



## Niina Haas

In this videocast, **Niina Haas** discusses how her interest in other people has shaped her career and led her to become the President of healthcare technology company BrightOutcome Inc. She also shares her advice for students hoping to pursue a career in STEM.

### Break the videocast down:

**00:00** Hello everyone, and welcome to this futurum careers videocast. My name is Joe, and today I'm joined by Niina Haas, who is the president of BrightOutcome Inc. BrightOutcome develops patient-centred healthcare applications which are designed to enhance the lives of patients and improve their health. One of Niina's latest projects has seen her work with Dr Paula Gardiner from the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School and the Center for Mindfulness and Compassion at Cambridge Health Alliance, and they've been developing the GEMINI platform, which guides patients with chronic pain through a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programme.

So, hello Niina. Thank you for joining me on this Futurum careers videocast. How are you?

Good, good thanks.

**00:35:** Thank you for being here. Why don't you start off by giving us a little background about yourself and about how your career has led you to become the president of BrightOutcome, from school through to where we are now.

Okay, well, let's see. I would say it started probably when I was five. I mean, that's really early, but I knew I had a real interest in people and wanted to know more, basically. I studied anthropology through college, and I did that for my undergraduate, and then I got a graduate degree in social and cultural anthropology with an emphasis on applied anthropology, which is applying the tools of anthropological inquiry to real world problems. So, it's trying to make the world better, and it gave [me] a frame to really explore and understand how to do that.

I was also really interested in computers and computer methods like computer modelling and agent-based modelling, so I focused a lot on that as well, which kind of helped, because now I'm with technology company! But I started to see, you know... When I was going to school, that's really when everything started to expand for the internet. So, people started to realise, "Oh, maybe technology can help with communication, and it could help with keeping track of different symptoms, or doing this or that to solve some problems." And it was just a really natural fit.

I moved into the work with BrightOutcome through working at the university [of Arizona]. So, before [working with BrightOutcome] I was an anthropologist at the university here, and I was doing anthropology; what I love, I got to do what I love! And I was working on problems with Indigenous governance and urban poverty, climate change, and then I was

working with the Cancer Center on some projects, and BrightOutcome had a study there. And it just kind of started from there; I started working on one of their projects, and it was a really good fit. And ended up fitting better than staying at the university.

**03:22:** Nice. And could you give us an idea of your day-to-day job role as a president of a company like bright outcome? What kind of things are you getting up to during the day?

Honestly, you know, it's not one thing. I spend a lot of time reading. I read literature a lot. I read news releases. I read the news. I see what people are talking about to get a feeling for where different movements are starting, and to see, well, people are saying there's a problem in this area, and to be like, "Oh, I wonder if we could find a solution for that. I wonder if we could solve that." So, I would say a good amount of my time is reading, talking to people, talking to other researchers and clinicians, and just having conversations about what they work on, what they're doing, the things that they've learned. Because it is through those kinds of connections and reading what's out there that I can start to see like, "Oh, maybe we can fit in over in this area." Or sometimes it's trying to predict funding mechanisms or priorities that might be coming out too, because if people start talking about it a lot, then usually there's some funding opportunities that come up which we like to use for our research, right? Because we do research, even though we're a company.

A lot of time is spent on meetings. I would love to have a clone because, God, there's days [when] it's just back-to-back. Sometimes it feels, kind of... I wouldn't say it's sad, because I don't necessarily regret any of my choices, but there's times where I'm like, "Wow, I'm really far away from where I started!" Or, I'm dealing a lot with putting out fires or finding things or keeping team dynamics working really well. And in those times, I'm like, "I miss just doing interviews with people!"

**05:49:** So, what do you do in those times when you're feeling maybe a bit a bit bummed out, or stressed, or [you've got] meetings all day? Do you have any ways of keeping going and keeping things on track?

Usually, I like to reframe it so that it's not a source of stress but a source of gratitude. Like, "Thank God I'm really busy because that means I have things to do. That means what we're doing is important to people, and they want what we have to offer." So, thank God. It's better that I am busy and tired and feeling like I don't have enough time in the day than twiddling my thumbs. ➔

**06:35:** Yeah, you're not sitting around just waiting for stuff to come to you. I guess part of your job is to keep yourself [busy]. You know, if you're busy, then you're doing your job right, because you're finding all those opportunities.

**So, when you do feel like 'oof', how do you recover? How do you recuperate? Outside of work, when you get a chance, how do you rebuild that energy?**

I find a lot of peace with my family and my friends. You know, I really enjoy the social connections that I have. And it's not huge. It's really hard to keep a good circle of people if it's big. So, it's not like it's a giant circle, but the people that I know I can count on, and mean a lot. I talk to them daily, you know. I work out, I find external interests. Sometimes it's just taking a moment and catching the sunset and being like, "Wow, it's really beautiful today."

