

Announcer:

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Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's guest is one of the most respected and revered tech journalists in the US technology space. Contributing writer to the New York Times opinion section, weekly NBC appearances, and executive producer of the Code Conference, an annual event that I have known and respected for years when I was in tech, that brings together a global community of the biggest tech names in the business to look at the future impact of digital technologies on the world.

Dave:

She hosts the podcast, Recode Decode, I was just a guest on there and the major podcast called Pivot. Both of them help you understand tech and what's going on there with a very sharp insight that's based on, well, 30 years of experience covering tech. I've respected and followed Kara for a very long time. I don't know if it's been all 30 years, but probably most of them. She's here on the show today to tell us what's going on with tech and especially with COVID. Kara, welcome to the show.

Kara:

Thanks, Dave. How you doing?

Dave:

I'm doing really well.

Kara:

Good.

Dave:

I come from a family of... I'm going to call them girl geeks. My grandmother was a PhD engineer, one of my aunt's-

Kara:

Your grandmother, wow.

Dave:

My grandmother, yeah from Los Alamos. It was one of my aunts taught Computer Science at Stanford. Another one has had [inaudible 00:02:13] at the Asprey Computer Science Lab is named after my great aunt. We have these-

Kara:

Wow, that's royalty, that's tech royalty for the women. That's an astonishing group right there. Especially the years ago, especially since it's decades and decades ago. There was unicorns, women were unicorns in this field.

Dave:

In my lineage, I even used to work... Exodus Communications, our CEO was Ellen Hancock.

Kara:

I remember Ellen.

Dave:

One of the biggest... In fact, she was the first Senior Vice President at IBM was a woman.

Kara:

She was.

Dave:

I also know, having been a geek for decades in the tech world, there aren't that many women at the senior levels of tech.

Kara:

No, there are not.

Dave:

You've been covering it for 30 years. Before we even get into the whole what's tech doing to solve this pressing pandemic issue, I love it when I get to talk to someone who's lived the wars of tech. What's it been like? Have you seen shifts over the last 30 years that are positive for women in tech?

Kara:

No, I would not. In fact, a lot of the statistics are showing there are fewer women in tech. There was a New York Times article written, I think 25 years ago about graduates from MIT and where they went and the numbers have gone down precipitously, in terms of graduates in STEM areas and women in tech and women in jobs in tech. There is a history even though your relatives, your female relatives were probably rare during that time, I'm guessing.

Kara:

At the same time, there were more women involved in tech early on and many fewer now and it's a nagging problem that continues, especially in terms of real power. The real power as you know, if you're a techie, is in the engineering area, or in the management. You say Ellen Hancock, but you could have 10 on your hands of really high... She's one of them, high ranking women tech executives.

Kara:

You'll have Sheryl Sandberg at Facebook, Meg Whitman, obviously, who's now at an entertainment startup called Quibi, which ran eBay. You have... It's very small. It's a very small. The woman around IBM... I'm totally blanking on her name. Anyway, there's not been that many women running tech organizations. There's not that many women running engineering organizations. They tend to be in the jobs that are more... The softer jobs, I guess. I don't consider them not unimportant jobs, but HR and PR, and things like that.

Dave:

Got it. I was hoping you would tell me that it's getting better, because it's not. Interesting.

Kara:

No, it's not getting better for people of color, either. It's just these numbers, because tech companies started reporting these numbers now and the percentages and they're still pretty much... It's pretty much white guys. It's white guys, that's what it is. That's the numbers. That's the numbers they... Everyone's like, "Don't be so negative." I'm like, "It's math. That's what they're purporting."

Kara:

You don't see an enormous change in them. A lot of them are committed to it. Marc Benioff at Salesforce talks about it and others and there are some companies that have quite a few women in high ranking jobs. Google actually has had quite a few women in very important critical jobs. Susan Wojcicki runs YouTube, for example, and there are many others there. But you're still a rare being, being a woman or a person of color running or being in a significant position of power at a tech company.

Dave:

It hasn't improved.

Kara:

Yeah.

Dave:

The reason I'm asking is I've heard all the war stories from my relatives, and my grandmother says how twice her thesis to get her graduate degree, it was turned down because she was raising a family of seven. It took so long to do the thesis that her advisors would leave and the new ones would say they didn't like it and stuff like that. It's been a very clear pattern that wasn't good. But now I feel like so many people are saying, all right, we want this. Companies, it's important that the executives I talk to whether, they're white dudes or not they actually want this to happen, but if it's not happening and the executives want it to, do you have a hypothesis for why?

Kara:

Well, they're so powerless that there's nothing they could possibly do to change it. There's a lot of talk about it honestly, Dave, and then nothing action. What happens is it becomes one of those... You know the lists you make, and the punch list, and it's number 15 on the punch list, it's not number one.

Kara:

It may be an aspiration, but it's like you're exercising in healthcare, I'd really like to be healthy. I'd really like to not eat that cookie I just ate, I'd really like to not have those extra 10 pounds or whatever. I think people have aspirations, and most people think it's a good idea. It just doesn't happen. They tend to pattern match.

Kara:

It's very common to be uncomfortable with these people. I didn't pick it for a reason that I meant to pick it this way, just happened this way, and nothing ever happens this way when you're staffing a company. You have to be very intentional in your choices.

Kara:

The second thing you have to do is one thing that I always notice when I'm covering these people, years ago... Am I allowed to curse on this? Well, it's not really a curse. Not really.

Dave:

You can curse.

Kara:

Years ago, I had a big [inaudible 00:07:21] about boards, because you can find plenty of women and people of color who can join boards. You may not have enough graduates with engineering degrees of the higher... You can make those arguments, the standards aren't right.

Kara:

I wrote a story about the men and no women of Facebook's Board, Web 2.0 Board and things like that. It's gotten better, but it's not great, but it's an area where you really can make a difference. Twitter at one point had 10 white men on the board, and I was like, "Look at this company. Here it is, half the people that use are people of color, half of the people that use it are women. This is really an unusual... " They're the same.

