

Issue 008

# WHEN SPARKS SPEAK

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**WHEN  
SPARKS  
SPEAK**



—● Ghali

● Asma



#### Letter from Elise:

Asma Ghali followed an unconventional path, reminding us, once again, just like Dr. Stefania Pecore in the past, that there is not a singular way to get into the Tech world. Innovation thrives off new perspectives and fresh ideas. Asma brings all of that in this article while making her technical expertise accessible even for a more beginner audience.

Through mentoring, Asma also shares how to navigate the workplace. Professional life, and especially the Tech world, is ruled by untold conventions. Yet very few people show the way, and these “corporate secrets” can sometimes hinder your path to your dream career.

Moreover, today’s guest decided to help shape a more inclusive environment in the Tech industry by volunteering as a member and later a treasurer at Digiwomen. From management to pure technical skills, she reminds us that our legacy also rests in the world we will leave to the younger generation and invites us to make it one of mentoring, kindness and inclusivity.



**Elise**

#### Letter from Michael:

Every story we publish reminds us that careers in technology are rarely built in straight lines. More often, they are shaped by curiosity, resilience, difficult decisions, and the courage to step into spaces where change is needed.

In this issue, we are proud to feature Asma Ghali, whose journey reflects what When Sparks Speak stands for: the belief that technology is not only about systems, code, and innovation, but about people willing to challenge expectations and build new possibilities for others.

Asma’s story reminds us that leadership is not simply about technical expertise. It is about vision, integrity, and the willingness to create opportunities where barriers once existed.

We hope this conversation inspires you to trust your own path, remain curious, and recognize that every step forward has the power to spark change far beyond yourself.



**Michael**



## ASMA

I like to introduce myself as a Muslim woman of mixed race with a growth mindset, entrepreneur, change maker and currently a senior director at Alithya managing the Microsoft Azure and Data practice.

## Entering Tech

**Your path started with a background in literature and business. How did you end up in Tech?**

This question is one I get often and one of the reasons why I encourage people, in particular women, to take a bet on themselves and do it! When I graduated with my Masters, I applied to all sorts of director and “conseiller pédagogique” roles because it’s my field. I had sent at least 200 CVs. I had 0 interviews. And so I decided to find a job to maintain my immigration status where I ended up working in banking. It was there where I discovered that there is a whole universe of “technology”.

I managed at the time the implementation of “Loan IQ”; a tool for financial folks and I discovered the IT team at the bank, project management and PMP. And, my whole career shifted! I went from being the financial advisor to the functional analyst to the project manager to the technical consultant at IBM and building data centers until the beginning of Cloud and continued growing within the IT infrastructure. I grew fond of cables, servers, networks and virtualization, and managing IT.

## How did you manage to start as a Software Developer with a degree in English Language and Literature? What would be your advice to people thinking of following the same path?

I studied Science during secondary and equivalent of Cegep. During that time, I used to code in my computer science courses. I did learn Python, C++ , HTML & Cobol (pretty much as old as ever in terms of programming language).

Thanks to that background, I used to create Websites. I worked in WordPress and coded LLMs. My English degree was a path to better understand programming and translating business needs into technology.

If I have one piece of advice to share it is to follow your inner voice. Dare to be curious and take actions, one at a time. The journey is more important than the outcome.

***“If I have one piece of advice to share it is to follow your inner voice. Dare to be curious and take actions, one at a time. The journey is more important than the outcome.”***

## Did you have mentors?

I wish I had, especially when I started my career. I reached out to many people who inspired me on LinkedIn. Later on, I had mentors when I worked at IBM and it was a great thing. I believe in the concept of “sharing without judgment” and that’s why I offer mentoring to youth.

## What was one of the hardest skills to learn in tech?

I don’t think things are inherently ‘hard’; rather, it’s about what isn’t naturally a part of who we are, and each of us is different. Personally, while I learned to code and did it, I found it hard—or should I say complicated (prior to AI)... Once you made an error, it used to take forever to figure it out. Now things are different!

# IT and Cloud Computing

**You work specifically with Microsoft Azure. Could you explain what it is for people who are unfamiliar with it? What are its advantages compared to other platforms like AWS or GCP?**

Beyond Azure, I am inspired by Microsoft's mission which is to empower each individual and organization to achieve more. I am also on a mission to empower each woman to find her own power and to create a better future and so, the fit was natural. Microsoft Azure is the foundation. Imagine you want to build a Lego city.

