

ImproveWell.

The Improver Podcast | Episode 1 | The Art of Possible

(00:02)

Welcome to The Improver podcast that explores ideas in healthcare improvement and participatory change, hosted by Dr. Na'eem Ahmed and Lara Mott.

Na'eem Ahmed (00:14)

Hello, and welcome to The Improver podcast. I'm Dr. Na'eem Ahmed, a consultant radiologist, co-founder of ImproveWell.

Lara Mott (00:25)

and I'm Lara Mott, CEO and co-founder of ImproveWell. For those of you who don't know what the ImproveWell app is, ImproveWell is the purpose built engagement solution for improvement in healthcare.

Na'eem Ahmed (00:35)

And welcome to the first ever podcast about improvement, how to change healthcare for the better and ultimately, how we make things, great for patients. So, we're going to be doing a number of podcasts. Hopefully, today just talking a bit about ourselves, how we came about to create ImproveWell, but over the course of a number of podcasts, talking to people who are interested in change, management, improvement, exciting med tech, and other healthcare leaders. So I'm joined today by Lara, my co-founder and we're going to just talk about how we started on this journey.

Lara Mott (01:20)

Thanks, Na'eem. Do you want to go first? Given this was your this was your brainchild, your baby from the beginning?

Na'eem Ahmed (01:29)

I guess. Yeah. I mean, so the journey, Lara, right was, I mean, we could talk about how we how we, you know each other, so you know, back in school, orange and grey blazer, you know, kind of going to school, trying not to get beaten up on the bus and train. So, we obviously went to school together, off to uni, and Lara went up to Bristol, and I went to, King's, and then we met back again, really, to get involved in some charity work that I do. And Lara, having had a very successful stint in the city in terms of biotech, I really wanted her skills on board in terms of the charity. And Lara, you accepted.

Lara Mott (02:23)

Well first of all, what I didn't realise you were asking me, I thought you were coming to meet me, one of my bosses would join.

Na'eem Ahmed (02:29)

That is typical Lara, you know, looking behind her. It's like one of those movies looking behind her, to see if it's really her. But you know, it is you and you know, we're so delighted, obviously that you, you had joined. And one of the other things I was working on, was this idea of junior doctor feedback app. So, this idea of you know how to address that frustration really, when you're, you know, you're working on the front line, you're working on a night shift, and you're stuck in a ward somewhere. And you see something, and you think you know what I just wish, well I know, there is some way of making that process a little bit better. And what's the mechanism really, you'd be able to, to kind of share the idea. And using the app or creating an app, which is what we did in terms of Propeller was just to get that junior doctor kind of feedback mechanism going. So you could put in your idea, you could be anywhere on the ward, putting your idea. And that idea wouldn't have to go through several channels, but would get straight to the decision makers, because, you know, these hospitals are complex organisations, lots of layers of management in between, and sometimes it's difficult to navigate that. Number one is difficult. Number two is do you have the time, you know, as a busy frontline member of staff to be able to do that. And, you know, so we set off on that pilot, and the uptake was great, the feedback was really positive. So, Lara that's really, when we started that conversation, right? In terms of, look this is a great idea. You have the kind of commercial business and you know, and values as well, because that was really important to us, right? I don't know, if you kind of remember that first conversation that we had is that we want to create something that is going to be beneficial but is grounded on the right values.

Lara Mott (04:43)

Definitely, I've had the privilege of working with exceptional people throughout my career. And I genuinely believe that bringing brilliant people together is the secret to innovation, especially in healthcare, so that was kind of the essence of what Propeller was. That was the original product for any old timers who listen to this will remember, Propeller. But that is the essence of ImproveWell. So for me, it's a very easy concept and platform for me to champion personally, because we're collaborative and in everything that we do internally and externally. So it was, you know, working with you, and pushing that mission forward. And building on that value set was a no brainer for me.

Na'eem Ahmed (05:29)

I've always wondered, and I haven't really kind of discussed with you, I mean, you know, what was going through your mind really, in terms of making that decision.

Lara Mott (05:39)

I, as you know, studied pharmacology university. So, I was actually too scared, for whatever reason, to apply for medicine. I just wasn't brave enough. So, I thought, okay, you know, pharmacology sounds good. Maybe I'll tackle the medicine thing later on. And then when I finished that degree, I thought to myself, right is now the time to apply for post grad medicine. And, you know, it wasn't, at the time, and I ended up having a very successful career, but I've always had that niggle of, you know, my eye on the NHS, wanting to help the NHS. And so yeah, when I was in that kind of forever job that I thought I would have for 10,15, 20 years very stable, earning good money, doing some exciting work, for sure. But when you presented this opportunity for me, I was, I then had that okay, well, you know, do I quit now and study medicine and become, you know, fulfil my dream of becoming a doctor? Or is this my opportunity to really help make an impact on the NHS? So, yeah, I mean, had somebody said to me 15 years ago that, you know, I'd be sitting here now recording this podcast with you, I really wouldn't have believed it.