Kara:

The lead of the story I wrote on it, was here on the board of Twitter, which has two Peters and a Dick. They were names; Dick Costolo, Peter Fenton and Peter Chernin on the board. The CEO, Dick Costolo called me and he said, "That's just terrible. That's really funny."

Kara:

My only point was that, it didn't have to be that way. Then in the ensuing discussion, he's like, "Well, you know, we have standards." At the time, Twitter was having a lot of problems. I'm like, "Why is the word standards only brought up when it's women and people of color?" There's plenty of men that screw up. It's never a thought, but they always worry about credentials and the standards when they're adding different people, never at the beginning, well, that idiot VC who sits on... You know the idiot VC who's always on your board who just says dumb things.

Dave:

Can't imagine such a thing.

Kara:

Can't imagine such a thing. What are they doing there? What does that dumb ass doing there?

Dave:

It's because they have lots of money and they bought the board [inaudible 00:08:55]

Kara:

Whatever, they don't deserve to be there, they should put someone who has qualifications there. I just would look at boards and I would say if they really meant it boards would be more. Now, they've gotten better. They've got better. They certainly have, but it's a slow, slow process.

Dave:

You were at a recent RSA conference and you were keynoting there. I've keynoted at RSA as well, years ago in my career. This is the primary cybersecurity, computer security conference out there. It's a big deal. But you said something, you said, "I'm sort of tech's version of Elizabeth Warren. I attack billionaires beautifully and put them in their place."

Kara:

Yeah.

Dave:

Which is super funny, but-

Kara:

I think they liked me more than they like... They really don't like Elizabeth Warren, these tech billionaires. They got scared. Mark Zuckerberg said she was an existential crisis to the business, the existential... I was like, "I could come up with a list of more problematic situations than Elizabeth Warren."

Dave:

Running out of oil is a bigger problem than that.

Kara:

Whatever, I was fascinated that was his choice, more than anything. I met Elizabeth Warren, I have a plan, for example, she has all the plans. What it is, is I think I point out the very obvious. I was just doing this right now around Zoom, everyone's using Zoom for coronavirus crisis, and there's all these issues now because it's been heavily used around privacy choices they made, security choices they made to make them frictionless, and to get around rules of Apple or others. They didn't go as far as say, sneaky, but they did things to get themselves out there.

Dave:

It's not well architected.

Kara:

It's not well architected. All right, let's be kind. Now, the CEO is going on through this apology tour, which I appreciate because most of them don't do this, saying we should have done it better. Oops, we have the servers in China and we were rushing. In hindsight, that might have not been a good idea, on and on.

Kara:

It was fine. One of the things that was interesting was the concept of not anticipating problems. Now, he's not going to anticipate coronavirus that would cause a boom in his business, but he certainly could

have anticipated architecting something that if someday I was big, you would be proud to have that security or privacy framework on the company.

Kara:

The idea of anticipating consequences, I think is about being an adult. I always think anticipating consequences is the hallmark of being an adult. Just from food, I'm going to eat that, that's going to happen. I'm not going to exercise, that's going to happen.

Kara:

Tech people tend to spend more time on things like that, like food and everything else versus thinking of design of their stuff. I'm always fascinated by the idea that they don't anticipate consequences. Then they're so non-self-reflective, which is a good thing and a bad thing. When it's a bad thing, is they don't reflect on the consequences of their actions. I think that needs to happen a whole lot more before they unleash things onto the world.

Dave:

What are some of the good things that tech has done for us? Do you think it's been... Has it been a positive for humanity or should we go back to the '70s?

Kara:

Listen to me, is oil a good thing or a bad thing? Well, right? Listen to me, is oil a good thing or a bad thing? Well, right?

Dave:

I tend to think they're both good, even though they have costs, right?

Kara:

Exactly. Is oil... Someday, we may be like, no, that wasn't a good thing, when it ends our planet, or climate change. On the whole, it's been about people moving in cars, everything else. Tech, of course has been a good thing. The ability to reach out to people across the... The original aspirations of tech were all really good. We have commonality, we can reach out across cultures and peoples and differences. We can communicate instantly, we can get great information about if you're in a rural area, about medicine and all kinds of news. When it's degenerated into, is all the bad parts; bad information. Access is not equal. It's not affordable for some people. Some people are left out. Uses of misinformation and abuse of it, the ability to track people.

Kara:

Brad Smith, who's the President of Microsoft, who's terrific, he's a really thoughtful adult who was at a company. I can't believe I'm saying about Microsoft, because it used to be Microsoft was the Death Star essentially. They've evolved, they have, absolutely. He wrote a book called Tools and Weapons. I think that's the best way to look at it is that it's either... A knife is either something that helps us or it's something that can kill us. I think it depends on the choices we make as we're rolling these things out and the responsibility we have when there are errors to it.

Dave:

Okay. Basically, it's generally a good thing. You mentioned disinformation, fake news, lack of security and all that stuff. How hopeful are you?

Kara:

Right now I'm not, because I think autocrats have taken... Autocrats love nothing more than the internet because they get to manipulate people, there's propaganda. Obviously you've seen Donald Trump use it to spew all kinds of misinformation all over the place, which is doubly dangerous because he's President of the United States.

Kara:

When someone in real power gets it, it can be very problematic. I think right now, not so good. I'm not feeling so good about it. I'm feeling worried about it, I'm feeling all the negative aspects are to the fore and the positive aspects, which are joining people together, giving people great information are not. At the same time, during this coronavirus thing, so much good humor, people having fun, being creative. I don't know if you saw there was a bunch of people who take out ventilators, the doctors and they did a dance. For some reason, it was delightful, it made me feel better.

Kara:

The ability to reach out across, that still is the most important thing in terms of giving people a sense of community, of health, of mental wellness. You can really do a lot of stuff in that area that I think is untapped. If we can move in that direction and take advantage With the good parts of it, I think it's great. If we can't, I don't know what to say. There's really some dark aspects to it for sure, and they're winning. We're in Star Wars, the fourth movie. We're in the fourth; Empire Strikes Back.

