



## Northeastern Next Podcast

**Madison Neuner, AMD'24 & Guests:**

Who run the world? Girls

*Aired on January 6, 2022*

**WOMEN** *who*  
**EMPOWER**  
Northeastern University

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 ([00:16](#)):

Welcome to the Northeastern Next Podcast, our special episode with Women Who Empower. I am Madison Neuner. I am the co-op at Advancement, and I will be your host. Today, let's welcome Ally Legend Siegel, the senior director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Salesforce, which amazingly is a position that she created herself. She is a Northeastern graduate from the Class of 2014, with a degree in journalism and minors in psychology and international affairs. As our name suggests, we are really into empowering women. We have a whole community of not just women, but people empowering women to do great things in the fields of entrepreneurship, design, and really everything in between. From your perspective and your experience, why do you think it's important for women, and people in general, to empower women?

Ally Legend, AMD'14 ([01:10](#)):

I think it's so important because many of us are the first to do something. I mean, when we think about corporate America, or you think about our different industries, historically women haven't had the same amounts of access, especially in leaderships. I think it's so important, community is such a key part of success. For me, I wouldn't be where I am today if I didn't have an amazing community of women who showed me the way, and helped teach me about things that I had no idea about. Like managing finances, or how do you approach an executive leadership meeting, or how do you negotiate a salary? And so, I think it's so important that we look out for each other, that we share the knowledge that we're gaining so that we can have more of us in the board rooms and in the top floors of these skyscrapers, and starting businesses and just... The possibilities are limitless for us.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 ([02:15](#)):

I completely agree. A lot of people who are willing to support you because they understand that being a woman in a male dominated field, such as business, is really hard. So, they're like, yes. We all have to support each other. So, I do think that that sense of community, of how important and influential that can be in women's careers.



Ally Legend, AMD'14 (02:37):

Absolutely.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (02:38):

Can you think of someone who stands out to you as someone who has empowered you during your career, during your education or your life in general?

Ally Legend, AMD'14 (02:47):

It's hard to choose just one. There have been so many great mentors and sponsors, and the difference between a mentor and a sponsor. The sponsor actually has skin in the game and they will put their reputation on the line to get you an opportunity. My journalism teacher, who I went to [Jordan Turkey 00:03:06] with was incredible, because she pushed me beyond what I thought my abilities were, and helped me to get out of my comfort zone. It's hard to believe now, because I do a lot of interviews and speaking events, but I used to be incredibly shy. I just remember her pushing me to interview strangers, and get out of my comfort zone and really push myself.

Ally Legend, AMD'14 (03:33):

And then, there was an incredible woman. She was working in the Arts Department at the time, and I was taking a class in that department, and I was having a really hard time with a male teacher. She sat me down and she said, "Your whole life, men are going to try to make you feel small, and we are never going to allow them to do that. We are going to support each other in these spaces." And so, it's something that really stuck with me, and I think part of why I work in diversity inclusion now. And then, once I got into the workforce, I've had some really amazing executive women who, for whatever reason, believed in me very early on, they helped me create that role. They sponsored me, they put me in the rooms that I normally wouldn't be in and connected me to people I wouldn't usually meet, and so I'm just so grateful and I try to pay that forward.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (04:29):

What would you say is a piece of advice that you think will bring us closer too, whether that's women's equality or women feeling empowered and feeling confident in themselves to take those risks and to listen to the right people?

Ally Legend, AMD'14 (04:44):

I think it's a few things. I think one, is just as you rise, I like to say lift as you rise, as you rise and as you grow in your career, just making sure that you are bringing someone along with you. The more you can bring, the better, but of course we're all super busy and it can be hard. But even if you just choose one person that you invest in, just like someone invested in you, I think that makes a huge difference because it's a chain reaction. I also think it's important to understand that you belong there just as much as the next person, and that you have your own superpower. I think even the adversity that you face,



that's super important. And then, also being humble and recognizing when you don't have the answers, and leaning on your community, your mentors, the people around you.

Ally Legend, AMD'14 (05:36):

I think women sometimes because society again has taught us this. We can be very competitive with each other, and that feeling you get when, instead of being happy for your friend who something amazing happened to, you feel threatened or jealous or anxiety. And it's like, okay. Feel that emotion for a second, my therapist calls it clearing the emotion. And then, think about, well, how can I learn from that person? That person clearly is doing something amazing, or has figured something out that I haven't figured out. And then also, how do I support and cheer lead for that person, because I want them to do the same for me?

