

Expert Interview I with Celine Tien, CEO & Cofounder of Flowly Including | thoughts on helping people address pain and anxiety.

>> *Celine guest curated Strands on November 17th 2022. [Read it here.](#)*

Tell us a little bit about yourself and what keeps you busy. How did you end up doing what you're doing today?

I'm the founder and CEO of Flowly, a mobile app that combines Virtual Reality and biofeedback to help people address pain and anxiety. A lot of my days are spent meeting with psychologists and doctors to continually develop our program. I also spend a good portion of my time directly working with pain and anxiety patients in clinical trials and case studies.

I started Flowly because I grew up around cancer and saw firsthand how pain and anxiety deeply impacted people's lives. I was passionate about creating a tool people could use at home, each day, to help them feel more safe, relaxed, and comfortable. My team and I spent years making VR and biofeedback something you could easily order and use at home.

What excites you most about what you do?

Spreading awareness of how each of us can take control of our health through addressing our nervous system. Biofeedback in VR allows you to collect your own heart rate, see it in VR, and learn to control it so you can shift your nervous system from fight or flight mode (where pain and anxiety lives) to rest and digest mode (where relaxation and healing lives).

There are techniques we can all learn to feel better each day, but we don't learn about it because the healthcare industry is not set up to incentivize true holistic medicine. I hope our work in Flowly can share more of the science and data behind these tools and techniques, now made more accessible by technology.

What beliefs define your approach to work? How would you define your leadership style?

I believe in clear communication with the team: communicating the highs, the lows, and the story of where we want to go.

What has been the most rewarding project you've worked on and why?

Running our early case studies for Flowly were incredibly rewarding because we were able to see the impact of Flowly on patients who had spent years in a wheelchair due to pain, and then after using Flowly for a few months, be able to walk on their own two feet.

We are big believers in diversity -- Not only because we believe in equality, but because we also think it's better for business. The Black Lives Matter movement has shaped industry conversations around both global injustice, and also lack of representation in our industry. How do you frame these kinds of conversations, both internally and with clients? Is there an emphasis on action, or are the conversations really more about communication?

As a woman of color in a very traditional industry, I have experienced the pain of being marginalized or overlooked in conversations regarding leadership, medicine, fundraising, and more. Because of these experiences, we've built a small team that reflects the demographic and population we serve including majority women, and many women of color. Additionally, even in our Virtual Reality experiences, we consider different types of environments that would feel comfortable, relaxing, and safe for folks of all walks of life (i.e. water environments versus more suburban or forest-like environments). We've spent a lot of time building out our product to be as accessible and as safe for as many people as possible.

Switching gears a bit, how do you find time to balance personal interests with your career? Do you believe work/life balance is



possible? Anything you've implemented that you recommend that others try?

I believe it is possible and I think for me, it begins with making sure I get adequate sleep. Sleep is foundational to our health and productivity and so before I even consider how I balance work life and personal life, I believe I have to pin down a consistent sleep ritual that promotes better sleep so I feel at my best each day.

What's your media diet? Where do you find inspiration?

I listen to a lot of audiobooks and podcasts! All genres: startup-focused, history podcasts, and more.

As you know, we believe there is so much value in having a wide range of teachers. What's the best piece of advice/knowledge you've stolen, and who/where'd you steal it from?

My mom! I feel like this is a cliché answer but as most people in my life will tell you, after they learn about my upbringing the first thing people ask is, "can I meet your mom?" My mom has taught me so many things but the one lesson I hold onto dearly is the idea that we should be present in each moment of our lives. Sounds simple, incredibly hard to do.