Dave:

I sadly think you might be right. I also think it's the most exciting time ever to be alive because it's so easy to do stuff, more of the Peter Diamandis side of things.

Kara:

That's his fault, I just interviewed him.

Dave:

He's a good friend. I love his mindset.

Kara:

He's great. That's a great attitude. Listen, here's my idea. You're either a Star Wars person, or a Star Trek person. Now, think about that. Star Wars is a very dark version of technology. There's a dark vision of autocracy. Now, they win in the end, but do they win? Nobody really ever wins in Star Wars, they sort of win. In Star Trek, it's all about we're going out, we're going to all get together because we all have these communicators, we all have these abilities to reach out and boldly go where no man... Seek new systems. You're either a Star Trek person or a Star Wars person. I would like to be a Star Trek person but I fear we live in a Star Wars universe.

Dave:

Wow, that is... If you're a fan of either show, for geeks, that absolutely is such a powerful analogy I've never heard anyone explain it that way, and Peter's definitely-

Kara:

I'm trying to... He's a Star Trek person.

Dave:

He's Star Trek through and through.

Kara:

You know he grew up and was loving it. I know them when I meet them. Elon Musk loves Star Trek. There's a lot of tech people who love the whole Star Trek feeling.

Dave:

There's that vibe that we're going to go out and solve the problem versus, there's dark forces at work. I think the reality is somewhere in the middle for-

Kara:

Not just dark forces, but physical forces. Elon Musk, I love the idea, I'm going to go to Mars, we're going to live there. Then I had a biophysicist, an astrophysicist... Astrobiologist, excuse me, from Columbia. He's the head of astrobiology, which is a professional which I thought was fantastic. He's like, "Okay, here's what happens when we get to Mars, "We're going to get dumb and we're going to get sick, and here's why; radiation and this is going to attack your brain and then your body's going to atrophy and then the G..." You're like, "Oh, that."

Dave:

I actually got to ask the President of SpaceX, at one of Peter Diamandis' events. I'm like, "Okay, in the 17 years of building hardened systems on spacecrafts, what have you done to harden astronauts for the rigors of space travel?" She's like, "No one's ever asked me that question, nothing."

Kara:

[inaudible 00:17:29] is great.

Dave:

She's great. That mindset, plus we get there, the land is contaminated with perchlorate. We're not going to grow potatoes there, like we do in movies.

Kara:

The idea of saying no, we can't is something I don't want to do either. I always use this analogy like exactly. The analogy of being... I always use Kitty Hawk as a good example. Now, flight has been a positive thing for humanity. It just has despite fossil fuels, et cetera. Someday, that won't be the case, we'll have other ways to fly without that energy. It's like you're sitting on the beach in Kitty Hawk and they take off for two feet, whatever they flew. They flew for a very short period of time and only a few feet off the ground.

Kara:

It's like you're sitting on the beach and you're like, "They said four feet, and they only did two. What a bunch of losers." You don't want to be that person. You don't want to be like, they didn't do it, they promised. You want to be on the side of, all right, living on Mars, that's a really cool aspiration. Maybe that shouldn't be the aspiration, but you should think about poverty on this planet or something like that. There's always something else to fix, but it's nice to have an interesting aspiration, I guess.

Dave:

We will get to Mars or we'll just figure out it's less work to stay in orbit of Mars.

Kara:

Maybe fix the planet Earth.

Dave:

Yeah, we'll have to do that too.

Kara:

It's been a pretty good place. It's been a pretty good place to live.

Dave:

I think all of those on our agenda, they're going to happen. That's the hopeful, Star Trek side of tech. What I'm seeing though, is that billionaires, or the people who have made a lot of money in tech, they wait a long time. Bill Gates is famous for being a non-philanthropist.

Kara:

One of the few.

Dave:

He was a non-philanthropist in the early days.

Kara:

He was for a long time. Now, he's made up for it.

Dave:

No, he has made up for it. I'll give him that. This is another one of those early tech stories. When Microsoft was just basically three guys in Albuquerque, the first employee of Microsoft was my mom.

Kara:

Oh my God, you're kidding.

Dave:

She was the secretary, half time secretary when she was pregnant with me and Ed Roberts bought my cradle before I was born, true story.

Kara:

Oh my God, you're Zelic, you're like an [inaudible 00:19:39]

Dave:

You can't even make that up.

Kara:

Did she get stuck, I hope?

Dave:

No, she didn't get stuck. She worked there for whatever, six months, they moved to Seattle, all that kind of stuff. That would have been nice if she did.

Kara:

You would have owned an island now, Dave.

Dave:

But Ed Roberts was really nice because he... They were all poor 25-year-olds, and he went out and bought a \$200 crib in 1972 dollars for their first employee who answered their phone. It was very kind, and she has great things to say about that. My parents would both be like, "He never gives anything to charity." Now, you really can't say that, he does.

Kara:

Well, he's building right now these... I think I was just talking about it with some of these factories to create vaccines. He's very prescient, like the president even. Of course, he's not thinking of anything, but we have to have these factories ready to build the vaccines, and that's one of the issues, is getting them out, and he's already on that. I appreciate that. I have not really gotten along with Bill Gates that well over the years, but I have to say he's really turned a corner in terms of healthcare for sure.

Dave:

It really seems like that. One always wonders, you have to spend time with someone to really know whether that's PR and positioning or whether that's the real thing, I feel like he really-

Kara:

There's a lot of PR and positioning. Every time Facebook gives a donation, there's 53 press releases on it and it's like 0.111% of their wealth. In his case... Jack, he just gave a billion dollars for COVID-19 for funding organization, it's going to do other things later, he very clearly said, and I appreciate it, this is 28% of my net worth.

Dave:

I like Jack. Jack's a hero. He runs things in a very different way.

Kara:

He does.

Dave:

That's why I'm going, the government doesn't do the innovative stuff. They used to, and we just have-

Kara:

They have to.

