

# Creativity and Digital Hope

Cisco New Zealand Country Manager Dave Wilson on fostering creativity, trust, and digital literacy

**Michelle Dennedy:** What does it take to fully participate in our knowledge society? In the next few decades, it's predicted that two billion more people will come online. In this brave new world of zeros and ones, it's not just techies who need to be digitally literate. Try to say that three times, sigma riders. Listen up all you sigma riders and digital citizens. My next guest says this is no time for complacency.

Cybersecurity, data protection, privacy. You like to stay ahead of the curve and listen to experts who lead by deriving greater value from data with an organized approach to data privacy. You're like us, just a few deviations past the norm. You are a privacy sigma rider.

Hello, privacy sigma riders. It's Michelle Dennedy, Chief Privacy Officer, not tongue-twister champion, and faithful and loyal servant and friend to our next guest. I'm super excited. I say that every time, but this time I'm really, really, really, excited. Welcome, Dave Wilson, Cisco's country manager for New Zealand who leads all sales and all sorts of stuff in that country. Welcome, Dave.

**Dave Wilson:** Hey, how are you?

**Michelle Dennedy:** Doing well. So, Dave, you're a director of sales and you're the country manager. You bring in all the money. But, you're not really the typical sales guy.

**Dave Wilson:** Yeah. Probably not. Most people would say I'm not, I guess. And probably because a lot of people, when they think of sales, go straight to real estate or car sales, so there's probably a bad vibe out there. But no, I'm not.

**Michelle Dennedy:** No. You're really not. I mean, it's interesting. So, I met Dave almost a year ago now. And from the first 10 minutes, first of all, I had like 17 new businesses I wanted to drop in my head. He showed me the most beautiful parts of the world down in New Zealand on our way out to the islands and telling me about these crazy mad-cap creativity sessions he has with his team. So, Dave, you're a deep thinker. You're a creative guy. How does all of this fit together with IT, and why are you concerned about IT complacency and a lack of creativity in our market?

**Dave Wilson:** Yeah. I love creativity. I love all forms, innovating, art. I'm aware of it of as an ... I think IT has a critical role to play because everything's digitizing, which, basically, is IT. And as it digitizes, as we know, it jumps onto Moore's Law's curve, and basically ends up on a curve of exponential growth and change. So, it's critical in this world. Everything is digitizing, and yeah, we need to make the most of it.

**Michelle Dennedy:** So, tell us a little bit about your background because I think you're ... so much of one's perspective, I think, starts off in a place ... And how did you get into this IT business? And how did you really start to be an emergent entrepreneur here?

- Dave Wilson: Yeah. Well, like everything, not by plan, especially in the creator's mind and world. But no. Look, I started off in life after school. Left school early at 17 at grandfather's advice that I needed to get out and get a job because he left school at 12.
- Michelle Dennedy: Wow.
- Dave Wilson: And so, I wasn't going to be employable if I didn't get out there at 17 and got a job. And he basically took me down the road and got me a job as a builder. So that's how I started in life and let my creativity flow there. You have to be really creative in that game as well. You're just building with wood and nails and bricks and not zeros and ones, right? But eventually, my mother, one day as, I guess, a gift or a present bought me an IT course, which I wasn't too pleased about, to be fair. You don't just go out and sign someone up on a course.
- Michelle Dennedy: If you're a mom, you do, Dave.
- Dave Wilson: Yeah. That's right. That's what I found out. And it was an IT basics course, which I remember very clearly. I was writing down, "this is a mouse. This is a keyboard." Because we never grew up with any PCs in our house and not at our schools. So yeah. By accident, is the short answer.
- Michelle Dennedy: I love that. In fact, my first course was a BASICs course, and I learned to like send a dot across the screen. And, of course, it was a green dot across a black screen, and that was like a huge accomplishment at the time. Back in the day. So how did you transition from taking a BASIC course, literally BASIC, the acronym BASIC? And now you do all these complex things and you're in this huge networking, and services, and software company; it's a global entity. How did you make your way there?
- Dave Wilson: I guess it's a ... you know, as someone who's creative and innovative at heart and your soul, you're also impatient. You're looking for the next thing. And I guess in business, a little bit, that goes down well. Always looking for that next thing, trying to provide the best service, and being also blessed to be able to, with this, as digital became a lot bigger over the years, of being blessed to work for ... it's given me opportunities in life for international companies, which has seen me bounce around the world. And that's also fueled my creative side, which I now know is the more experience discovery you're out there doing, different cultures, religions, foods, everything that you expose to, it just continues to build you along that path. And yeah, I've just been blessed that that's kept on going and got me to where I am here.
- Michelle Dennedy: That's very cool. So, let's talk a little bit about my geekiness. Are your customers thinking about or talking about data? And have they come around to this idea as privacy as a growth-enabler or do you think we're stuck in the past thinking about compliance? Where do you think that their thinking about data these days?
- Dave Wilson: Yeah, well, I ... I mean, oh, my God. Everybody's talking about data. It's front of every conversation. It's either data lakes or data swamps because your data's rotten.
- Michelle Dennedy: Yes.
- Dave Wilson: You know? Or data is the new oil, so that's where you follow it. Yeah. I think, though, it's almost #data or #privacy. For me, yeah, that's something that when I say hashtag as being spoken