But you know, at the time, it was a no brainer. I just thought, What have I got to lose? I mean, people probably thought I was crazy, leaving my job to build a tech...

Na'eem Ahmed (06:59)

What do they say? What do they say at work?

Lara Mott (07:01)

Well I remember, I mean, actually, the person in question, I will bring this up with him again, one day. But he sort of looked at me and said, you know, "Sorry. So you're, you're leaving this job to build an app, and your customer is the NHS?" And I was like, yep. And he said, "Okay, well, you know, the chair can be kept warm for you, if you want to come back, but all the best we'll be we'll be wishing you well." So it is, you know, is incredible, looking back on the past four years, and obviously, you know, hopefully, we'll be able to cover a lot more of this as in this series. Because, you know, we've been on our own massive improvement journey ourselves, but I don't regret it for a second, it's been amazing.

Na'eem Ahmed (07:44)

And how do you feel, I guess, now, fast forwarding, you know, having been through that, I mean, we all talk about the journey. So, part of it, is what we need to describe as the, kind of, the journey of the product itself from being that very simple junior doctor app, to now being what it is today. So that's one part of it. But I guess, in terms of your, you know, your personal journey and progression, how would you just, kind of, how do you think about it now?

Lara Mott (08:14)

I mean, I'm an I'm a different person. I think now, it's funny, because I remember the first presentation I ever made, I was working for a company called Oxford Biomedica. And we did a massive internal kind of launch of the brand guidelines and the CEO at the time, John Dawson said to me, "okay, well, you know, why don't you present this, this was your project, why don't you stand up and, and you present to everybody", and it was an absolute disaster, I stood up and I froze, and I couldn't get my words out. And I, you know, I knew everything inside out, but I couldn't, I couldn't quite formulate what I'd worked so hard on. So, the thought of, you know, being in this position, and presenting every day and building a business and being a CEO, and all of that was just, you know, crazy. So I think for me personally, the confidence of being able to just give it a go, build something, bring people together to help me do it. You know, I'm not a tech expert, we've managed to recruit a fantastic CTO, we've managed to recruit a fantastic team. Again, it comes back to the essence of ImproveWell, you know, bringing those expertise together, leveraging that collective intelligence and building something collaboratively, and I wouldn't have done it without you Na'eem. So, you know, there's no way I could have come up with this concept. You know, you are so deep rooted and entrenched in the frontline, you see opportunities, you know, week in, week out for this platform to evolve. So, it's just been an enormous team effort. But me personally, the personal growth, I think it's just having that confidence to give something a go and enjoy the journey. And you know, we've had setbacks, we've had challenges, there's been tears, but, you know, ultimately, we're here and we're smiling and we're really, really enjoying what we're doing, which is just fantastic.

Na'eem Ahmed (09:55)

People always come back to me and say "Why don't you jump into it?" and "Are you not convinced by the product?". But, going back to why we started, it was really that we wanted to be rooted in the healthcare service. And we wanted to be relevant. And I think that actually, me being, continuing in my clinical role keeps my eyes and ears open, it keeps everything relevant, it keeps me also grounded in the fact that actually, these are the people we really want to help. And this is our mission and our purpose. And it's a constant daily reminder for that, and me being able to go back to the team and say, look, guys, I don't think this will work, or this might not work. And, you know, we've done that so many times, Lara, like having a brainstorming thing, actually, you know, what, can we go back and think about this, again, I think that has been more valuable than actually, the number of days or hours I could put in.

Lara Mott (10:53)

Let's be honest, we do speak most evenings. So don't sell yourself short!

Na'eem Ahmed (11:01)

I'm not completely detached. I mean, we do speak a number of hours. And you're right. But I think that that perspective, being on the front line is probably one of the things that keeps us unique and fresh and relevant, I guess. So, I think that's important that the product itself, Lara, I mean, we've had our personal journeys, but the product itself was very basic, very basic app to begin with. And we, you know, we're fortunate that the guys at Guys and St. Thomas' got back behind us and saw that as a something that is really worth pursuing.

We have had some real low points. I mean, I think we should, we should talk about our story, really, in terms of developers, you remember, Lara, when you know, I think you were, you are on holiday, I was, and this was kind of, one of the few holidays and breaks that you ever took

Lara Mott (11:54)

I was going to say... holiday? When?