Dave:

We just have the national laboratories and things like that where innovation happened and that was actually where my grandparents and my parents both worked in national labs their entire careers. That's why I have so many geeks in the family, but that doesn't happen much anymore. The innovation doesn't live there. It lives somewhere else, but it seems like only at the end of the cycles when you have billions of dollars you say, "I'm going to go do things." Either the for profit, Elon Musk way or the nonprofit like Jack just did, "I'm going to donate all this money."

Kara:

Well, we have to. The government has to be... If this coronavirus has [inaudible 00:21:54] of government to get out of businesses they need to be in. If not for money making, but for saving of human lives. The government's business is not to make money, it's to help its citizens. This is underscored how much rot is in the system that we don't have these things in place.

Dave:

You're criticizing the billionaires, but the billionaires at the same time are the ones who I think are going to go out and solve this problem, unless the government prohibits them from actually releasing tests. A friend who I'm going to have remain nameless, who was at the Forbes 400 conference regularly, who has a big lab and is ready, willing and able to do COVID testing told me on the phone, "I could do it for six bucks. I'm afraid to do it because of the FDA regulations. They won't approve it. I don't want to put my main company out of business by doing this, but I'm ready."

Dave:

It feels like there's still, when you get a guy with a billion dollars saying I'm going to solve the problem, they spend half a billion dollars getting around regulations designed to prevent them from solving the problem.

Kara:

Yes, I agree with you. I'm going to read you a quote. I think it's not necessarily that we don't want these people there doing these things. I think that's great, okay? It's just that why are... This is a story that Teddy Schleifer wrote from Recode, which is a site I started, I don't run it anymore. But these are the tradeoffs when we depend on billionaires to save us. I think what he thought, which I think was the key sentence, here we go, "Two things can be true at once. Tech billionaires can be doing good while simultaneously revealing their power and entrenching it for the long haul. As government struggles and the safety net crumbles, tech billionaires are reaching to the apex of their influence. Influence that may not proceed so easily once we do manage to survive this pandemic."

Kara:

I think it's great that they're doing that, but the question is, should they be doing it, and it should not be our government and should we be maybe just taxing them and redistributing the money the way we want to do it versus Jeff Bezos feels like going to space, Elon Musk feels like going to Mars, Mark Zuckerberg decides the wants to save the New York school system. Maybe we just tax them and let our elected officials decide.

Kara:

I think that's really the... You don't want to look a gift horse in the mouth and say, "No, don't give us your money." But we do want to say, where's the accountability? Where's the decision making as a society? Where's all of us deciding together what we want rather than a small group of people, who may or may not have good motives and later will... Just, they aren't accountable? I think that's my issue. It's not the criticism of their giving money, I think it's great if they give money, and I think they should give more, especially when it's a small, small percentage of their wealth, they should give more.

Kara:

But, we don't have any way to have any accountability as a people. This is what our government should be doing. That's my issue with it.

Dave:

Got it. I would love to see more innovation from the government. We can all sit back and be armchair quarterbacks on this stuff, but you have the unique position of having talked to, and covered a lot of these people for 30 years. They were different people 30 years ago and they were not the big deals they are now. You have these multi-decades of experience.

Dave:

I have some of that not... I'm not a tech journalist like you are, but I've also had a chance to look at the differences in what happens when governments try to solve problems, including COVID, nice job guys, and like space travel. One of the things that absolutely changed my whole perspective on tech and on everything was I went with Peter Diamandis in a group of people to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Ansari X Prize. This is the thing that created private space travel.

Dave:

I got to go... I went to JPL and I looked at the government's, here's what we're going to do for going to space, and here's how we test it. It's incredibly rigorous. As an engineer, it's like going to Mecca. The problem is they're using chips. These are radiation hardened chips and they cost \$10,000 a piece and they've been tested forever. Then you go next door to where... You go to SpaceX or any of the startup, people doing this. They say, "Well, the radiation hardened chips, they're one 10 millionth as powerful as the chips we're using. We actually just put five Android phones together on the satellite, because we know one of them will break but we don't care. Our cost was one billionth of whatever the government's was.

Dave:

Governments never do the innovative things. I'm hoping-

Kara:

I'm going to push back. They don't not do the innovative things. Landing on the moon was pretty frigging cool. That's exactly right. The best and the brightest used to go into those areas because that's where the action was, and that's changed. That's one thing, because a lot of it has been taken over the private sector, but you don't want to necessarily... You have to decide as a society what you want to privatize and what you don't. I think everything's gotten privatized. Maybe that's just the trend. But I don't think any of us... Already the private prisons have been better. It just has-

Dave:

That's just a horrifying thing. We need to end those right now.

Kara:

Yes, because they're privatized, because their whole goal and set is to make money. Look, I think they're the worst people on Earth, but the fact of the matter is that they're doing what... A hyena does what a hyena does. For us to pretend that that's not what they're going to do.

Kara:

I agree, there's a lot more innovation, but the idea of public private partnerships is what I'm more interested in, and this idea that public and private can work better together. That's something that seems to me to be a better solution where you apply private, innovative techniques. The idea that you have to make a buck to make your payroll with government which should have loftier goals, Obama was seen as the tech president. I don't think of him that much that way as much as other people do. But one of the speeches he gave right toward the end of his tenure was, as I look back on this, a lot of people in tech think there's a solution for every problem like poverty, and there just isn't a tech solution for it. There's problems of humanity that need to be solved in a different way.

Kara:

It would be really nice to see a much more robust, private public partnership, it seems to me. You get the best of both worlds to do these things. I think that's fallen by the wayside completely, in this love of corporations that's happening right now.

Dave:

How are we going to take our current situation where the government has not innovated the way it used to, tech companies are innovating, but not necessarily around progressing humanity as a species. How are we going to say, okay, we've got six months to solve this pressing societal virus stuff. Who's going to win? How's it going to happen?