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (06:15):

You literally create your own job. Even though there was some doubt in the beginning, you were able to make that work and have that be an existing thing that you created. What brought you to deciding to create your own position, especially this position in particular? And how have you've been able to use that role to empower others?

Ally Legend, AMD'14 (06:40):

I ended up in tech by accident, completely. In Northeastern I had actually started an online magazine with my friends that picked up quite a bit, and my friend had ended up in content marketing in tech. He moved out to California, he called me one day and said, "Do you need a job? Because we have an opening and we need a writer." And I said to him, "I know absolutely nothing about the tech industry." He said, "It's okay. You have the skills, you can do this job." So, again, that someone who sees you and knows that even though you may not have all the on paper requirements, you can do this. And so, ended up getting the job and moved out to California. I worked at a few startups, and while I was working at the startups, I just realized that there were so few, not just women, but women of color, around me, or even people of color.

Ally Legend, AMD'14 (07:34):

I was just curious, what's going on here? Especially coming from the East Coast, where there's just more representation. There's still a challenge of course, but definitely more. Then Salesforce is one of the biggest, I think it is the biggest, employer in San Francisco and was at the time. Everyone was like, "You have to go work at Salesforce. Salesforce is the best company ever." I had attended a talk where they were talking about that year spending \$3,000,000 to close the gender pay gap in the company, which just blew my mind. I was like, "I've never heard of a company even acknowledge the gender pay gap." And having spent time in journalism at Northeastern, writing about gender rights and all those different issues, that really drew me to Salesforce. So, anyway, I landed the dream job at Salesforce, but still noticed, okay. Even though they talk about equality, there still aren't many women of color here, what's going on?



Ally Legend, AMD'14 (08:33):

So, that just sparked my curiosity, my journalism hat, started doing research, found out every company was hovering around 2% black employees at the time. Started talking to DEI experts and just became really tunnel vision on, I need to figure out a way to solve this. This is super important to me, and got involved with our Black Employer Research Group, and over time people just started to come to me for advice and guidance. With the help of my mentors, some of the senior leaders that I mentioned, they helped me put pen to paper. Luckily I had seen another woman create her role, so I knew it was possible. I think that's what's really important about representation, because just seeing that someone has done it before, you're like, okay. I could do that. If she figured that out, then I can figure it out. I remember getting a meeting with her and just asking her to tell me everything that she did to create her job, and then I just copied the blueprint.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (09:31):

Just man.

Ally Legend, AMD'14 (09:32):

It is cool. It is cool.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (09:34):

I think that you did touch on a really interesting thing though. Maybe between the lines I'm reading is that started off as a bit of a passion project for you, to create this position. I would love to hear from you how you think passion has played into your success in building this program at Salesforce, and just how important it is to be passionate about what you're doing.

Ally Legend, AMD'14 (10:01):

It's so important. I think when you align your job with your passion, that's when you're going to thrive. I mean, it's like you unlock this next level of both yourself and also what's possible for you, because you wake up every day with a purpose. I used to think I will never work in business. I'm going to be an international journalist, and I'm going to live modestly and write about social justice. I never conceived that you could also drive change and social justice and impact, but in a different space. The work that I do now is really about connecting communities that haven't traditionally had access to generational wealth, for example. That haven't had access to all the opportunities and information that the technology industry brings. And then, also making sure we have a seat at the table in creating this technology that is really driving our whole world. If we're left out of those rooms, women, people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQ plus communities, just think about how harmful that could be. I think passion is everything.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (11:21):

I am here with Michelle Satter, who is the Founding Senior Director of Artist Programs at the Sundance Institute. She is also a grad of Northeastern in the Class of 1974, with a degree in Art History. She's



gotten several awards, so many that I didn't want to talk about every single one, but I will mention that she did get the Women In Film Business Leadership Award. So, with that, I will welcome Michelle Satter to the podcast. How are you today, Michelle?

Michelle Satter, LA'74 (11:51):

I am great. Thanks Madison. I'm honored to be here with you.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (11:54):

So, just to start off, in your opinion why do you think it's important for women to empower other women?

Michelle Satter, LA'74 (12:01):

Well, I think it's important not only for women to empower other women, but men to empower women. If you have a platform to do that, which I do, it is imperative. Women are great leaders, and we have to diversify the leadership at every level of business, nonprofit, government jobs, any opportunity that we can have. It really is not only the right thing to do, but it's the smart thing to do.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (12:30):

I really appreciate that view. In your career, your educational journey and your life in general, who is someone who has empowered you?