The Old Way: You have to buy every brick upfront, find a room to store them, and hire a guard to watch them. If you run out of bricks, your project stops. If you have too many, they just sit there gathering dust.

The Azure Way: Microsoft owns a giant, infinite bucket of Legos. You simply "rent" the specific pieces you need, exactly when you need them.

If you want to build a skyscraper on Monday, you grab 1,000 bricks. If you decide to take it down on Tuesday, you put them back and stop paying for them. Azure is that infinite bucket of tools that grows or shrinks with your imagination. The same applies to GCP and AWS in terms of functionality but the payment, impact, elasticity, and reach change. I explored all clouds and I find that of Microsoft more secure and AI-scalable, which is why I choose to work with it.



## Could you share what a day as a strategic IT leader is like?

In a word: never a dull moment! To go into detail, it starts with a few meetings to map out the week, followed by working on service offerings, meeting with clients, and organizing the team's workflow. A strategic leader also focuses on preparing and executing long-term strategy, managing the sales pipeline, researching, and fostering collaboration across other divisions. On top of that, I handle maintaining relationships with Microsoft partners, hosting webinars, and overseeing finance.

## What has been one of the most challenging technical problems you have had to solve?

The most challenging work I've done was as an incident manager on call. It's a role where you work around the clock (24/7) once everyone else is offline, ensuring critical issues are resolved when systems go down before the start of a new day. We also have to ensure financial transactions continue running accurately despite downtime. It's definitely not a one-man job; rather, it requires a whole team collaborating in what we call 'war rooms.'



## What hindered you the most in the transition from a technical role to a role with management responsibilities?

In my career, I've come to a vital realization: the higher you climb in an organization, the less your impact depends on your 'technical prowess' and the more it relies on the art of diplomacy. However, as my own role has shifted from managing stacks to managing systems of people, I've had to build a new kind of architecture. While I pride myself on having mastered 'managing down'—building high-performing teams rooted in psychological safety—I've recognized that the executive level requires a different muscle: the art of managing up. This transition requires shifting from technical spontaneity to strategic intentionality. It's not about losing my authentic self; it's about developing the discernment to know when to speak and when to observe.

## Could you break down what expressions, such as "Restructuring the infrastructure team into DevOps" or "Increased security and strategically planned data lakes and data structures moving to Microsoft Fabric," are in simpler terms for non-technical readers and how they are relevant to your expertise?

I like to use the analogy of Legos and houses when talking about IT. I will use an example to explain what those terms mean in simpler words. For example, restructuring a team in a DevOps mode means that you take a house made with bricks and decide to build a harmonious structure with brick and stone so it blends and looks better.

# Entrepreneurship and Public Speaking

## You have built your own cybersecurity startup. Where did the idea come from?

It came from my work in the financial industry. A lot of our clients deal with sensitive data and most of them don't have time to test how secure their products are, or if they do, the testing doesn't account for all potential threats." And, so my product was around risk management. The goal was to have a fast, scalable solution to test and surface threats before launch.

The product's IP was proven to be successful and is currently used in financial institutions. It came to a point where it's no longer a product and it needed to scale; hence why I sold my stake to my partner. Scaling and running a 5M\$+ business

was not a dream of mine. I am on a mission to coach, mentor and open opportunities to diversity in STEM in leadership positions. I am on a mission to transform the way we do business.

## Would you recommend the experience, and would you do it again?

Regret is almost always more expensive than failure. While the world offers a constant stream of unsolicited 'shoulds' and 'should-nots' the most successful people I know treat their intuition as a primary data point. Don't just chase a dream; test it. There is far more institutional knowledge gained in a single 'failed' attempt than in a lifetime of cautious observation.



# ***“Success isn’t just about building a business; it’s about building a life and a system that reflects your integrity.”***



## **Why have you left that project? If an entrepreneur is reading this, what are the three main factors they should consider in this decision?**

Growth is never a straight line, and in leadership, knowing when to pivot is just as critical as knowing when to persist. My decision to exit my venture wasn't a withdrawal; it was a high-level calibration. I chose to align my professional output with my primary vocation: dismantling the 'invisible' barriers to diversity in corporate leadership.