Kara:

Well, this is a global effort. Let's remember, this is a global effort, and there's stuff going on all over the world. I think that... I'm always a fan of as many voices as possible in a table. One of the things that... What Eric Schmidt who read Google just gave a speech saying tech is going to emerge more strong than ever from this crisis. I actually wrote a column in the Times saying, "Yes, they will, because all the small companies are going to get washed out-"

Dave:

I read that and it's true, most of the small companies will die, and the big companies will be getting so much money for surveillance.

Kara:

Yes, exactly. Not just surveillance, everything because they'll have the money to survive. They have the cash to stay afloat, essentially, more than afloat, believe me, they have the cash to have a luxury liner, 10 luxury liners themselves. I've always thought the way we get to any solution to anything is a diversity of opinion, a diversity of efforts, a diversity of small companies being on a plane where they can compete with larger companies.

Kara:

I still feel like this idea that we need these big giant tech companies that control everything is a real problem for innovation. The FTC, just before coronavirus, was starting to look into all the small company purchases that big companies did, big tech companies did. I thought that was the smartest thing because these things die in little quiet corners. They're snuffed out. There's a thing called killer acquisitions, which is you buy something to kill it, so it doesn't compete with you. That is against everything that is great about innovation, which is that it comes from somewhere you didn't see.

Kara:

I think you know this as an entrepreneur. Did anyone see what you were doing? Did any of the big companies, the food companies see what you were doing? No. It was innovate.

Dave:

Do you want to hear a story about that really quick?

Kara:

Sure, please.

Dave:

I hired the first employee from Starbucks. She had opened many divisions for them and their early days and she worked with me for a few years. She parked next to Howard Schultz in the very early days of Bulletproof. We had one coffee shop, we hadn't even opened yet. We're still a small fry. He said, "What are you up to?" She said, " Oh, I'm with this startup called Bulletproof and we're putting butter in coffee." He looks at her and he goes, "I hope they paid you up front." It's the classical disruptive innovation [inaudible 00:31:13]

Kara:

When he was one too. He was disruptive.

Dave:

He was a disrupter.

Kara:

That's a surprise for him, because he usually gets that. But I guess he's gotten fat and happy, I guess.

Dave:

Also, it sounded ridiculous at the time that you could do it, and then it would work. That's why people paid attention, because it was too good to be true, except it-

Kara:

First they mock you, right? Then they get scared of you, but I always think that more innovation is out of many, many companies that build to operate, and that's my-

Dave:

That's your... Okay, I'm with you there, you need diversity just in numbers in order to have that stuff happen. Six months, the main solution that wins, do you think it's going to come from the government or from a big donor or somewhere else? How do you call this?

Kara:

I'm banking on Bill Gates.

Dave:

The main solution that wins. How do you call this?

Kara:

I'm banking on Bill Gates honestly, because he's had so much success around malaria around the world, someone like Bill Gates. I think that success is mitigating. There's no success to a virus. The virus is winning, FYI. just so you know, because of all the arguments we're having about it. But it is being flattened by this social distance. There's no question that early... Look at San Francisco and California, they were very early, much criticized, least death rates. Just they did the right things at the right time. They made the hard political choices.

Kara:

Gavin Newsom and London Breed and Eric Garcetti and others. I think that the mitigation until we get the virus, until we get testing where we can know what dangers were, then we can get the economy going again. I think probably the mitigation until the vaccine is the winner in terms of doing that, and then getting to... Obviously, the winning move is the vaccine itself because there's no beating a virus if you don't have a vaccine against it. I would suspect Bill Gates, some of the many research organizations that are working on it all together, there's all kinds of pharma... Again, a lot of the big pharma companies are going to work really hard on this issue. I think that's probably where it's going to-

Dave:

You're betting on a combination of private and donated stuff from Gates or somewhere. Okay.

Kara:

Yeah, I do. I think he's the one I think is smart. Well, I think he's the one that's articulated it best. This idea that we can just get... I think the rush... I get the impulse... I don't like being home, I'm losing money, everybody's losing money. I don't like being in the house all the time. I want to get out and do the things I was doing. But I do understand that if we don't mitigate it in advance, we cause real... Our

twitchy personalities these days, in this world will cause us a lot of undue deaths because we can't just wait for the vaccine, which will be here at some point.

Dave:

As a just a tech numbers guy, I get really irritated when people say, "Let's flatten the curve." Because what really matters is area under the curve. Now, if you're a math geek and you understand calculus and all that stuff, you look at number of people who get sick and go to the hospital and die, ultimately, is the number you want to drop. It's not about our best and brightest goal that we put out there, is we're going to have people get sick less quickly so then the hospitals can handle that better. But it seems to me that all of our resources should go into how do we make it so that people get sick don't have to go to the hospital? Because that's actually lowering the curve instead of flattening it.

Kara:

Yes, that's mitigation. That's figuring out what the best... That does come with time though, knowing what treats people. Look, the AIDS crisis. Think about the AIDS crisis, I wouldn't compare it to the AIDS crisis. Well, everybody's getting this. There was a point in the early AIDS crisis, I don't know how old you were, but it was right when I was a young person. There was a point where it was chaotic to know what was the right treatment, what was good, what worked, what behaviors didn't work? It took a while to sort it out. Then it became just one of these daily digging in terms of a cure, and then they got to a mitigation situation of what worked really well together until they just recently have looked like they have cured people. I think there's two or three people who have been cured now of AIDS, but they got to a point where it was maintenance that people were living their whole lives with AIDS.

Kara:

I think that's the... I think this is going to end... This is a virus, we'll get a vaccine. But I think the idea of we'll figure out this. Does work to have more oxygen, maybe ventilators aren't the best idea, you've seen a lot of those stories. I don't want to go on a ventilator, but someone was telling me early oxygen for example, is the doctors, that seems to be we'll figure out the way to mitigate it. And you're right, that's how you flatten the curve, figuring how it works.