about but not truly understood how serious you need to take it. It's the same with GDPI. It's out everywhere. Everybody's out blogging about it. Everybody's posting about it, hash-tagging about it, but if you really scratch the surface, no one's really doing anything a lot about it. It's more the scare factor, I guess, that I'm seeing as thrown out there. That when you get people with the scare factor side of things, they end up stepping back away from it. So probably not enough serious understanding of it, but everybody's talking about it.

**Michelle Dennedy:** I like the term hashtag this or that. I used to call it ampersand privacy or ampersand data and be like, "Oh, we're doing security and privacy." And you'd ask people, "Where do you really take that?" and they couldn't really go any deeper. But I think it really is, it ties into this theme of entrepreneurship and creativity in so many ways. I think the nature of work is changing. And the way that we have to look at and measure and mark our jobs in our life and how we're recording our experience. I mean, think about how our kids are recording their lives. They don't just have one little diary hidden under their pillow. There're so many data sources. So how do you think this translates into ... how are we keeping up as a society, Dave? Like where are we falling short? What do we need to do?

**Dave Wilson:** It's probably learning to evolve with the pace that you just talked about and the change, right? Some of the younger ones, they're living that world. They're probably, in some way, in front of us in it. But the world looks very different to how we were taught, especially in business. Yes, you can arguably say there's always been change. And people will say that, "Just take the word off digital transformation." Transformation's been around for a while, very obviously, for decades. But it's the speed of transformation. And a lot of where the coaching and training comes in that we've had over the years, including everybody that has an MBA or that sort of style. It was about managing predictability, quite high levels of certainty in that your product, your customer set, your market. The speed is meaning that we're actually going into different, having to look and take different approaches because we're actually entering into, every day we're entering to higher unpredictability, so it's more exploration area that we're out there. So, with that comes high uncertainty. So how do you manage high uncertainty? How do you go to market in high uncertainty? And with high uncertainty comes high risk. Right?

**Michelle Dennedy:** Yeah.

**Dave Wilson:** And that's not how most people in business have been taught over the years, so some key skill sets come out in that is what we try to bring out and train because most people's risk profiles are quite low. They're encouraged to innovate quite low, and challenging the status quo is even lower. And we've kind of taught them that, right? Especially in big corporate. Like, "Do your part of the job. Have your blinkers on." And even if they had some spirit to them, we kind of, over the years, have beaten it out of them. Yeah, so it's-

**Michelle Dennedy:** We used to even tell them how to dress for success. Like everyone should wear a uniform.

**Dave Wilson:** Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. Exactly.

**Michelle Dennedy:** So you do a lot of training in this area and in the area of creativity in digital literacy. How do you unleash people's creativity? What kind of exercises do you do? And how do you convince people to take these risk? As you've said, I think you're right, I think we have bred into a generation of non-risk-taking. We say that we like risk, but we only like the risks that have already been paid

out and we can conservatively look back on by not taking a risk. How do you unleash that power?

Dave Wilson: Well, I guess, first of all, it's talking about that you are creative. Everybody is. If you ask a room, every time I'm in front of a room, "Put your hand up if you think you're creative," it'd be usually less than 5%, right?

Michelle Dennedy: Yeah.

Dave Wilson: So, what we know from IQ is you can thank your parents for that. Eighty percent of your IQ comes from your parents. But creativity is literally down at only 33%. So, what we know is that if it's only 33%, that it can be taught. So, basically the first thing is sharing that with people, even if you don't think you're creative, you are—or you have the capability to be creative. And so, it's bringing an awareness because if—in this environment and day, everybody talks about being time poor, right? There's not enough time. And we can't work people any harder.

Michelle Dennedy: Right. I have so much time.

Dave Wilson: Otherwise, we're going to have people dropping down. But what we can do is tap into this new pool of unutilized creativity capacity. Right?

Michelle Dennedy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dave Wilson: So, it's about then saying, "there's this new lot of capacity that we can, of natural resource, we can tap into." And then helping them understand that they can be creative. So that's the first part that we kick-off. And we kick-off with a simple exercise. Right? A really simple one would be two people pair up. Pick your favorite brand, then pick your favorite product in that. Now, share it with your partner and create an "innovation baby." So, what are you going to force-associate those to and create something? And then you just step one after the other. And we go through it. And yeah. Start from there. But it's the knowing. It's awareness that, "Hey, I can be creative."