**07:38:** Nice, yeah. Getting influence from outside of work, from your friends, your family, and finding peace, that's important.

**So, are there any other traits or characteristics or outlooks that you have on life that that have helped you succeed in your career?**

Well, yes. I mean, it's a bit tricky, because sometimes it's the things that can be really annoying to managers or to someone else! I think some of the things that that help are I'm pretty tenacious, and failing - 'failing' - doesn't bother me. I think that's one of the most important things to learn, is that there really is no failure. You just try again. And most people have to try again a lot before they get somewhere. So, I would say the persistence and tenacity. I can be incredibly stubborn, not necessarily toward people, but once I set my goals and I'm like, "Okay, we can do this, we can do this, we can do this." And I would say some optimism. I'm an optimist, so it helps me; I'm glad I am!

**09:09:** Yeah, it can help when you're struggling, when things are feeling a bit overwhelming, to be able to think, "Everything's going well, we're on track." I think, yeah, a determined outlook; sometimes things aren't going to work out, but keep going, you keep trying, and you'll end up where you need to be, whether it's where you thought you were going to end up in the first place or somewhere different.

**Throughout your career, has that happened? Have you ended up in places that you didn't think you would? I guess you didn't necessarily think you'd be in the health technology sphere when you started anthropology.**

Yeah, I think that most of the time I end up in places I don't expect! I often say I don't like to plan things to a detail, because I'm always going to end up somewhere I never expected. And if I put a plan in place that is really fine-combed, my tech team can fine-comb that, but for direction or grand vision or [thinking about] where you want to be, if you really hammer it down into a really small, detailed space, a lot of times you get limits. It limits what the possibility is. And maybe an opportunity comes that you think won't really fit this goal or direction you have, but that opportunity actually opens a lot more doors into a space that's more aligned with what you want to do. It's like an adventure.

**10:49:** Yeah, if you have too much of an idea, then you might block out things that you didn't think would fit, but actually that might have been the next door to go through that you didn't realise.

**So, do you have any other advice, maybe for students who are thinking about pursuing a career in healthcare technology or just in STEM more generally, or even just leaving high school and not sure where they want to go next?**

So, usually, because I have a lot of young people of similar age in my home, the advice is, "You're not really going to mess up." So, then anything you do is kind of good, right? Even if you do something and at the end, you're like, "Oh God, I really hated it." Well, you know you hate it, at least you know that! I would say, if you can (I know the UK is a little bit different than the US with courses and being able to select a field of study and everything) but talk to people. Most professionals are happy to talk to people who are interested in their work. And if you are a good listener, people will talk to you forever, right? So just talk to people. If you're like, "Oh, I'd really like to do healthcare technology, or I'd like to do this kind of healthcare research with MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) or whatever topic," find people that are doing something similar, and contact them and just say, "I have some questions. I'd like some advice." And talk to a lot of different people. And if some people are jerks, don't take it personally, because people can be jerks. So, you know you're just like, "Alright, you're having a bad day, man. All right, I'll move on to someone else." But that would be my advice: talk to people and don't give up.

**12:58:** Yeah, great. So, talk to people and don't give up. And, like we said, you might not end up where you thought you were going to end up, but I think you said, "You can't mess up." You're going to end up somewhere, and chances are you'll be doing just fine, wherever it is that you end up.

**So, I think we're almost starting to run out of time here. I've got one more question. But is there anything else that you wanted to just pop in before I asked that?**

No, I'm interested for this next question.

**I think you're gonna like it. So, It's a question that I ask everyone, just to round things off. So, the question is, if you could be any animal, what animal would you be? And why?**

I would probably like to be a peregrine falcon, just so I could dive really fast, something you can't do as a human. That would be pretty cool, that you're not gonna die, but you can plummet to the earth and see what that's like. That would be pretty fun.

**Yeah, as a human, if you're plummeting to the earth, it's probably gonna be a bad ending, but if you're a peregrine falcon, that's just a good time. That's just fun.**

Exactly. So, that would be kind of cool.

**Cool. Well, that's a great answer. Thank you very much. Yeah, so that's all we've got time for, really, but thank you for joining me, Niina. It's been a pleasure.**

Thanks.

**And for anyone watching at home or in the classroom, you can find out more about Niina and her work with BrightOutcome by heading to our futurum careers website and downloading her resources. Thanks for joining us, and I'll see you again next time on the next episode of the futurum careers videocast.**