

Interview with Elizabeth Booth by Susan Goodman 7/17/19

- John Caher: Welcome to Amici, News and Insights from the New York Judiciary and Unified Court System. I'm John Caher. This is the latest episode of Diversity Dialogues with Susan Goodman. Today, Susan's interview is with Elizabeth Booth, associate computer systems analyst.
- Susan Goodman: Elizabeth, thank you so much for talking to us today.
- Elizabeth Booth: Thank you.
- Susan Goodman: If you could, just tell us your current position and how long you've had it.
- Elizabeth Booth: Sure. So in my current position, I am an associate computer systems analyst and in this particular position, I would say I've probably been in it for about five to six years. However, prior to that I've been in that role, just not in that position, if that makes any sense.
- Susan Goodman: Yes. And since the focus of this piece is really diversity, how would you describe your cultural background and how do you feel it has influenced your current job, your current role?
- Elizabeth Booth: Okay, so my culture is pretty blended. My grandparents were originally from the South, so they put more emphasis on behaviors, religion, community. But I did grow up in a more diverse neighborhood in Queens, New York and because of that I was able to experience a lot of different cultures and I feel privileged because of that.
- Now in terms of the second question, my culture really hasn't shaped my current position because technology isn't embraced or encouraged as much, unfortunately. But I myself became more captivated by technology when I saw a computer face-to-face for the very first time, and it was, if you don't mind me telling you the story, it's really quick.
- Susan Goodman: Of course not, no.
- Elizabeth Booth: It was when I moved to my stepdad's and it was a broken computer and I was just like kind of looking through stuff and I was like, "Oh, what's that?" He's like, "Oh, it's just a computer. It's just been sitting in the closet for years and it's broken." So, I took it out of the closet, I fixed it, and then I proceeded to write a card game, an actual program.

Susan Goodman: Oh, my God!

Elizabeth Booth: I was 11-years-old, and the rest is history.

Susan Goodman: Oh, my God! Oh, my God! That's amazing!

Elizabeth Booth: And never before that had I had any exposure to this type of technology. That was actually the first computer I ever was in front of.

Susan Goodman: Wow. So, it was innate?

Elizabeth Booth: It was. They were just floored and of course all of the kids then wanted to play and so everybody played my card game that I wrote and it was just pretty cool.

Susan Goodman: Oh, that's amazing. So you said that computer science was not something that was embraced or accepted by your... or it was accepted by your cultural background. I just want to make sure I heard you correctly.

Elizabeth Booth: It really wasn't.

Susan Goodman: It was not.

Elizabeth Booth: No. Technology wasn't anything that I grew up with.

Susan Goodman: Right.

Elizabeth Booth: So like I said, that first computer that was at the age of 11 that I was in front of. I just had a desire and it was kind of like out of the blue I feel, because everything else was very much not technology-based. That was many years ago, that was over 30 years ago, so just imagine over 30 years ago how that was.

Susan Goodman: Right. Yes, absolutely. So how would you define diversity and how would you say you encourage others to honor their diversity, their uniqueness?

Elizabeth Booth: I would say that it's made up of several different elements and that could be race, your culture, your sexual orientation, religion, your gender as well. And in terms of encouraging others to honor it, I just feel that each individual brings their own value to anything that they do and so that's where I would say it's great to honor their uniqueness. I look at myself as being unique. When I was younger, I was teased a lot because once I got

into technology, that's all I really cared about. Not all I really cared about, of course, but I really did have such a passion to learn and so when-

Susan Goodman: As a woman...

Elizabeth Booth: Especially as a woman, and so it was very strange to people, and so if I had kind of gone along with the flow of what was the norm, then I would've held myself back from what I've learned, where I am now. That's why I would say definitely anyone should embrace their uniqueness in whatever way that it is, because it does help shape a person and even could affect other people and could encourage other people based on an individual's uniqueness.

Susan Goodman: So if you think about your job now, what three words would you use to describe it?

Elizabeth Booth: One would be challenging—definitely!—and also fulfilling and diverse.

Susan Goodman: Can you elaborate on one or more of those?

Elizabeth Booth: Sure. Challenging and diverse are the two descriptions that fit in together with my current role. We are managing many different applications, which is really not common in the technology field, and so having to switch gears and to be able to manage many different applications from beginning to end is what I would consider quite challenging. I could be working on three to four different projects at once and I have to make sure that I'm on the right path for each one in terms of having conversations with other individuals and making sure that I'm not getting any of them confused with each other. So that's where it becomes quite challenging and making sure that I'm able to manage many different projects at once.

And then of course diverse would be another description and that is because I do have the ability to work on many different types of projects, so it's not always the same exact project or type of projects, it's many different types. It could be something as simple as creating a call database to creating an entire new system for, let's just say, I don't know if I'm able to actually say specifics, but the Ethics Commission financial disclosure form, so those are two totally different types of projects, but that's where it's like very, very diverse.

Susan Goodman: What specific court are you working for? In what area?

Elizabeth Booth: I'm actually in Office of Court Administration and within that is the Division of Technology and Court Research. I work in the Division of Technology.

Susan Goodman: Where are you located?

Elizabeth Booth: At the Rensselaer Technology Park in Troy.

Susan Goodman: . And then what would you say you like most about your job?

Elizabeth Booth: So it goes back to that diversity, but I like that I basically hold several different roles within my position. I'm a project manager, I'm an analyst and a programmer. That isn't common for someone to be in all three roles—typically you're in one or the other, not in all three and so because of being able to be in various roles, it's I absolutely love what I do. It makes it very interesting and ever changing on a day-to-day basis. I would say even on an hourly basis. I could be working on one particular project and have to switch gears quite quickly on totally different projects.

