



## Season 7: Navigating a Global Career Amidst Emerging Technologies Episode 4

### **Stacie Berdan**

*International Careers Expert  
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[Music]

#### **Stacie Berdan:**

Welcome to the global careers podcast sponsored by GW-CIBER – THE source for inspiring stories from seasoned professionals who have embraced a global role and reaped the benefits. We offer practical advice and insider tips across a broad swath of industries and fields around the world. Whether or not you've considered moving abroad or taking on an international role, globalization will impact your career. So join us for a lively discussion as we explore what an international career really means. My name is Stacie Nevadomski Berdan and I'll be your host!

In season seven, we focus on the intersection of technology and globalization across all types of industries and functions. What aspects of tech do we all need to understand to adapt and thrive in the workplace? What types of global tech jobs are out there? And what skills are needed to compete? Join us as we hear from seasoned executives who will help us navigate global careers and emerging technologies around the world. I'm excited today to introduce our guest, a trailblazing leader in the tech startup world – Grace Schroeder – Founder and CEO of Slingr, a low-code platform company. Slingr offers the platform and services to bring world-class automation to companies of all sizes. Her background includes significant time in finance and working for big companies, but it's the entrepreneurial space that she thrives in. Since founding her startup in 2011, Grace has been bringing her vision to life by solving problems for clients using low-code solutions, and leading a team of more than 100 in Argentina. Welcome, Grace, it is wonderful to have you with us.

#### **Grace Schroeder:**

Thanks so much, Stacie.

#### **Stacie Berdan:**

So, one of the objectives of a podcast it's to provide a sense of careers that are out there. Now, I know you have decades of experience doing all kinds of things, so can you tell us what you do, and maybe tell us what you do now and why you're so excited about it?

#### **Grace Schroeder:**

First of all, thanks so much for having me on your podcast today, I really appreciate the interest. As a lot of people do, I began my career with the job that was in front of me. And that was really a job in financial services in high school. And I continued along that path. And just started to notice what I was attracted to in the work that I did and what I was not attracted to in the work that I did. By and large, over time, I noticed that I was most attracted to technology. So whatever the role in financial services, I was the person that was trying new tools – the first... you know, database manipulation tools, I was the person trying to solve problems with tools that I had to bring into the company. So fast forward to today, in light of my attraction to technology and my frustration with shopping for, evaluating, and trying to implement off-the-shelf products, in about 2011, I proposed to a very solid group of angel investors and friends that we embark on a journey to create a machine that makes it easier to create custom software. At the time, there was no word called "low-code application platform". At the time, I truly was building a



machine such that we could offer a pre-integrated way to start building applications straight out of the gate versus a traditional software development process, which would include evaluating which database to use, which code bases, which libraries, how to treat the UI, and really just hand a platform to a developer that could start solving a business problem immediately. So today, Slinger creates custom business solutions for a wide range of verticals. For example, we've created laboratory information management systems, and these are for testing labs who need to track samples that come in, report on the status of the samples, bill for those, and distribute HIPAA-compliant reports and portals. And we've created artificial intelligence infused tools and products for people that sell into orthopedic practices, the automation to generate an orthopedic appointment without picking up the phone. So, for example, orthopedic practices have very heavy call volumes on Mondays and Tuesdays because the weekend warriors like us go out and hurt themselves. So, on Mondays and Tuesday, people that work in the office cannot pick up the phone. The bot that we created for our client is easily installed into the client's location such that when the call overflows happen, the bot can answer the phone call and effortlessly book an appointment with the patient, and their correct doctor, on the correct day, at the correct location. We essentially come to a business problem with a platform that is a low-code development platform, making it fast and easy to develop things and make changes. But we also are aware of all of the technologies that we can bring to bear to solve specific business problems. So, we are not going to recreate a QuickBooks, we are not going to recreate a Twilio for text messaging, we evaluate a given business problem, look at the tools on the worldwide web, and integrate them using our platform to harmonize and orchestrate all of the efforts of maybe 10 applications to create the tool that a business needs.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That is so cool, Grace, that is so cool! I mean, visionary, a problem solver, pulling all of this tech that's out there already and actually making it work, pulling it together to picking and choosing, it sounds like, and making it work to help businesses get to the heart of their problem and solve that. That is so neat.