Michelle Satter, LA'74 (12:38):

I do believe that you empower yourself, is the most important thing. Yes, there are always obstacles and it depends on the privilege in which you're born into, and that makes a huge difference as well. So, from my earliest job, I was partnered with a very close friend when I graduated from Northeastern, and created a nonprofit to produce in the performing arts. That was a great opportunity that we had. I learned from her. I learned from everyone by the way. I hope that people also learn from me, and that I can be a model for artists and for other staff and leaders who are growing up in any business out there.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (13:27):

I love that point. That's the first time I've ever heard someone say, I empower myself. I do think that's really important. I just love that. I wanted to point out how cool that is.

Michelle Satter, LA'74 (13:38):

I should also say I struggle, and I think many women do, with confidence, and I did very early on. It's something that you have to work on for yourself, nobody can give that to you. You give that to yourself in bringing yourself into the world and into any public or private space that you're in.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (14:01):



Yeah. I really agree with that point. I do want to go back to something that you said earlier, about how you learn from everyone and you hope that people learn from you. What do you hope people are learning from you?

Michelle Satter, LA'74 (14:12):

Well, I hope they learn to actively listen. I hope they learn that collaboration and being a team player is really important. It's about creating spaces that are safe, and spaces where people feel like they can belong and become. I work with a lot of artists. For me, it's giving them the space, the feedback on their work, never being prescriptive, asking great questions, helping them own the answers. It's not about me in a lecture situation. It really is about working together, working collaboratively, listening, helping people grow, but asking them about how they want to grow.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (14:59):

Yeah. I do think that everyone grows in a different way, every person is different. It's really important that those people have the opportunity to learn in the way that works for them, and have the opportunity to make that their own. So, going forward with that idea of empowerment and helping others, was there ever a time in your life where you felt where you were being disempowered, and what did you do in that situation?

Michelle Satter, LA'74 (15:26):

That's a great question. I've worked at the Sundance Institute since it's very beginning, so I was part of the founding group of the Institute. It's very different working in a nonprofit, and also working with artists. The only thing that has kept me back is myself. I don't think anyone else has kept me back. I don't think anyone should be waiting for permission. Of course, you have to be able to look at the politics of the situation you're in, knowing that there are moments where you should be speaking up, and moments maybe you shouldn't be. But I put that all aside. It may be that I've been in this job for such a long time that I believe in myself, I believe in my taste, I believe in my ability to really nurture and support and bring out the best in artists. But that has not always been the case.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (16:22):

Your role at Sundance, I think it's awesome that you have been there for such a long time, and you are a founding member, and obviously you've done a lot of amazing things in the years since you've been there. I wanted to talk about what brought you there and how have you used your role there over the years to lift up others?

Michelle Satter, LA'74 (16:43):

I got very lucky in having this role at Sundance, and I grew with the job, and I love working with the artists and I love storytelling. I got to be in a place where I could bring my full heart and my full engagement to the work of it. In terms of the opportunity that I have, and I really do, I see it as an



opportunity and a responsibility that I have. It's to support more artists and stories from underrepresented communities. That's my great interest right now.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (17:20):

So, our next guest is Ahndraea Allen, the Senior Training Specialist for Sales Academy UAE at Adidas, a new position. Congratulations, Ahndraea. She is a Northeastern graduate in the Class of 2005, with a degree in Music Industry and a minor in African American Studies. Then she actually came back to Northeastern, to get her masters in Sports Leadership, getting that in 2009. She also has a couple of school records in track and field and was inducted to The Hall of Fame in 2017. Welcome to the podcast, Ahndraea.

Ahndraea Allen, AS'05, MS'09 (17:54):

Thank you. I'm excited to be here.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (17:57):

Scrolling back to the beginning, how did you end up at Northeastern?

Ahndraea Allen, AS'05, MS'09 (18:03):

I went to a school in a small town. I remember when I joined the track team, I had a coach basically, who I was winning states, winning conference, but still it wasn't good enough basically. He didn't see me as a great athlete. We had a thing called Clearing House, that your coaches at that time had to basically fill out this form in order for colleges to even look at you. He never filled out the form. I'm winning states and my competition, everyone's getting scholarships to all these different schools, but schools weren't able to talk to me. So, we thought, when one of the coaches asked, "What happened? Where's Ahndraea going?" to my parents, they were like, "No one's approached us." When we asked my coach about it, he was like, "Ahndraea's not good enough to get a scholarship. She needs to stick to the books."