Dave:

The thing that's a little upsetting to me is having interviewed so many doctors and knowing the very high end of functional medicine in written mitochondria books. There are people out there who know what to do, and it's not pharmaceutical, unfortunately. Magnesium and thiamine will reverse pseudohypoxia in most people to the extent that that's a part of the problem, it's already hackable. But we ran into this weird situation where now the government says, that can't work, therefore it doesn't, therefore, you're not allowed to talk about it.

Dave:

Then even jack of all people, Twitter has things where we're not allowing conversations about this unless it comes from basically CDC and WHO, who are tied in with the pharmaceutical side. I already feel like there's a group of 100 people that I know who all know what to do and are doing what to do so that they won't go to the hospital if they get sick, and they're probably Right, but those voices, they're having a hard time if they can do with patients but they're afraid.

Kara:

I think Twitter's got a unique problem because there's a lot of really crazy junk science. There is junk science.

Dave:

Absolutely, there is.

Kara:

They've got to crack down on that.

Dave:

What happens if you kill the good science and the junk science and all that's left is government science?

Kara:

True. I'm not sure that's... I think the people that are getting kicked off are primarily people who are trying to make a quick buck off of people's fear. I think that is with really bad, take a garlic bath, maybe garlic works in your case. You know what I mean? I think they're targeting very serious, fraudulent things. You're not going to hit every perfect thing, but I do like the impulse to make sure that people get good information about things.

Kara:

As stupid as it is, hand washing, look, that makes... If you talk to any doctor, they're like, hand washing will solve almost so many problems in terms of that's gotten out well, but you have to... I agree with you, I don't think there's any lack of place for people to discuss these things. If their goal is to get rid of stuff that actually really hurts people. I think interestingly, there's debate around hydroxychloroquine is interesting and should be talked about. I think the problem is that when you have something like the president saying, "It's some game changer, it's a magical thing." Without any proof, that's where it gets dangerous, because they've taken it... Not that hey, here's a promising thing, let's discuss it.

Kara:

Now, in the past two days, I've seen dozens of studies have stopped because of problems with it. Like, people are getting very sick from it. I think it's how we conduct the conversation about promising things. Whether it's that or magnesium, I don't know what else you're talking about. But I think if we talk about them in the correct way, try this, do this, this is the repercussions, that's fine. I think it's more the fraudulent stuff that has to stop.

Dave:

The miracle cure stuff it has to stop. I have seen a good amount of people saying look, these are things that are likely reduce risk, but not cure it. Those conversations-

Kara:

Mitigation.

Dave:

They're getting thrown out a lot of the mitigation stuff. Well, because nutrients, even if there's studies behind them, they're not considered to be real science by people who decide what's fake and real.

We're running into that in a new way from the tech industry, where they're all saying, we don't want to be accused of spreading false information, because look what happened to Facebook. Therefore, we're going to overreact and we're only going to put the official thing and even on WhatsApp, that's where the most good information is now, because it isn't censored yet.

Kara:

Yeah. Well, one of the things... Look what happened to Facebook, Facebook really went out of its way to screw everybody, by being so irresponsible. Come on, they were no victims here. Look, they got stopped and they were really sloppy. I think the issue is the balance between being responsible as they're calling it, it's not a platform and they're not a publisher, they're a platisher, which is a crazy word. But they do have some responsibility what's on there.

Kara:

You wouldn't argue, don't put up child pornography. Let's get it off. Everyone agrees with that, the child pornographers. There's base level things we have to agree on, which is, I just did a column in the New York Times about Fox News putting out all this info... Go out to restaurants. My mom kept going out to restaurants. It took me forever to stop her from doing it.

Kara:

Now, I didn't call for them to stop broadcasting them, I just said, "Look what they're doing." That's the only thing I'm talking about is pointing out, possibly bad information is fine. That's not censoring, and it's saying that's bad information.

Dave:

You talked about human downgrading. Where did you hear about that, and what does it mean-

Kara:

Tristan Harris, that's an expression by Tristan Harris. He heads the Center for Human... I can't remember what it's called. Anyway, he used to be a Google engineer and he sold the company Google and then got obsessed with the idea of how they're trying to addict us to the screens. Then it moved on from there into a larger way to look at it, which is a systemic... It's all linked together whether it's misinformation, twitchiness, addiction, hate speech. It's all part of the same continuum. He calls it human downgrading.

Kara:

It's the concept that as we upgrade our computers, we're downgrading our human experience. What he wanted to do, what he is wanted to do is link them together rather than these discrete like let's talk about addiction, let's talk about... It's all linked in one way, so he calls it human downgrading. While we're upgrading our technology, we're downgrading our souls really and our health and our ability to have agency, I think is what he's talking about.

Dave:

Do you think that this is mostly inevitable? Or if you don't, how quickly can we turn that around?

Kara:

I think it's architected that way. It's architected... A lot of these social media platforms are architected for speed, virility... Think about a word that tech uses a lot, virility, right? There's two words that tech uses that fascinate me. One is virility, which is not a good word. Now, it's not so much a good word. But they think, oh, it's viral, maybe not so much viral.

Kara:

The second one is users. The only other time you use the word users is when it comes to drug users. That's how they think of their constituents, essentially, which is interesting. I like word choice, I think it's interesting. I do think that there's a question of how it's architected and whether we architect it to create a twitchy thing. How much addiction is involved? I do think over the years, there's going to be how much these tech companies knew about how addictive these things were and how they built them, to push that red button. Did they do it the way cigarette... A lot of people are comparing the cigarette companies and the way they architect it.

Kara:

There's something about screens that are very... I have a new baby, and she's just like the minute she saw it, there's something about it that it's architected, that is... It's like sugar. There's something about it that draws you to it. It's the same kind of feeling. That's-

Dave:

You just reminded me about that addiction thing. I worked with an exec at a startup that I co-founded, who was from EA and we had these discussions about, we have addiction built in, we have all the sociologists and anthropologists and we've actually studied what makes it addictive. This was actually to become a health tracker thing that was addictive. But after that company got sold, he went off to be a senior exec at Pax, the vape device for cannabis.

