

SAIT Podcast: Bonus Episode: Dr. Raynie Wood on Tech Layoffs

[00:00:00] ANNCR: This is a bonus episode of The Best Careers You Never Knew Existed Podcast.

[00:00:06] LORA: Hey everyone. Today we're talking to Raynie Wood about her perspective on some of the news we've been hearing around layoffs and tech over the past few months, and just what some of the long-term implications might be for the Alberta ecosystem.

[00:00:19] LORA: Thanks for joining us, Raynie. Can I ask you to introduce yourself?

[00:00:21] Raynie: Hi, Lora and Zach, nice to meet you and absolutely, my name is Dr. Raynie Wood. I'm the Dean for the School for Advanced Digital Technology here at SAIT.

[00:00:32] LORA: Awesome. You know, I wanna talk a little bit around just some of the stuff that's been happening in the market right now around tech and lots of stuff in the news.

[00:00:42] LORA: Can you share with us what you think students that are considering a career in tech or mid-career workers looking to pivot into tech. What should they be considering given the consideration of the recent layoffs in tech?

[00:00:59] Raynie: So, you're asking either the wrong person or the right person Lora, because you know how I feel about tech.

[00:01:05] Raynie: So, I have to say that tech is a fantastic profession, and I think probably one of the best pieces of tech is it doesn't matter what sector you're in, what role you're in. Tech will always be required. So, it's one of those resilient opportunities, one of those programs or one of those education pieces that will carry you for the rest of your life.

[00:01:25] Raynie: So, while the technologies are changing and evolving, the fundamentals around technology are always consistent. So, when a student, and even if I reflect back on myself in times where I felt like, hmm, what's that next step for me? You will know that even in not knowing that next step, it doesn't matter where you go or what you do, you'll be able to leverage tech capability.

[00:01:47] Raynie: So, when you're looking, I always say to the students, you know what, it may not be the end point, and as we know, learning is lifelong. And even as a

professional, you need to continue to come back and upskill and I mean, of all people, Lora, you know, that best in leading in the corporate division. But really technology will give you a fundamental base that will help you to continue to grow your career throughout your life.

[00:02:10] Raynie: So, I always say, take the plunge. It's never a mistake. And then who knows where the journey will take you? If someone said Rainey, you would be the Dean of School for Advanced Digital Technology. I wouldn't have believed it. And here I am having the opportunity to engage with so many students that don't know their path, so many professionals that need support and tech is always the right choice.

[00:02:32] Zach: Do you think students should be concerned about these kind of big news articles, tech layoff articles?

[00:02:39] Raynie: So, my first response would be, I think the ebbs and flows that we're seeing post pandemic are truly just keeping us honest.

[00:02:47] Raynie: So, you know, during the pandemic, technology and the use of technology for digital transformation in any organization was accelerated beyond what we could have ever imagined. So, you know, my example being is how many of us learned how to work in, for example, a teams platform within a day. So, we saw an adoption of technology come at us.

[00:03:09] Raynie: So, it happened either with us or to us, and really in a lot of cases it was to us. We either figured it out or we lost connection and had the inability to continue to do our day-to-day and even connect with our families globally. So, you know, we completely accelerated, we completely grew, and now we're finding ourselves in a position where, I would say that when you're seeing layoffs, I think we're being more honest to what we need in our various ranges of talent funnels.

[00:03:36] Raynie: So, when you look at an organization, you may see ebbs and flows. You may see a bit of downsizing in one area, but that doesn't mean that tech is not needed. It's actually growing in other areas. So, for example, diploma graduates versus, you know, mid-career workers that are looking to upskill. So, while it looks like there's a shift, there's just a shift or a relocation of the demands for tech.

[00:03:58] Raynie: So, do I think that there's concerns we always have to be honest and when we look at our talent funnel, but my comment would be, tech talent will always be needed. And continuing to upskill will give you the, what I wanna say, the

resilience or the Teflon that you need, the Superman cape that will help you navigate the change of our world.

[00:04:18] Raynie: So, no different than, you know, other sectors that we see where we've got ebbs and flows. We're subject to changes in our economy and our world. And continuing to take education, whether it's short courses, boot camps, workshops, or even new programs or even programs embedded into your day-to-day work, which is one of the things that we're really working on in the province here.