Ahndraea Allen, AS'05, MS'09 (18:50):

So, by the time we filled out Clearing House, there's only a certain amount of scholarships that are given out, so basically they told me to go to community college for a year, and then come back, stay in shape. I was discouraged, and I was like, "I'm not going to run anymore at Northeastern." I was invited to a Delta Sigma Theta party, and I remember going to the campus and thinking, wow. This is a really beautiful campus. Also this was the year of the Olympics. I remember watching Marion Jones and crying watching it because I was like, "I should be doing this. I miss running." So, I remember contacting my parents, and they were like, "Do you want to get in touch with the schools that said that for you for a year?" I said, "No. I think I want to stay in Boston." They were like, "Where do you want to go?" I said, "BC, BU and Northeastern." I didn't know anything about the track program or anything, just knew I wanted to stay with Northeastern.



Ahndraea Allen, AS'05, MS'09 (19:42):

So, my mom contacted BC, BU Northeastern. Sherman Hart was the coach at the time. Both of them were talking, I did not know about it. Got a call from my mom, "Pack your bags, you're going to Northeastern. They gave you a partial scholarship." Sherman never saw me run. I go to Northeastern. The semester had basically started. Training with the track team, nobody knew who I was, because I wasn't recruited or anything, I just showed up. First track meet, Sherman put me in a four by four, mixed four by four. Never ran the 400 in my life. I was 100, 200 long, long jumper. Put me in a 400, I was the last leg. I ran a 58. I no longer was a 200, 100 runner, I was a 400 runner.

Ahndraea Allen, AS'05, MS'09 (20:30):

By the end of the season, I was a running a 53, and Sherman brought me into the office and he was just like, "We're giving you a full scholarship." That's how I ended up at Northeastern. I have a crazy story, but I had a coach that took a chance on me. Never seen me run, just saw my stats, didn't get recruited, but took a chance on me. And my mom, who I said empowered me, and is a strong woman, advocated for me and I'm forever grateful for him and for Northeastern of course, taking a chance on me, and where I am now today. So, that's my story.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (21:11):

I'm in awe. Wow.

Ahndraea Allen, AS'05, MS'09 (21:14):

Yeah. So, if I would've believed what that coach said about me, which I did, but I forgot who I was. After watching the Olympics, and remembering, I was like, this is the talent that I have, and I know I need to be utilizing it. It's brought me to where I am today.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (21:32):

As an athlete myself, a competitive runner, the biggest thing that I would say I've noticed is that the lessons I've learned in running are life lessons as well. What would you say are some of the lessons that running and sports have taught you, that have translated over to the rest of your life?

Ahndraea Allen, AS'05, MS'09 (21:51):

I want to say that being a collegiate athlete, I think, is one of the hardest things to be. Not only do you have to keep your grades up, you have to perform on the track or on the field. So, it's double the pressure. I think that definitely makes you a strong person for sure. And like you said, when I think about track and field, I'm a 400 runner, so speed wise, I think I work really fast sometimes. I'm able to juggle a lot of things, but I work really fast, which helps me in a sense. But then the other part of the 400, there's endurance. So, I might get tired, I stay focused and I finish.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (22:32):



A big thing that women who empower values is community and mentorship. I'd say those are two huge pillars of what we do. One thing that I want to ask is, any advice that you may have for broader Northeastern community, what is your advice for these people?

Ahndraea Allen, AS'05, MS'09 ([22:53](#)):

Community is definitely super important. Northeastern definitely was probably the foundation what started that for me. My track team are still some of my biggest supporters and the people that I call for life decisions, for sure, that I'm talking about. I don't know. Zara Northover, she was on the track team. She's one of my best friends.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 ([23:13](#)):

I love her.

Ahndraea Allen, AS'05, MS'09 ([23:14](#)):

Love her. I think it's really important. And even outside of my track family, I mean, my faith is really important. So, I have a good group with my church. That's important. And me still competing my running group, my training group is really important to me too. So, these are all little separate nuggets, they don't all know each other, but they're all important people that help me in my daily life to keep me focused.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 ([23:42](#)):

Our esteemed guests are Darrel and Dominique Schreiner. They are the co-founders of Cake Denim, and they are both graduating from Northeastern in 2022, from the Curry College of Computer Sciences. So, we do have a few general questions that we start every podcast with, that I want to ask you. Our whole thing at Women Who Empower is, as the name suggests, empowering women. So, why is it important to you for women to empower other women?

Dominique Schreiner, MS'22 ([24:13](#)):

Right, Darrel.