**Grace Schroeder:**

It is, and the thing I liked about it... So I left financial services and went into technology because technology changes so much more than financial services was changing. And there's always a different way to look at it. And when I think about my younger self, I wish that the technology existed in my early career so that I could have more options of what kinds of things I was attracted to. So today, you know, I look at our developers that work down in Argentina, and I constantly encourage them to get beyond this idea that they need to code to add value. The real value and the people that are starting to accelerate and get more momentum in their careers are those that can consume a business domain, and understand all of the requirements of a business domain, how do you translate that into what technology can do for that business domain. And then further, once you identify that you are, you know, attracted to understanding how business really works and the plumbing of business, you know, then you can even get more specialized into certain verticals that are more appealing to you and really tune in on where you want to work. And to me, there has never been a place in time where there's so much variety, and so much opportunity for people that are truly curious and that are training themselves to notice what excites them, than today. There's literally a situation today where you can decide where you want to work based on the tools that you use, the news stories that you read, and you can target your career opportunities, versus the old days where you're sort of reading job postings all the time. And you know, so not only are the opportunities wide and appealing, but your ability to sort of target exactly who you want to go work for us is unprecedented.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That's great. And you talked about curiosity, which is critical to, I think, succeeding in the workplace, anywhere today, but particularly internationally. And you also mentioned Argentina, so I want to talk about that a little bit. So you've got 100 employees or so, almost all of them are in Mendoza, Argentina. How did that happen?



**Grace Schroeder:**

I started the company in 2011, and without a tech background, really. I mean, I was always attracted to it as a user and I went beyond a normal, you know, office worker user in terms of my experimentation with things that I could buy. But I had no concept of how to hire a developer team, how to tell if they knew what they were doing, and literally spent, you know, hundreds of thousands of dollars on failed starts before I identified and located my CTO. And I did that through word of mouth, and... as you know, a network of business people in Denver, Colorado... when I heard he was unhappy, I recruited him and we began to staff the team there. And so, it's really important that, first of all, you allow yourself to make these mistakes because had I not, you know, hired the wrong two teams to begin with, I wouldn't have gotten it anywhere, I wouldn't have realized that people would actually pay us for a product that did what we were saying it could do. But then I also became a lot better at discerning whether or not somebody knew what they were talking about and how to evaluate an approach that would be successful versus needing to be a developer to determine whether somebody could accomplish the goal. So it was human first. We started off with two US teams... we would have continued down that path, I could not find the human that was attracted enough to the concept of building a platform that nobody had a name for. And then when I found Diego, he really brought the technology to life. To add, I love Argentina, the people are fantastic, they are great to work with. The obvious practical advantage is they are an hour, or at most two hours, forward of East Coast time, depending on daylight savings time, but I couldn't be happier with the quality of people that we were able to recruit down there. And honestly, the... our Instagram channel talks about life at Slingr because we spend a lot of effort to create a cultural environment that people want to work in.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That's wonderful. That is fantastic. I just love that story. Especially because you went to where the work was, right? You went to where the workforce was, you went to where the ideas were, you went to where the person, as you said, the human was, that's great. That just hammers home the point that jobs really are global, the workforce is global, skills are global, and we're competing with people on a global scale. Yeah. Let me ask another question about fundraising. So you fundraised a startup, you very graciously, you know, kind of, gave a nod to the support you got from the angels in the beginning, but how do you fund a startup, especially one that has a lot of, you know, as the vast majority of your intellectual property and what's going is outside the United States?