Michelle Dennedy: Yeah. I love the term "created an innovation baby." I'm going to have to steal that one from you, Dave. I love it. That's what they say is the best artists steal, right?

Dave Wilson: Yeah, yeah.

Michelle Dennedy: And I like this idea of the creativity capacity because, to be honest, before I met you, I would have been one of the 95-percenters that had my hand down and said, "I'm not creative at all." That's why I went to law school, because I had no creativity. But when I look through your lens, I have been pretty creative. I've produced some cool stuff and, I think, some weird stuff. Sometimes I think it's how you share it. And I think the other concept that you taught me that I'd like to hear more from you about is trust. Like how do we talk about trust in this new ever-changing, constantly moving world?

Dave Wilson: Yeah. Well, it's a big one, right? Trust is key with this innovation. And stepping forward, a big part of it is change, this pace of change. And I've had to learn as I'll jump up with the vision, with the innovation, I'll jump up over the cliff and I'll turn around, and there's only 25 percent of people that have jumped out with me. The next 25 percent are kind of looking, going, kind of

like the story, "Yeah, trust this guy. Let's all go over." And then, you've got the bottom 50 percent that they're not knowing what to do. And the last 25 percent are sitting in the trench with their hands crossed going, "I don't like change and I'll never do it."

And I think you locked on it with trust. Trust is the biggest thing. And what I've had to learn to understand as a leader, that that resilience comes from a place of fear. So, as in people, with trust, we need to make sure we have everyone in and we've dealt with their different levels of fear. So, we've removed that resilience for them to want to move and change, as opposed to the old management analogy, "You're on the bus or you're off, so you know where the door is" sort of thing.

**Michelle Dennedy:** Right. Right. And especially with the speed, you don't have time to be pushing off people off the bus and be finding a new one. You have to somehow find a way. And I think the other thing, as you're looking at these teams, not all these people are going to physically in the room. So, to gauge their fear and kind of understand which of the 25-percenters, when it comes to change, are with you. How do we deal with a future that includes virtual interactions? How will we trust each other?

**Dave Wilson:** Yeah. It's going to be a difficult one. And we're learning that, right, obviously, now in technology that we produce. And video is a big part of that because you can see body language and emotion. And these are the natural things that people build off of each other. But trust also comes—it's proven. You typically only trust someone who kind of looks or feels like you. Same sort of maybe background, ethnicity, religion. Also, data proves that once there's about ten people that have validated or recommended something, then those barriers start to go away. So, it's about validation, proving more than ten people feel that it's also safe. But it's about putting an emotional interface into technologies as well. Like how are people meant to trust AI? AI is coming faster than we know it is. And so, I've been doing a lot of work with different companies that are putting a face on AI with digital humans and avatars. So as opposed to just talking audio to an AI, you have an avatar there that's looking, that's very humanness. It's showing facial emotions. It's reacting to your emotions. It's putting human side back into technology.

**Michelle Dennedy:** Yeah. This is a theme that I always pick up on is I really do believe that technology should serve humanity and not the other way around. But to do that, as you point out, you really do have to put the human in the middle of the design, and the output, and the interface. So, you've got everyone's trust. They understand that they need to take a risk and be creative. I've heard you talk about digital hope. And I love that term almost as much as the innovation baby, but they may have to have their own innovation baby to see which one I love the most. What do you mean by digital hope, Dave?

**Dave Wilson:** Oh, I came up with that because I've been interviewed multiple times about the doom and gloom of AI and algorithms and robots. Yeah, it's just click-bate and publicity for me. I think if we could only get more people understanding about digital hope, a foundation, look at me. I'm blessed from ... there's nothing wrong with being a builder or plumber or anything else. But moving into the digital world by accident has given me a lot of different options and choices in life, so that was part of my digital hope. But the digital environment gives a lot of people hope. We talk about STEM a lot, until I'm almost sick of it, to be fair. And I get we need people in science, technology, engineering, and math. But what about digital literacy? Because it's not just

the science, technology, engineering, and math people that need digital literacy. Like, everybody needs it. Everybody. Whether you're an art student or whatever you are.

And with that, you're going to be doing amazing things. You're going to be doing things around social enterprises, and that's what I'm seeing the youth doing. They're not going to be ... For me, when I started, that meant, for most of us, we were going to be on a help desk somewhere taking calls, and we'd slowly get up to being on the tools. And the digital literacy skills I'm talking about are these young ones are going to do something powerful. And the great thing about it is they come with a mindset of abundance versus a mindset of scarcity that we all had, and that our companies have. And it's about collecting the IP, locking it up, creating a patent, don't share it. The more and more I meet with these younger ones, they come with a shared-economy approach with open source, not as an open-source software, but open source "I'll share what I'm doing."