[00:04:38] Raynie: All of those opportunities will help keep you most current, but also will help you evolve and adjust, as we see the changes in our workforce and the demands of our workforce become new and evolved. So, my comment would be, I don't see, you know, the downsizing, I see us being more honest and I see us being really careful about not having a one-pronged approach to talent.

[00:04:58] Raynie: Really thinking about multiple prongs and how we as a professional personally own our responsibility to continue to educate or engage in education.

[00:05:07] LORA: That's a really good point Raynie. I think, you know, we're always looking at playing the long game. In terms of how do we support the evolution of talent in the province, and certainly as educators, I'm thinking for students and for learners, you know, we always look at education or investing in yourself and your learning path an investment, but if you're thinking about where people should be investing their time, energy, resources to learning about tech and learning about digital. Are there specific areas that you think those investments make sense for people?

[00:05:41] Raynie: So, first Zach, I wanna note she said that I had a good point. So, can we put that in the books? My second comment is an investment comes in many forms. So, if we're talking about the way we invest in developing ourselves, investment could be time, it could be engaging in a formal program.

[00:06:00] Raynie: And of course, as being a strong advocate of post-secondary and working both with people such as yourself in the corporate division, as well as in the academic division. Investment can be in a program, but it also can be just engaging and exploring. So, learning doesn't have to be in a formal program. Certain competencies for sure, but there's always the opportunity to explore on your own independently, take, you know, online tutorials. And then of course when you're looking for competencies or some more advanced types of outcomes, there's the

chance to engage in any type of program out there. So, engaging through formal enrollment, intuition, et cetera.

[00:06:40] Raynie: So, I would say that the ways we learn are no longer just streamlined into leaving a job and going into the post-secondaries or an education institution. It's gotta be a combination of all, because at the pace of technology, as you both know, it's accelerated, And our ability to stay current is gonna be based on our willingness to invest our own personal time, either in exploration or by engaging in an online platform or formally engaging in a program through a post-secondary.

[00:07:05] Raynie: So, to be single-minded or a single approach will limit yourself. But just be curious. Just want to learn and always explore. And I'll give you an example for me. This morning I was working on my iPhone and had to explore one of the new technologies to figure out how I was gonna be recording some information on a screen.

[00:07:21] Raynie: And sounds really, really simple and it should be really straightforward, but that in its purest form is learning and navigating technology and those small pieces contribute to a bigger picture when you're doing it every single day. So, think about life as learning and take every chance to learn something new by exploring it on your own because some of the best learning comes from SharePoint training that I engaged in this week. And who would've thought SharePoint would be a technology that I'd be interested in? But boy, there's some embedded AI activities in there that I'm very intrigued with, which is related to rewards and acknowledgement.

[00:07:53] Raynie: So, sounds so simple. But the time to find that out and explore and learn what that was really, for me, was interesting. And it's actually a tool that I'm using every day. So small pieces, big outcomes.

[00:08:05] Zach: Yeah, I think you're on a roll on good points, so more than one for sure. Looking at it from the other perspective.

[00:08:12] Zach: I know you're doing some of this work at SAIT, but the opposite side of the individual around learning. How do organizations, be it for-profit organizations, not-for-profits, governments, how should they look about investing in learning around digital transformation, new technologies, and what are the benefits of such investments?

[00:08:34] Raynie: Here, here Zack. That's a fantastic question and it's very complex. My comment would be I've quickly learned myself, and this would be a lesson, I

would, you know, share to anyone... To believe that you're gonna be an expert in technology is not possible, right? So, even in knowing that I have two academic chairs that have PhDs in artificial intelligence, to know that I have an academic chair that is a specialist in cyber security.

[00:08:57] Raynie: It doesn't matter how many people you have on your team; it doesn't matter how much time you have; you'll never be an expert. So, recognize that your knowledge is based on the breadth of people you know and their expertise. Even in myself, you know, when we drive the strategic direction of the school, I have a dean's advisory individuals that every day do nothing but look at strategy in a specific, fine lined discipline with regards to how they run their business

[00:09:19] Raynie: So, by leaning into all of the experts who live this day-to-day, based on their own personal domain, is how you're really gonna have the insight with regards to where you invest and where you spend time.