**Grace Schroeder:**

There's not a short answer to that. The dynamics of the company we decided to start really didn't lend themselves well, especially in 2011, to VC financing. And there's tons of writing on this, there are people that specialize in you know, how to craft a company that is fundable, what the pitch deck should look like, who are the likely targets in your particular genre... That said, we built something different, in part because I really didn't know anything about VC funding when I started it, I wasn't aiming at that, I broke all the rules of starting a company, I did no market studies on addressable markets, I had no real notion of how I was going to continue to finance the company. I just went one step at a time, and as I got reinforcement that we were heading in the right direction, I was able to raise a little bit more money, I was able to get clients that also helped support the growth of the company. And in that way, we had sort of, you know, they call them party rounds, maybe like small financings just to cover certain gaps in the revenue, if a client left, or something like that. So now, we're past that. It was a rocky ride. But I also found that – even when I tried to re-tool my story and the deck – that the time I spent trying to chase down institutional money for which I didn't fall into the pattern was better spent trying to land new customers and grow the revenue and obviate the need to raise, you know, a ton of money. And so, you know, if you think about why do people start companies, some people do this whole categorization – lifestyle, I'm gonna exit... and I don't really have a firm decision there for myself. You know, I obviously recruited a team of exceptional people that are 20 years younger than I am, that could take over the entire management of the company if we just decided to keep growing. But I left everything very open ended. Many people would tell you that was a mistake.



**Stacie Berdan:**

Sounds like it's... I'm sensing a pattern here – if there is a pattern in your kind of life, in your career path – which is to see what's next, right? To see what's around the corner... Don't make the decision now, maybe, if you don't have to.

**Grace Schroeder:**

I always tell people that are having a hard time with making a decision, and internally too, like, if it's hard to make the decision, it's not ripe to be made. And that's probably not the way a lot of people approach decisions either. But decisions are pretty easy to make when the answer is obvious. Sometimes you have to have patience. You know, people want to stick a process into place before the work of a process, and without fail work drives process. And every major process that we tried in the early years, had to be rewritten once the work started to happen. So I'm trying to form a culture where people can experiment, where people can let some sloppiness happen until the actuals crystallize, and then, and then move on improvement from there.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Sounds wise, sounds wise, not only in your business, but it kind of sounds wise to apply to ourselves as well. I mean, most people wouldn't say be sloppy, right? But that's a really good... I understand what you mean, which is just kind of let it happen, it doesn't have to be perfect the first time, right, just kind of get it all out there. Um, I have a term that I like to use when I write, which is called splat, just gonna splat it out there and eventually it'll come into focus. Yeah, um, can you tell me, Grace, what is the biggest change or challenge in globalization that you've witnessed in the tech industry the past couple of years?

**Grace Schroeder:**

That's a really good question. And it has a lot of answers depending on the angle. For example, if I'm a global company and I'm accustomed to getting very favorable software rates depending on the country, whether it's India or Argentina or Ukraine... the pandemic forced globalization in rates at the senior level. So, for large companies that were accustomed to, you know, 50% cost advantage, whatever the number is, once everybody became very comfortable with remote learning during the pandemic, those rates became global rates. So you're not going to get the same cost advantages that you used to prior to the pandemic. So that's been, I think, painful for a lot of corporations. On the human side, you know, you look at how to operate when perhaps you were outsourcing to Ukraine, which... I still have friends there, it's a very difficult situation to try to continue to do business in... and several large software companies had to deal with a lot of complexity with regard to business continuity, and so forth. Our own teams in Argentina, and obviously, they deal with, you know, inflation at the 100% plus rate, and frankly, political situations that make life somewhat complex. So that, globalization is to me, you are getting in touch with the reality of what life is in these other countries, which I find extremely interesting. I spent several months a year in Argentina, just to see, you know, just to be a part of the team and to see what it is to live there. So that, I think globalization combined with a pandemic has put a lot of people in other people's shoes, which I'm a huge fan of.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That's great, well said. That's really interesting to think about it like that. And I had no idea about the equalization that has occurred in so many different areas. Cool. What kind of global tech jobs are out there right now and what skills are necessary to compete?