Susan Goodman: Can you give an example of a typical day.

Elizabeth Booth: It's funny, because I wouldn't consider myself having typical days because they change so quickly. Usually my days involve meetings with the various offices to discuss their needs—their needs meaning any new applications that they want or existing applications that they would like modified, whether it's something like simple functionality or if it's something more advanced.

So, some of my days are just all meetings and then sometimes I'm also doing development. Today, for example, I had some correspondence with what we call a stakeholder, that's someone that we correspond with who is the point person for a particular application that we're working on. So, there were some questions and just trying to do what we call analysis, and simply put, it's just fact finding and gathering like specific requirements.

So, I did a little bit of that today. And then I had to switch gears and I had to go into some programming because I am managing projects, not just for myself but for an entire team.

So it's meeting with individuals on the team to make sure that the projects that they're working on are moving along and that if there are any roadblocks or any questions that we are communicating. And then it could be me actually hands on— I am really very much a hands-on person, hands on actually doing programming myself or even doing the analysis.

So that's really what my days consist of. It's constantly changing throughout the day and then some days I certainly have to have a to-do list and I pretty much create one at the end of each day for the next day. Sometimes I don't even get to touch that to-do list because I have to be very flexible and be able to quickly change my frame of thought. I'll be focused on something in particular and then I have to be able to quickly adjust that focus to something else. That's a typical day for me.

Susan Goodman: Do you have someone that you consider or more than one person who you consider a mentor and why?

Elizabeth Booth: I have had quite a few mentors over the years, two of which, Valerie Rivera and Deb Fallon, although they have both retired, sadly for me, but they do continue to mentor me. We're friends still to this day, but they shaped my journey in quite a few different ways.

So I'll talk about Deb first. She empowered me really through guiding me, she guided me to become a leader within a unit that I worked in and so from that guidance I then became a manager of the unit, so she constantly encouraged me to believe in my capabilities and really all the skills that are required in terms of being a manager, they were really invaluable when it came to her patience and just her knowledge. She just had so much knowledge and I couldn't imagine not having her as a mentor. Even to this day, any questions that I have, like, 'What do you think I should do about this?,' she just loves to help and I love that.

Now, Valerie Rivera. It's funny because, so as you know, like I'm technical now. When I first started with the court system, I was in the help desk, so I was a technical support assistant and so it was very much like hardware-based, software-based, not programming. I did dabble a little bit here and there in programming so I was very much hardware based.

As time went on, that was really my path — hardware based, not so much programming like I was when I was younger and even when I went to school. So Valerie Rivera was teaching the employees within the court

system how to use FileMaker. And so FileMaker is a database program where you not only have the database side of it but you also program the screens, which is not common at all to have like an all-in-one solution.

I sat in on a couple of the training sessions and I was like, 'Oh, I'm not really interested in doing it' because I just felt like my focus was not on programming at that time. So, she just kept on pushing me and she's like, 'You can do it!'

Because there were projects that I was involved in which required the development of an application within FileMaker but I was more like the analyst at that time, and so I really wasn't intending on programming anything. She just kept pushing me like— "You can do this! You can! — and just showing me the different techniques and things like that. I would do like some screens but I would never get into like the back end where I'm actually doing serious programming. And so she just kept on encouraging me, kept on encouraging me and I just didn't think I could do well. And so now, funny enough, I'm the project manager for that same unit that developed in FileMaker and I am, I would consider myself, an advanced developer in FileMaker and I absolutely love it. I couldn't see myself not doing it. I mean obviously things change, but I really couldn't see myself not doing it, which is why I'm still programming because I absolutely love doing it.

Susan Goodman: So just a couple of other questions. How would you advise prospective applicants to the court system, either people who are not in the court system yet or those who are in the court system who are looking to rise within the technology area. How would you advise them?

Elizabeth Booth: I've actually done that quite a few times already, but the way that I do it I just encourage anyone that's looking for a position in technology to apply because one of the great things that a lot of people don't realize is that one, for technology related positions within the Division of Technology, you don't have to take a test.

The other is your entire history is looked at, not just having a four-year degree or a two-year degree, your entire history.

When I advise anyone that's interested in being in technology, I actually say you should apply in the court system because chances are you're probably going to get it if you do have some sort of experience. And I just think it's wonderful. I think it's wonderful because I certainly would not

be where I am if it were just looked at as like you have to have a four year degree, because that I don't have. It's just you're given so many wonderful opportunities and I'm just very grateful.

Also, one of the things that I would advise or let people know is that a lot of times you're learning on the job and I don't know of another place where you can actually learn on the job and grow from that as well without having something to start with, meaning like a four-year degree or something. So it's just wonderful. I feel very grateful.

Susan Goodman: That's great. And just the last question, before you leave your job, which hopefully will be a long time from now, what would you like your greatest achievement to have been?

Elizabeth Booth: I would say because I'm also an educator, I would say that as long as I've had a positive impact on someone that I interacted with, whether it's someone that I've developed an application for or one of my colleagues in their work life. So my goal is to always make things more efficient, and so if I can have an impact on someone, even just from one thing I will feel like I've achieved, because I already feel like I've achieved that and so as long as I am able to continue to do so, to me that's the greatest achievement within this realm that I could imagine, and just continuing to have an impact on anyone that I'm in contact with.

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