Dave:

When you call that I was like, "Oh my God, he really did go from the addiction of video games to the addiction of cannabis. Yes, some people will say it's not addictive, well, it is for some people isn't for other people, that's a different discussion.

Kara:

Come on, the vast group of... It's a really interesting question is, by the way, they have sociologists and psychologists. Why do they need them there? Because they want to make sure you push that red button or buy that thing or look at this way, look over here. Why are they studying your eye movements, for precisely what? You have to... Is it to make it a better product or is it to use it longer? They just have to be more transparent about what they're actually doing.

Kara:

I think someday, there will be quite a lot of material about what they knew, and they knew what about the addictive qualities of it, I suspect.

Dave:

There totally will be. You mentioned also that you're home with a new baby and you're in quarantine with your girlfriend, Amanda, your new baby, two sons.

Kara:

One son. My other son's in quarantine with his girlfriend up in Maine. He was visiting her and then he just... He's having the best part-

Dave:

I was just going to say, that he's the happiest guy ever.

Kara:

He's 17.

Dave:

Oh, man.

Kara:

I know, no school and with his girlfriend.

Dave:

Sometimes you hit the jackpot.

Kara:

I guess.

Dave:

As a 30 year tech journalists, you have all the tools, you can call anyone you need to. How are you handling tech and family life during the quarantine? What are your tricks? What are you doing?

Kara:

I'm the original social distancer. I have been working at home for 20 years. I hate the office. I never went in the office. I don't have a car. I wrote a column in the Times about how I don't have car. I just gave up all cars and stuff like that because I walk a lot and use bicycles and things like that. I don't have as big of an adjustment as other people because I've been working from home for years.

Kara:

I think doing podcasting, as you know, you do it from there, all the time. Is that where you do it all-

Dave:

Almost always. If I'm on the road-

Kara:

Not me, I like in-person interviews.

Dave:

I prefer in-person. It's just, I live on an island.

Kara:

Right. Well, that's a problem. Anyway, I was doing in person interviews. I actually found it's actually great. I've had a great series of interviews that are doing very well, just on these remote things. I think they're quite good. We're using Skype, and others things. I use something called Squad... Whatever, there's tons-

Dave:

SquadCast. I tried SquadCast, but the video wasn't so good.

Kara:

Well, you're doing video, we aren't. The sound is good. It's been okay, the issue is of course my ninth grader who has to do online stuff, which is probably... It's not great. I have to say it's not a very good experience for teens to do that and not have anything. There's that. The baby could care less. The baby loves it. The positive part is I get to see... I probably would have been working when she laughed for the first time, but I was here. I was taking care of her when she laughed for the first time.

Kara:

There's been some positives. I don't want to say... You hate to say something's positive, but the time we would have not had together we already had a babysitter, which I love our babysitter and stuff like that. But we have to share childcare now between the families. That's been a little bit tiring, you know what I mean to do work and also... Not to say you shouldn't raise your children, but most people work and have babysitter's or have daycare or something like that. That's been what many people do.

Kara:

That's been hard. I think not being able to travel... I travel a lot. I like traveling, and that's weird not being... I just thought I want to get on a plane right now. I want to not have room for my suitcase and yell about it.

Dave:

I feel weird because... When you travel a lot, you have a suitcase. It's always packed and you have all your stuff. I disinfected it with ozone, after my last trip coming home, and it's just been sitting... It helps solve medical, ozone generator. But it's just sitting there. Where do I put this thing because it always is in the closet right where I grab it, where it's present. Do I put it in the garage? Because it's so... People don't travel, I wouldn't understand it-

Kara:

You'll be traveling soon enough. Restaurants, I love restaurants, I do. I go to a lot of restaurants. I was watching a movie... I like watching a lot of movies, so is everybody, Unorthodox, which is great on Netflix, and they were all in Berlin. I love Berlin, it's one of my favorite cities. There was a scene where she's in the park and it's a Sunday and everyone's hanging in the park.

Kara:

The thing I said when I was watching it, I was like, "They're way too close together. Why are they so close together?" I literally was like, "What is wrong... Every time I see a movie now, where people are

close together in a normal fashion, I'm like, "You need to separate. You need to get six feet." That's been weird. I can't wait till I forget that.

Dave:

It's funny because the Germans have one of the largest social distancing things culturally anyway.

Kara:

They do. Yes, they do.

Dave:

You like Berlin a lot. Do you see the whole world having this incredible, more German like... It's all have five feet around us.

Kara:

Are you kidding? Everyone's going to get all sloppy again. Everyone's going to start touching [inaudible 00:48:48] and stuff like that.

Dave:

I laugh like nothing will ever be the same again. Do you guys think this is the first pandemic in society? No, there's been pandemics every 20 years forever, and none of those succeeded in getting people to not hug.

Kara:

This is a big one. I think people will forget it completely. There'll be jokes initially when everyone starts hugging. Like, oh, that kind of thing. Humanity has an incredible ability to have no memory whatsoever, in good ways and bad ways, often bad ways but in good ways too.

Dave:

I'm with you there, and in this one I think it's actually going to be a very good thing to restore hugging and even handshakes and things like that because something else transfers besides the bad stuff, the good stuff also transfers.

Kara:

You can have your family. You can hug your family, still while you're in quarantine [inaudible 00:49:36]

Dave:

It's not bad where I am because I'm on a farm. What does that matter?

Kara:

We had Esther Perel come on and talk with Scott Galloway on our Pivot Show. She was talking about that. The important part of that connection really creates a lot of mental health issues. The ability to physically not connect is problematic.

Dave:

It really is. She's a friend I really appreciate her a lot, and she's been on the show as well. It's one of those things where I think there's going to be sociological and anxiety and just all sorts of mental problems from lack of human contact over the next year. I think tech may try to solve that problem in some ham handed way that is not going to go well.

Kara:

Remember Haptic?

Dave:

Yes. The vibrating gloves. They're going to solve the problem.

Kara:

Whatever, I have them on stage at a lot of our events and I'm always like, this sucks. They're like, look, I'm like no, try again. Go back. Call me in 10 years. They'll get it right.