Entrepreneurship demands a profound sacrifice of time and ego, but the 'hustle' should never come at the expense of one's core values. For me, work-life integration isn't a perk-it's a performance requirement. As I reflect on this chapter, three non-negotiables emerged for anyone building a scalable legacy:

1 - The 'why' is the Glue: Choosing the right partner is secondary to choosing a shared mission. If the 'why' isn't identical, the 'how' will eventually fracture the foundation.

2 - Differentiation is Your Currency: A strong client base is a byproduct of a clear, unapologetic differentiator. If you cannot articulate why you are the only solution to a problem, you are merely a commodity.

3 - Culture is the Operating System: Marketing gets you noticed, but culture gets you paid. A work culture isn't a mission statement on a wall; it is the lived experience of every decision and action. It is the literal foundation of how you generate value and, ultimately, how you scale.

Success isn't just about building a business; it's about building a life and a system that reflects your integrity. Sometimes, that means handing over the keys so you can open a much larger door.

# You have been a lecturer and panellist on multiple occasions...

## How do the two exercises differ?

I find both are the same in the sense that I'm sharing information on a given topic. That being said, a lecture is in a formal setting where there's a structure whereas a panel is an exchange between people and is sharing information in a less formal way.

## Do you ever get stage fright?

That pre-performance rush of adrenaline is a natural response, but it doesn't have to be a barrier. I've found that the most effective way to dismantle stage fright is to psychologically 'shrink' the room. Instead of addressing an anonymous crowd, I speak to a single, trusted person in my mind. This shift transforms a high-stakes stage into a familiar conversation, allowing for the kind of authentic sharing that a formal 'presentation' often stifles. Connection always outperforms perfection.

## Has your work as an interpreter helped you to express yourself clearly and concisely?

Public speaking is often misunderstood as performance, but I view it through the lens of live interpretation. My background in that field taught me that my primary duty is to protect the

integrity of the message. To do that effectively, you have to be obsessed with the 'why' and the 'how' - researching and documenting until the complexity becomes clear. That commitment to accuracy is what transforms a simple speech into a strategic dialogue.

## How does one become a lecturer, an interpreter, or a public speaker? Do you apply or are you called to join?

My trajectory has been defined by a relentless pursuit of clarity in high-stakes environments. It began with the UNDP, where a rigorous selection process and intensive training integrated me into a global pool of interpreters. That experience was my foundational masterclass in cognitive agility—learning to distill and deliver complex truths in real-time.

Today, that same discipline informs my work as a speaker and educator. Whether I am delivering a TEDx talk or guest lecturing at the university level, my goal is to bridge the gap between technical expertise and human understanding. My Master's in Education wasn't just a degree; it was a strategic investment in the pedagogy of leadership, allowing me to certify the next generation of professionals in my field. I don't just share information; I architect the frameworks that allow others to master it.

# Digiwomen and Diversity

## **How did you make the decision to move to Canada to continue studying?**

I often say that Canada chose me, but the truth is that I chose to redefine the boundaries of my own potential. Arriving during the Arab Spring—a time of profound systemic instability—wasn't just a move for survival; it was a strategic pivot toward a future I had to build from scratch. Coming from a modest background in Tunisia, I carried a singular conviction: that our origins should never act as a ceiling.

My drive was fueled by a responsibility to my family and a desire to be the living proof that systemic barriers can be dismantled through sheer intellectual rigor and unyielding values. I didn't just come here for a better life; I came here to build a blueprint for what is possible when we take full ownership of our narrative.

## **You won an Excellence scholarship for the originality of your research. What was your research about?**

There is a profound sense of peace that comes when you realize you are being judged solely on the caliber of your work. It confirmed a truth I've lived: that performance is the ultimate equalizer. During my research, I noticed a massive gap in how we approach gender diversity in technical fields. The world was focused on the 'arrival', but I became obsessed with the 'stay'.

We often celebrate the 1% or 2% of women entering these fields, but we rarely interrogate why they leave. I shifted the lens toward retention: What actually makes a woman stay in a culture that wasn't built for her? If we don't solve for the lived experience after the hire, we aren't building a workforce; we're managing a revolving door. True leadership isn't just about opening the door; it's about architecting an environment where staying is a strategic choice, not a daily battle.