**Grace Schroeder:**

So, the most interesting thing is the digital nomad. And there are all sorts of rules for this. All you have to do is get somebody to pay you for something you do well, and there are countries like Spain and others who have digital nomad visa programs that allow you to move there easily, you know, run your life in another country without trying



to dodge the visa or the travel complexities that used to happen. The obvious careers are software development. We have people who travel for a few months a year to another country, and it's just fine with us, we don't require that they sit in the office. There are writing jobs, content creator positions... Sales – it also took a very remote work profile during the pandemic. So like we were you used to see a lot of sales travel, especially in the enterprise level... Many times people don't want the meetings anymore, you know they don't want to sit in their office. By and large, I think the trend is going to be toward remote work and globalization. We have always been remote except for the two offices that we have in Argentina.

**Stacie Berdan:**

What aspect of tech do we all need to know and understand even if we don't have tech jobs? Although I completely appreciate that technology is part of all of our jobs and our lives today...But for those who aren't going to be software engineers or the like, what does everybody need to know?

**Grace Schroeder:**

Technology isn't going anywhere. And your ability to operate in a changing world relies on your curiosity and the extent to which you spend the time to experiment and learn as you go to stay relevant. I really worry about people that aren't seeing what AI is going to do to careers. I look at law firms, I look at writers, content creators, video producers, and I believe those jobs are still very, very valuable. I think leveraging the technology is your job. Like how do I learn? How do I go into this job? How do I leverage technology? That's to me what's going to keep people relevant, keep them employed, and keep them interested. And part of whatever happens next.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Ah that is great – leverage technology. You have to find out what it is, right? And it's constantly changing. It's a bit, it's on the fast track, for sure, just to keep up with it. But do so as much as you can and learn how to leverage it. That's great. I love it. Bring it into your workplace, right? Bring it into your workspace.

**Grace Schroeder:**

I mean, it's a practical matter, I moved off of Windows on to Mac 15 years ago, I wanted to throw the computer away for the first 30 days out of frustration, but then you get to learn a new thing. And I did the same – I use a Google Fi phone, I used to use an iPhone... So now I try to use you know, Google for the phone, Macs for the computers, a variety of different tools for you know, home networking, and I think that keeps me, you know, from getting lazy and sitting in a walled garden bubble of a particular technology vendor and not seeing what else is out there.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Well, sounds like you just kind of tackle challenges, and you actually make them part of your daily life in a way to actually sort through and overcome them and learn, which is admirable. What is maybe one of the greatest challenges that you faced in your career so far, how did you deal with it?

**Grace Schroeder:**

So, I think the earliest... the challenges that were most difficult were the early challenges of understanding why I was frustrated, unhappy, you know, lashing out against... I was a terrible employee, I should have been fired more than I was. That all culminated in one day realizing that I deserved and needed to be happy with what I did to make money every day. And from that moment on, I took responsibility for my happiness versus putting that pressure on my employer who really isn't there to make me happy. So that was the number one realization and the number one... those early challenges were the toughest, because I could not understand why I wasn't fulfilled in this job that I had. And it sounds so simple. But I've since run into a lot of younger people who behave the same way as I



did. And I see myself in them. And I tell them, you deserve to be happy at your job. And that's what you need to focus on. Like what in your job makes you happy? What in your life makes you happy? If you are watching a TV show, which ones do you binge on? Why do you get excited when you're working on one task and not when you're working on another? And those all add up to fulfillment at the end of the day. So when you construct the life the way you want to be paid for what you do, that's what you pay attention to. Like, what do I really enjoy? What am I really curious about... and follow those lines, and that's where... you don't know where that journey is going to end, it never ends if you're doing it right.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Many people will say, as they've said to me, it's like, oh, well, we're looking back, right. we're looking back and we have the benefit of hindsight, and wisdom, and security, and job security, and all of that... but how do you really do that in the moment? How does somebody who's just a few years out of school say, wait a minute, this isn't making me happy, I should go do something else. There's an element of fearlessness there, right?