Dave:

What's your take on the trend towards having robotic lovers coming out of Japan?

Kara:

If people want them, I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm good. I feel like we have to discuss robot rights at some point, but, if we give them sentient feelings. I'm from San Francisco, you could do whatever you want. You can marry a goat, go ahead.

Dave:

I'm 100% with you on-

Kara:

Actually, you can't marry a goat. It's not nice-

Dave:

If the goat might not like it, I was going to say.

Kara:

No, you can't use that.

Dave:

It has to be a platonic marriage.

Kara:

I don't know, it's sad, a little bit, I find it sad. But at the same time, I'd rather people have sex with human beings.

Dave:

It seems healthier. In terms of uses of tech, I'm with you. I'm like, well, if people really want to do it, okay, and maybe it's therapeutic or something. It's also sad, but it has its own place, and I wouldn't ban it.

Kara:

It's interesting, because I was at MIT many years ago, and they were talking about... It's more interesting when it comes to healthcare, people are home bound and things like that, I think is helpful in a lot of ways, especially as companionship. One of the things that was interesting, one of the researchers there was telling me that the issue they have is something... When you get sick, there's about 10 things that most people have that they can quickly solve, so you don't have to wait in a waiting room and this and that.

Kara:

I said, "What's your biggest problem?" She's like, "Oh, it's all solvable, it's all pretty easy through robotics." I said, "What's your biggest problem?" She said, "The eyes. You can't replicate the eyes of a human being looking at another human being." She goes, "We tried and we're going to get it right, but the eyes, people are always on to the eyes." It makes them uncomfortable having a robotic experience with a robot.

Kara:

I thought that was... Then my suggestion is stop making them human, why don't we just treat robots like they're robots? Don't try to humanize them. The concept of the ability to meet eye to eye is really important.

Dave:

I'm with you, and you say that wearing sunglasses and the true-

Kara:

I always do. I have really bad eyes. There's my eyes. I'm trying to avoid intimacy with you, Dave.

Dave:

There we go. We met eye to eye. I feel like we kept social distancing, even over Skype.

Kara:

I told you, I'm the original... I don't want to have intimacy with you, if you don't mind. Thank you. Or anybody, really.

Dave:

Kara, it's been an honor to have you on Bulletproof Radio.

Kara:

Thank you.

Dave:

Thanks for all of your-

Kara:

I'm wearing the ring you suggested.

Dave:

You did, you picked it up since our episode.

Kara:

What do you have? Why did I pick up my [inaudible 00:53:01]

Dave:

I have an Oura as well, but mine, I scratched it because I-

Kara:

[inaudible 00:53:06] Okay.

Dave:

What I did is I took a fingernail polisher.

Kara:

You did? I have to figure it out. I get all this data now I just don't know what it means. I'm doing a column about it because you gave me inspiration because they're doing a test with UCSF.

Dave:

Yes, for body temperature. Correct.

Kara:

It's really interesting. I thought it'd be... Because I used to call a lot of these things unwearables because they had pointless... Telling me I do 10,000 steps-

Dave:

Those are horrible.

Kara:

I agree. I was like, tell me, Kara, you ate that chocolate chip cookie, and this is what it did your body and go eat this in response to it. I want it to be more actionable. This is an interesting thing where this has better privacy implications, could be helpful, isn't big enough? It's got me very interested.

Dave:

Having been CTO and co-founder of the first people to get heart rate from the risk company. We sold them for 100 million to intel on this basis. This ring is better than anything... I could never wear any tracker. This is the one from my perspective. I love it.

Kara:

It still has to be smaller for women, I have to tell you, because I know you have the tracking in it, you need it.

Dave:

It will get smaller.

Kara:

I know that, I get that, but I do think it's the most... One thing I haven't taken off yet, which is interesting, and I take them all off. I'm going to write a whole column about this idea of wearables. Again, I call them unwearables, and they're also useless.

Dave:

100%. The only reason I ever went into that space is, I was oh, we can get stress levels. There's only four things that matter. One is temperature, and you don't care about that, except if you're getting sick, it'll tell you. The other one is heart rate variability. It tells you how stressed Are you that you don't know about and that's useful. Because if wow, I'm super stressed, I don't know why, something's going on. Maybe it's biological.

Dave:

Then the other one is, did I have a lot of dreams and did I get a lot of restorative sleep? Because you can't tell without the data? This is the thing I've worn for the longest of anything and I have a drawer full of crap. Unwearables is a great name for it, and I love that you call BS when you see BS. I just noticed you're wearing that. So, cool.

Kara:

Anyway, thank you so much.

Dave:

You're welcome. We're going to go on Instagram Live, and I'd like to remind people before we do that, you can check out... There's two podcasts that you run that are really good, where you go deep and you actually talk to the really big names in tech. There's Recode Decode.

Kara:

That's an interview show. It's an hour, it's a full hour. We don't want to be twitchy. We're like substantive ideas deserve substantive conversation, which you're coming on, yours is airing very soon.

Dave:

Actually, it hasn't even aired yet. Cool. Then the other one is-

Kara:

Pivot, which should we talk about topical. It's very news of the day. Today we talked about Zoom. We talked about Jack Dorsey's donation of 28% of his thing. We talk about topics, then we analyze it. We

tend to be pretty predictive on how things are going to go, in both business and tech. We're quite predictive. We're smart analysts on what's going to happen.

Dave:

You have a track record for decades of studying this and being pretty darn accurate. That's why I've posted wherever you've put all of this.

Kara:

Well, it's because we do something called reporting.

Dave:

I've heard it.

Kara:

Yeah, and it's crazy. It's old fashioned, but I tend... If you ask questions, you tend to get answers. That's my policy.

Dave:

We'll keep doing reporting, Kara, and I will see you on my Instagram channel. We're going to do a shared Instagram right now.

**Catch Dave's Instagram Live with Kara Swisher at [https://youtu.be/g2PNA\\_u1vTQ](https://youtu.be/g2PNA_u1vTQ).**