## **How is it related to your investment in women in the Tech field?**

This isn't just my career; it's my vocation. I've taken my research and transformed it into a foundational pillar for navigating the complexities of STEM. By utilizing qualitative insights, I've been able to architect a roadmap that doesn't just guide my own journey, but actively secures the path for other women in the field. We are moving beyond the 'what' of diversity and into the 'how' of long-term sustainability. For me, success is measured by the strength of the systems we build to ensure no talent is sidelined by a lack of a playbook.



***“In leadership, alignment is the only sustainable currency. My commitment to Digiwomen wasn’t just a professional choice; it was a values-based convergence.”***

### **What got you interested in joining Digiwomen?**

In leadership, alignment is the only sustainable currency. My commitment to Digiwomen wasn’t just a professional choice; it was a values-based convergence. In Elsa and Michelle, I found leaders who truly ‘walk the talk’—a rarity in an industry often satisfied with optics over action.

While I was initially approached as an ambassador, I quickly realized that a movement of this ambition required more than a ‘face’ - it required a foundation. I chose to lean in with my expertise in financial strategy and executive coaching to scale our impact. We are architecting a new voice for women in tech—one that isn’t afraid to speak the blunt truth about what isn’t working. This is about more than programming;

it’s about building a legacy of inclusive technology so that the next generation, including my own daughter, inherits a system designed for their success, not just their presence. This is an invitation to move past the 1% statistics and start building an infrastructure where women don’t just enter the room—they own the conversation.

### **What is your role as a treasurer?**

In the corporate world, we often say that strategy without a budget is just a hallucination. As the Treasurer for Digiwomen, my role is to ensure our mission—to be the new, vocal force for women in tech—is backed by a resilient and transparent financial infrastructure. I don’t just manage a ledger; I architect the fiscal runway that allows our vision to scale.

# Work on the Board

## Here is how I define my mandate on the Board:

### 1. Fiduciary Integrity as a Foundation

My word is my sword, and in a nonprofit environment, trust is the primary currency. I serve as the Guardian of Integrity, ensuring that every dollar invested by our partners and donors is managed with total transparency and ethical rigor. By establishing high-level governance and risk mitigation protocols, I ensure Digiwomen is a high-trust institution that the corporate world and government bodies can partner with confidently.

### 2. Strategic Resource Mobilization

Because I navigate the executive landscape daily, I don't see fundraising as 'asking for help' I see it as Investment Strategy. I translate our social impact into the language of ROI for our corporate partners. My role is to help organizations understand that supporting Digiwomen isn't just 'charity'—it is a strategic investment in the future of the Canadian tech ecosystem and a direct solution to the talent retention crisis I've studied throughout my career.

### 3. Engineering the 'Always'.

While the President and Managing Director focus on the 'why' and the 'How', the Treasurer ensures the 'always'. I am responsible for building a self-sustaining financial model that moves us beyond month-to-month survival and into Legacy Mode. We are building this for the long haul—to ensure that the support systems we create today are still there for the next generation of leaders, including my own daughter.

### 4. The Financial Support

I view the treasury as a form of Financial Coaching. I provide the Board with the clarity and data-driven insights they need to make bold, disruptive decisions.

## A Few Last Words

**What is a book, movie or podcast you would recommend our readers? Why?**

So many! I love reading! That being said, two books that helped shape my leadership style are “Daring to Lead” by Brene Brown and “The First 90 Days” by Michael D. Watkins.

**What is a quote that resonated with you recently?**

“Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind. Feeding people half-truths or vague feedback to make them feel better (which is actually about making ourselves feel comfortable) is unkind.” Brene Brown. It’s a quote I live by with my team despite how hard or unclear it gets.

**Who would you like to see interviewed next in our magazine?**

Kathy Malas; she has an inspiring story about her work evolution in STEM.

***“My word is my sword, and in a nonprofit environment, trust is the primary currency.”***

# A Note to Our Readers

Thank you for spending time with this issue.

When Sparks Speak was created to highlight the voices, experiences, and ideas of women working across the technology landscape. Our mission is simple: to create a space where stories of innovation, leadership, and perseverance can be shared with a global audience.