Na'eem Ahmed (11:56)

I think that was when you were at your breaking point. And we said, you know what, how about you take a couple of take a couple of days off, right? And then I was dreading, I was like, Lara, I've got this real big problem. And you're like, what, and this is all furiously on WhatsApp. I was like, Lara, oh my God, if we don't have this component, our whole kind of app is going to fall flat. And it's going to take us ages to get it back online again. So, this is, you've just got to picture this three way conversation, I've got this guy on Skype and broken English, and I'm trying to communicate with him, you know, with my English and, and the little bit of Hindi that I've picked up from like, watching movies with my mum. And I've got Lara on the other side. Finally, having a break after being completely immersed in this thing. And trying to negotiate this guy out of pressing the delete button, was probably one of the real, real low points. I mean, there are obviously other low points. But I mean, that early on was something that really stuck in my mind. And, you know, really highlighted in terms of we need good people around us. And I think that's another thing, Lara, that we've tried to do in terms of building our team now, is, we've always had this conversation about your will get them for the skills but for their growth and their values as well.

Lara Mott (13:17)

Yeah, definitely. I think we're very, very lucky to have people around us who are passionate about the mission. I mean, it's maybe I'm biased, but I think it's an easy, it's an easy platform to really get behind. I think people are proud to associate themselves with the ImproveWell journey. So, we've been very lucky in that sense. And I guess it kind of almost brings us on to the purpose of this podcast, you know, we have built a fantastic network of ImproveWell friends and family, you know, be it people that work with us, be it customers, be it key opinion leaders, partners. It's actually quite incredible the network that we've built, and you know, I really hope that we can feature some of those folks who have been a key part of the journey.

Na'eem Ahmed (14:07)

I think, you know, the other thing is that a lot of people were seeing improvement is something that is for a specialist. It's not for everyone. I think if we could do this through the podcast also, is just to show people what the art of possible is that, in fact, actually it's everyone's business, you know, to get involved in improvement, and particularly health care, because I think health care attracts, you know, that person, we come into this kind of line of work to solve problems. So we're naturally geared up to being improvers. And I think that that's why the podcast, The Improver, our journey and all those people who have seen value in it and can share their own experiences of improvement I think is a really strong story that will inspire others. I'm really looking forward to it.

Lara Mott (15:07)

Me too. What are you most excited about for the podcast?

Na'eem Ahmed (15:10)

I think the thing is, that inspiring others when you see, you know, people have listened to something and you see it, Lara, when we show people the product, and people are using it and tweeting about it, and posting on social media and talking to their colleagues about it. That excitement, right, if we can, if we're creating another avenue for that to happen, I think that that's brilliant. The other thing is, which we've done is that, this is just another way of creating value for people, we were just talking about our colleagues and the people that are working with us on this journey, right, we've watched people that have come in, have stayed with us and have grown and then I know going on to do even the, brighter, better things is, is great. And this is just another avenue for us, I think to be able to, to do that.

Lara Mott (16:06)

I think it'd be really nice if we can to also, perhaps, feature guests from other industries, and maybe get some healthy debates on trends and challenges or generate insights from other leaders in the field. Because I think you're right, I mean, there is there is so much enthusiasm for improvement across healthcare. And I hope that we get a following with this podcast from people who want to learn something new, or hear something and apply it to their own setting, or whatever it might be. Because journeys of improvement aren't easy. We've already touched on our own journey, building a startup and that that could probably be a more detailed case study at some point. But you've got to start somewhere, you've got to find a way to keep going. So, I kind of hate that this podcast will bring passionate people together. And just fuel that culture of improvement and just keep keep the conversation going. And you know, maybe people will be able to suggest other topics that we can cover and things like that.

Na'eem Ahmed (17:00)

I mean you've kind of spoken about other industries. And that will be fascinating as well. Because if we can look at how F1 is using analytics, if we look at oil and gas and how they're using safety measures, I mean, everyone talks a lot about airline industries. But there's a lot more, customer service, and hospitality, all of these things really, can be applied to improving healthcare, but also I think the converse is true. Can ImproveWell be applied to helping them? I think that's also another conversation we can talk about.

Lara Mott (17:36)

So who can we give any teasers as to who we might feature in the next episode or two?

Na'eem Ahmed (17:45)

So, we can have, we will, I mean, let's see, I mean, how we grow it, but I think that we definitely have our immediate circle of friends and advisors, that are leaders in their field in health care. We, you know, we want to hear from them. I think that also within our organisation getting John and people and I want everyone to know about the product and what goes on behind the scenes in creating this product and what our values and cultures that we're trying to instil amongst our own organisation, because, that's one of the things we were keen about, was that we start, you know, start with ourselves first. And I think we should, it'll be great to just share that with everyone else. So I hope everyone listening will continue on this journey with us. It's been, it's been great just to kick off this podcast, and Lara, you know, sharing a bit about our journey. And hopefully what, you know, more of that to come. And but teasing you up nicely for other people, getting them involved in terms of sharing their insights and working with us, what excites them about the product, what excites them about improvement, and how we can inspire the people. So, I'm really looking forward to the podcast and sharing all of those insights with you all.

Lara Mott (19:12)

Me too, and thanks so much for joining us and I really hope that you will tune in to the next episode. Bye for now.

(19:23)

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