**Grace Schroeder:**

Yeah, there is an element of exploration, there is always fear with exploration. So I wouldn't call it fearlessness. But I think you also have to learn these words called "I don't know". So, when you come to a job, and I have noticed this in my hiring people that are close to just out of school, people feel a need to give an answer, even though they don't really know. And that same answer they feel compelled to give about their career. What are you doing in your career? What are your plans? Where's your education going to take you? And so people give answers to these questions that may not actually be generated by their internal understanding of themselves, but rather by an external expectation that: a) they should know what they're going to do; b) they should know the answer to the question they were asked. And a large part of my early communication with new, you know, younger people out of school is, don't say you know the answer, you have to be good at finding the answer. So, I don't need you to pretend you know the answer, I need you to say, I don't know and I'm gonna go find it. And that's where it's important to be curious about the work you do. Because it's no fun tracking down the answer to something that you have no interest in whatsoever, it's a lot of fun to figure things out in domains that you are actually very interested in. And that is where the noticing part of what do I get a charge out of versus what makes me want to sleep and binge watch "Law and Order" (sorry, that's my personal pleasure). What's the difference between those two tasks?

**Stacie Berdan:**

We do that, society does that... students haven't even graduated... What's next? What are you going to do next? I mean, they feel so they have to have an answer. It even starts in high school, you know, kind of labeling students with their test scores and what college they go to, it doesn't matter.

**Grace Schroeder:**

You know, I will tell you this: part of it is, again, back to the human side, some people don't do well in remote work environments, they need human interaction or they just become unhappy. It doesn't really matter the task that they're working on, they need that energy exchange to perform and to feel like they're growing. So that's another thing to notice about yourself is, am I that person or I'm the person that, you know, if I go to a trade show for two days, I will need to spend three days alone to recover from that. And these are all things that you have to notice about yourself, because it is interesting how external... many people focus externally when things aren't going well, when they're not happy. But most of the answers sit right inside of ourselves. And that's where I think that education in particular could do a better job of, sort of... and I know there's words like mindfulness, but it can be very simple, like, does this environment make, you know, make my neck clench up and make me feel like I need to protect myself versus wow, I will stay up all night to solve this problem, because it's very interesting to me.



**Stacie Berdan:**

Interesting. I want to bridge to a similar kind of a topic, which is how do you figure it out? What about balance? What about something like maybe you work a lot... there's this lore that in startups people do. They work, you know, long, long, long hours. That's a big question today. I mean, not only just about the mindfulness, but that's part of being happy for many people, particularly students instilling in school now. How do you do that? How do you manage, how do you balance?

**Grace Schroeder:**

I've never been one to focus on work-life balance, I have sort of followed my nose in terms of where I want to spend my time. This company has been my journey. And some people might choose, you know, children, country clubs, cars and boats. Some people might choose to start a company and put their growth and their aspirations into deciding which direction the company should go, am I on the right track making these modifications... I feel like I got, I released myself from the human expectation side of life early enough to do this, but not as early as I wish I had. And then too, realize that if it doesn't work, nobody died, you know, you're gonna go do something else, I would encourage people to just trip into the next opportunity that they find. I have encouraged people to go wait tables, if they are so unhappy that they are destructive in their work, meaning burning relationships that they shouldn't burn... Go work in a restaurant, get real time feedback of humans that are interacting with you. That is a really fast, honest way to reshape how you interact with the world is by actually interacting with humans. And that has worked out well for several people that have taken that advice. And it's, it's just... keep trying, keep trying until you decide that that particular lily pad could be replaced by another one, and another one, and another one. You don't see a world now where people need to stay in the same place for ten years, seven years. In fact, I highly advocate job hopping, moving from large company to small company... If you are lucky enough to get into a large company that has enough internal movement that you're able to practice on a number of different canvases, that's fine, but, by and large, if you're coming out of one company – and I noticed this too many times – the entire lens through which you evaluate form your vision is based on one company, which is not ideal for the world as it stands today.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That's wonderful advice, great advice. Particularly getting outside your bubble, because I think that happens to a lot... particularly at a university level there's this couching and, I'm gonna use the work 'coddling' even, at times. And we don't do anybody a service by doing that, by allowing them to do that.