If you enjoy this publication, there are a few ways you can support it:

- Share the magazine with colleagues, friends, and students
- Connect with the women featured in these pages and follow their work
- Reach out if you would like to nominate someone for a future issue

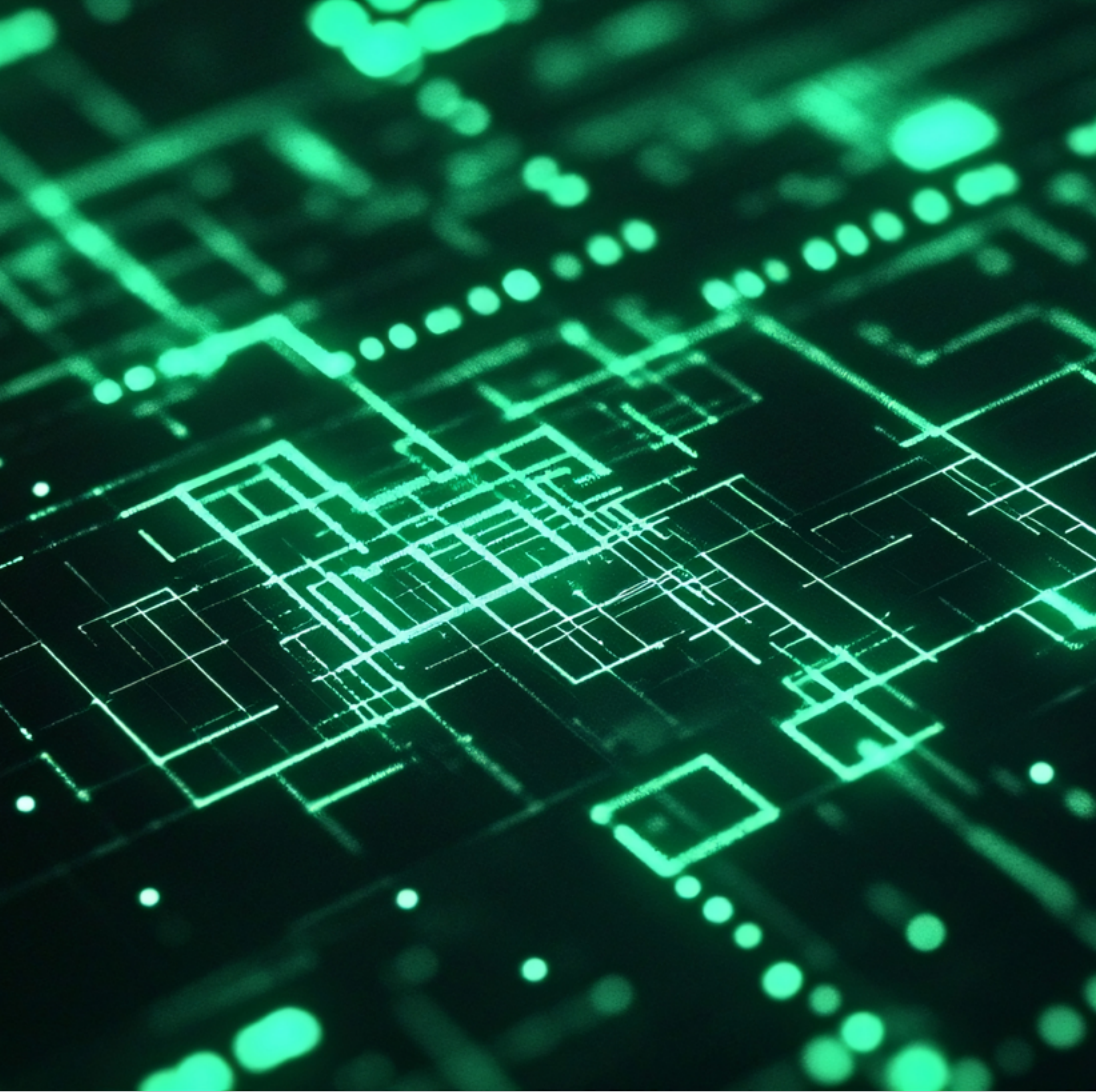
We believe that visibility matters. Every story shared here helps expand the conversation about who builds technology and how the future of the industry is shaped.

If you would like to collaborate, be featured in a future issue, or contribute to the publication, we would love to hear from you.

Thank you for reading, and for supporting the voices that spark new ideas.

— When Sparks Speak





# Contact Us

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