I met an awesome company the other day in Brazil, and they had open-sourced everything they do: their IP, their funding models, their costing models. And they say that they can pinpoint 15 companies around the world that have started off the back of their sharing of their information, and they've got something back from it, not as in dollars, but information and sharing back. So yeah. I think digital hope is big. I could talk about that more than time we have. Right now, I'm working in New Zealand on a project around mental health. Mental health is a significant issue everywhere. And I'm talking about everyday mental health, anxiety, stress. Everybody feels it. So, what if we could apply technology to that and give people hope? And so, I'm working on a project at the moment around, "How do we give people hope at scale and mass?" Instead of human scale, we move to machine scale.

So I think, yeah, there's so much to talk about, digital hope. Yeah. It's an exciting area.

Michelle Dennedy: I'm also writing down, "machine-scale digital hope." I think that's our next episode together because I think we really have to explore because I could not be in greater agreement. I think this is where ethics engineering, privacy, security, all of those things that curate the stories that we want to tell each other about each other as human beings, which is really how I define data privacy and protection. To me, that is how you get to machine-scale digital hope. I think that concept is astonishing. So, I want to close this out because I've heard you say this story twice and I've cried both times. Going from machine-scale digital hope, let's talk about your little girls for a moment.

Dave Wilson: Yeah, yeah.

Michelle Dennedy: I love what told me about your perspective as a dad of boys and girls. Tell me your story about your ladies.

Dave Wilson: Yeah. Well, I've overachieved in a few areas of my life, but I've definitely overachieved in children in having five. So yeah. I've got three boys, older boys, teenagers and 20s. But then came along these beautiful little twin girls, now six. And yeah. Like you say, I had to reset my expectation on just what it meant when I looked at these girls and what their life was going to be in this new digital world that I see every day, maybe a little bit more than others. And I caught myself looking at them and calling them my beautiful and adoring them. And hey, I believe they're beautiful. I'm their dad. But I caught myself in that saying, "What? They're more

than beautiful. And I'm not talking to them the same way I used to talk to my boys." And what do I know from everything I just talked to you about is I need to build, we need to build children, but especially young girls that have courage, courage to innovate, that have creative confidence, and they're risk-takers.

We'd let our boys do that. Go climb a tree, and if you fall out and hurt yourself, it doesn't matter. Yet, I found myself going, "Well, don't be ... oh, be careful. Maybe don't climb that tree." So, I've had to reset. So, one of the things I do every night, obviously, I sit with the girls after I've read them a book and I look into their eyes and I say to them, "You're creative. You're innovative. You're strong. You're unique. You're an artist." And I just, if I go on, "You're determined, yet you're patient. You're kind. You're caring." And just instilling in them, every day, that they're more than beautiful, which I know they are. But trying to create these strong girls. And that's hard, as a dad. I need to sometimes step back once they're out climbing that tree and go, "There's just as right for them to fall and scrape their knees as the boys were." But yeah. It's challenged me. That's for sure.

Michelle Dennedy: Alrighty. I think I'm going to try not to cry this time, but I'm feeling a little choked up. I'm not going to lie. And I may have to play this when I'm about to go to sleep and pretend you're saying it to me. I think we all need to look at each other more often and just say these things like, "You are more than—"

Dave Wilson: Yeah, we do.

Michelle Dennedy: "You can be creative. You have creativity capacity. You can have—you can make innovation babies." Here we are making innovation babies. I love that. At machine scale and digital hope. So, Dave, I don't even know how to wrap this up. I think we just wander together and we insist that you come back on the show and tell us more of your amazing concepts.

Dave Wilson: Love to.

Michelle Dennedy: And I hope the takeaway, too, is that Dave Wilson is, obviously, a friend of mine, but this guy who runs our sales office. And any of you who thought that you can't interact with the sales teams who are actually bringing in the money, these are the guys who you are telling each other and scoffing at saying, "Ah, they're just coin-operated. They don't care about things like humanity and ethics." Look again, my friends. Look again. And join hands with all parts of the business. That's the lesson for today.

Dave Wilson: Great.

Michelle Dennedy: Thanks, Mr. Dave Wilson.

Dave Wilson: Lovely talking to you.

Michelle Dennedy: You too. Thanks so much. And how are your numbers?

Dave Wilson: Awesome.

Michelle Dennedy: Excellent. Good answer. Thank you, sir. It's a wrap.

Dave Wilson: Done.

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