[00:09:36] Raynie: The other one too, which is really difficult in tech is because it is accelerated, are those inflection points that sit out on the landscape. You know, is this technology gonna be the technology? Is it gonna be something that's embedded? Is it too new and it's being explored or is it something that's mature enough. And it's never easy, but by watching the corporations and the organizations that I work with and the senior leaders that I connect with and on a program level, individuals that hire our grads, asking them what they're seeing out there because their collective mindset is what will contribute to how we make decisions about the best way to invest the best way to train and the best way to support the advancement of our economy.

[00:10:11] Raynie: So, I know that was a very convoluted, complex response, but it is complex. And overarchingly, I would say, rely on the people who live it, the experts to collect their perspective because they will help inform your personal strategy based on where you're hoping to go with your organization.

[00:10:33] LORA: I just wanna pile on that a little bit, and I mean, there's been a lot of talk lately around the impact of AI, the new tools in AI. What do you think the impact of that is going to be and how is that gonna impact the learning journey that people have into different roles that are potentially gonna be impacted both from a creation standpoint, but also from a job perspective?

[00:10:56] Raynie: AI from my lens is a game changer. Enough of a game changer that we've got two individuals in our school that have that specialization. It's still

evolving. We don't know where it's gonna go, it's accelerated, but from being embedded within, you know, business operations within the day-to-day of everything that we do, even on the simplest form of our phone.

[00:11:17] Raynie: I believe that AI is going to change the way we work so significantly. It's really, really quite amazing. And I would encourage anyone who has not played with AI, my team sat me down and made me walk through some of the capabilities. It demonstrated the potential. It also demonstrated the limitations.

[00:11:36] Raynie: So, the example being if there's references, it will pull your references, but they may not be credible references. So, you know, the effective domain will always be there. And the critical thinking to think maybe that information's not true. It will never replace the human factor because the emotional intelligence that's required to engage in our society will always be prevalent, but it really will emphasize the importance of who we are as people.

[00:12:02] Raynie: So, I would say watch AI, play with AI. You are already using AI; you probably don't know it. And it is truly a game changer to keep an eye on because our world, based on what we're seeing with acceleration and changes, it will continue to increase, evolve, and we will see it start to mature and we'll see some really significant impacts on how we work in our day-to-day, how we are at home, but also too for organizations, how organizations function with their ability to have more foresight and insight with regards to how their operation runs, but also to where they need to go next.

[00:12:36] LORA: Well, I really appreciate you taking the time to chat and give your perspective and bring forward all your passion and enthusiasm for learning overall for tech or the work that we're doing in the ecosystem collectively. I think it's been fabulous to chat with you.

[00:12:51] Raynie: Thanks for taking the time. It's a great end to my week.

[00:12:55] Raynie: I appreciate meeting you all and you know, I think we could probably talk for a few hours, but we won't do that.

[00:13:01] LORA: A big thanks to Raynie for her time with us today to talk about the impact of some of the changes that we've been seeing in tech and what the perspectives are for folks that may be investing in their education and digital and technology.

[00:13:21] LORA: We really appreciate her insights, not only as the Dean of the school

for Advanced Digital Technology, but also as a lifelong learner herself. So, I know I really enjoyed that conversation.

[00:13:31] ANNCR: The Best Careers You Never Knew Existed Podcast. Sparked by SAIT and CITI, funded by the government of Alberta. Have a career suggestion or want to appear as a guest?

[00:13:44] ANNCR: Get in touch. Sait.ca/careers podcast. Rate and review this podcast and you might find your review on a future episode. Please subscribe to The Best Careers You Never Knew Existed, wherever fine podcasts are downloaded. With Lora Bucsis and Zach Novak, produced by Terran Anthony Allen and Jenna Smith, executive produced by Lora Bucsis.

[00:14:09] ANNCR: Voiceover by me. All right. Special thanks to SAIT Radio for their support and the use of their studios, and most of all, thank you for listening.