Darrel Schreiner, MS'22 ([24:13](#)):

Yeah. Well, we really believe that it's important because it creates an environment that women can flourish. It's something that we've noticed that women are strong on their own, but together they create communities that help people succeed. And then also, it's important to see women in those leadership and role model. That only happens when we empower each other.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 ([24:36](#)):



I think representation is important. I'm really big about making sure that we can see people like ourselves in any area that we might want to aspire to. Was there ever a time where you felt disempowered by someone and what did you do about it?

Darrel Schreiner, MS'22 (24:51):

Yeah. When we first started our company, we had worked with some contractors that just weren't supportive of our mission, and they point blank told us that we wouldn't succeed and would never find a mill that would work with us. But my sister over here, she actually, before we decided to move on and work with someone else, had actually found one of the best mills in the world. We work with them now. So, it proved them wrong, but it was a disempowering moment.

Dominique Schreiner, MS'22 (25:22):

You think the fashion industry, they're targeting women a lot and that it would just be we are major consumers, that it would be more geared towards women. But when you actually get into the apparel manufacturing side of it, behind the scenes, it's a lot of men running the factories that are making your clothing. And so, they do challenge you and tell you why you want to do this. And then, they also tell you that it's not the right way about going about things, and so you do have to fight with them a little here and there, to just keep going. And just remember your vision and that you are the one with the power, because it's your business, at the end of the day.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (26:01):

For those in the audience who don't know, Cake Denim is a sustainable and stereotype rejecting clothing brand. Where did this idea come from? It's a really interesting idea of sustainability, but also being unapologetically ourselves.

Darrel Schreiner, MS'22 (26:16):

It was actually an investigation into why buying jeans was such a personal struggle. It was stressful to go and buy them, and then also once I had a pair, I didn't always love them. I felt like I would like to just be able to pull out my favorite pair of jeans, and always want to put them on and just feel comfortable in them. From there, we came up with the name, First. Cake is a play on... That you can have your cake and eat it too, you can have it all. You don't have to decide to be one thing or another. And so, that is where the stereotype rejecting comes into it. On top of that, we're really trying to implement programs that encourage women to celebrate the body that they have right now. I don't know if you want to add on.

Dominique Schreiner, MS'22 (27:12):

We're super passionate about sustainability, we're designing and working on a few upcycling programs within our company. And also, we have started the research aspect of reducing our packaging, and hopefully getting to a place where it will be zero free packaging when we are shipping our denim out to you guys.



Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (27:34):

One other thing that I'm really interested in from personal experience is rejection of stereotypes and being happy with, like you said, the body that we have now. And just being self-loving, is really important. For me, as an athlete, body image has always been a big part of who I am. Sometimes it hasn't been that great. Sometimes I feel like I'm on top of the world. But as an athlete, you're always under that microscope of society. I love that a big part of Cake Denim's mission is to reject stereotypes. So, how does Cake Denim work toward this mission?

Darrel Schreiner, MS'22 (28:19):

Well, as women, we're always going through different transitions and just different stages of our lives, so we really tried to find fabrics that allowed for that. That allowed for changes as we go through, whether it's physically, mentally or emotionally. Then after that, it comes with who's representing us as a brand? Who are people seeing when they come to Cake Denim, and also whenever they think about someone who wears Cake Denim? Then it's really important to reject those stereotypes and just think that only a certain person wears jeans or this type of jeans, or anything like that. We're also trying to do more convertible styles. So, that way it's, you may not want to wear one trend all the time, but then buying all these other trends puts you in one category, and that also does go into consumerism. Which it would be nice if I had some jeans that adapted to my body, as well as adapted to whatever trends and lifestyle I was living right then and there, so you don't have to make those sacrifices.

Madison Neuner, AMD'24 (29:24):

What are your goals for Cake Denim in the future?

Dominique Schreiner, MS'22 (29:27):

We are really interested and excited to bring all the tech that we are learning right now into our company. And just on such small scales, you'd be amazed by just making small little changes how drastically we can improve the environment. Not just for sustainable in the planet, but also for our employees, those that are in the factories. Just ways that we can find tech to improve their skill sets, but also just make their jobs easier for them.

Darrel Schreiner, MS'22 (29:58):

Of course our goal is always to remain as sustainable as possible, and inspire other people, other brands, and show them that it is possible to be successful and sustainable as well. Then also to collaborate with other female founders. Yeah. We love the idea that our network could grow and that we could help and inspire, potentially even mentoring, because I know that there are so many young women out there that have great ideas, and I can't wait to hopefully help them out and see those come to life.

Ilana Gensler, MA'19 (30:33):



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