**Grace Schroeder:**

No, and I'll tell you, I have found that... (And also, by the way, I typed land contracts in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, so I took college-level typing)... I found that many newer/younger people don't have a lot of general business experience like creating appointments, and how do certain things work... that are, to me, obviously, back-of-hand human nature... But they don't even know general office because many of them came out of school during the pandemic so their first job is sitting behind a computer. There's no training program for that, there's no, like, how do we make things happen in an organization where we are not in charge, how do we become part of a team... So there is a big gap in, sort of, that onboarding experience that I think we are also seeing starting to play out now, so... I would advise people to do the human interaction thing if they haven't. Work in a trade show... it doesn't matter... But you can start to see the way humans work, the way you work, and all of that leads to sort of a more diversified experience and a better outcome.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Awesome, that is great. So, you've given out listeners a lot of advice. Is there one piece of advice you'd like to go back and give your younger self?



**Grace Schroeder:**

Probably the piece of advice that I deserve to be, I need to be happy at my job. And I don't need to try to conform to some childhood interpretation of what the world expected of me. And that it's OK to be the way that I am. I was a nerd in elementary school... and then in high school: hey you don't need to do that, you're funny, so I went in that direction... I've sort of come back to my natural nerd self because people weren't necessarily supporting back in my day the types of, you know, who I was. And I'm not a big "everybody's gotta support everything that you do", but I wasn't hot to value myself. I made this comment once, somebody asked me, well, you had this great jobs in corporate America – why did you leave? And I said: natively I knew that I saw more in myself than corporate America would ever see. And that I needed to go prove to myself, that my high ideals about myself were true. And that's why I ultimately went out and took this big risk.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Amazing. Grace, this has been a terrific conversation. You've shared so much. Your perspectives are so different. You really do think differently than a lot of people that... certainly within my circle... and I've loved the exposure and the stimulation, and I'm super curious and could sit here asking you many more questions. But our time has come to the end, and I want to see if there is anything else you'd like to add, maybe just to share with our listeners before we wrap up.

**Grace Schroeder:**

There's no shortage of opportunity and direction for anybody that's interested to craft their own path in life. And I encourage that heartily, especially the notion that you need to understand yourself well enough, to understand a career that you want to belong to. We spend so much time at work, second only, you know, in front of sleeping... and this part of life in terms of how do you train yourself to notice what you're really attracted to is underserved. I feel like education, to a certain extent, is the same as it was during the industrial revolution. We created factories to educate factory workers, a lot of that continues and persists through grade numbers 1,2,3,4,5... and now even into college and majors and the curriculum. The speed at which the world is changing is faster than curriculum can catch up to. I also... I believe there is a huge opportunity, even in the education space, to leverage a hybrid approach of in-person learning, AI, and a way to better align subjects to what people are attracted to and the skills they actually want to develop versus just consuming information that gives them a degree.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Excellent advice, that's great! Thank you. I think a lot of value in that...so much value in everything that you've shared with us, Grace. So thank you for your time, I know you are a busy person and I really appreciate you taking the time to be with us today.

**Grace Schroeder:**

Thank you Stacie, you are too kind.

[Music]

**Stacie Berdan:**

You have been listening to the GW-CIBER Global Careers podcast. Join us again next time, and in the meantime – go global!