

Inclusive science communication with Tamara Poles

(Research Adjacent Episode 87)

Tamara helps scientists bring their authentic selves to their research and outreach activities

<https://researchadjacent.com/tamara-poles-episode-87/>



[00:00:01] **Tamara Poles:** if you study something that's so abstract that people can't connect with, then how are you connecting with it? What is your personal story and why are you doing this?

[00:00:10] **Tamara Poles:** What I do is I try to give people the tools to bring them their full selves to when they're doing their research or when they're doing their outreach because I didn't see myself in science or science communication as a lesbian black woman in STEM. I didn't see that.

[00:00:26] **Tamara Poles:** I created a program called Sirens where it's a science themed drag and burlesque show. And it's a way to show that scientists can be anybody and you can communicate science in more than just reading and writing and speaking. You can perform it.

[00:00:41] **Tamara Poles:** You can't fight passion with data. You have to fight passion with humanity

[00:00:48] **Sarah McLusky:** Hello there. I'm Sarah McLusky and this is Research Adjacent.

[00:00:54] **Sarah McLusky:** Each episode I talk to amazing research adjacent professionals about what they do and why it makes a difference. Keep listening to find out why we think the research adjacent space is where the real magic happens.

[00:01:10] **Sarah McLusky:** Hello and welcome to another episode of Research Adjacent. I am as always your host, Sarah McLusky. Today I'm delighted to introduce you to our first North American guest, Tamara Poles. Tamara runs Universal SciCom, a company based in North Carolina, which helps people learn, do, and experience excellent science communication.

[00:01:29] **Sarah McLusky:** We met through previous guest Kath Burton and immediately hit it off, and when I realized that February was both LGBT+ history month in the UK and Black History Month in the USA, I knew that it was the right time to share Tamara's story with you. Tamara was planning to do a PhD but realized that she was much better at talking about science than actually doing it.

[00:01:50] **Sarah McLusky:** Motivated by the fact she couldn't find role models who looked like her. She trained as an educator and science communicator, and that drive to increased diversity and representation in science and science communication has led to programs covering everything from making field work more inclusive to science themed drag and burlesque shows.

[00:02:08] **Sarah McLusky:** We also talk about what it's like doing science communication in the US right now where funding cuts and an anti-science public narrative have made her work extremely challenging at times. Her solution is community humanity and improving education around mental health. All things which I think will resonate here in the UK too.

[00:02:27] **Sarah McLusky:** Before we get onto the conversation, I have to apologize that the sound quality isn't as good as usual. This is entirely my fault. For the first time in over three years doing this podcast, I recorded the wrong microphone. Tamara generously offered to re-record our episode, but in the spirit of showing what really goes on behind the scenes and owning up to my failures, I've cleaned it up as best I can, but otherwise, I've left it as it is.

[00:02:48] **Sarah McLusky:** So with that, listen on to hear Tamara's story.

[00:02:54] **Sarah McLusky:** Welcome along to the podcast, Tamara. It is fantastic to have you joining us all the way from the USA. First of all, can you tell us a bit about who you are and what you do?

[00:03:04] **Tamara Poles:** Hello. Hello. Thank you so much, Sarah, for inviting me on the podcast. I really appreciate it. My name's Tamara Poles, I'm founder and CEO of Universal SciCom, but my official government name is SciCom Consulting, as you can see behind me.

[00:03:19] **Tamara Poles:** But we, you can Google us as Universal SciCom. That's my doing business as, my DBA. And what we do is we are the home for a lot of researchers and STEM professionals where we, they can learn how to, do science communication. We do science communication trainings and workshops and also bootcamps.

[00:03:40] **Tamara Poles:** So if you want multiple days of it, we conduct those. We also do outreach opportunities. So it's a place where scientists and science educators can learn how to communicate their science effectively, and also a place where they can practice and hone their skills in science communication.

[00:03:56] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. So do you do really, is it like any aspect of science that you work on or do you have particular things that you specialize in?

[00:04:05] **Tamara Poles:** Yeah, excellent question. So it's all science. So the, that's the reason why we actually changed the name from SciCom Consulting to Universal SciCom 'cause I wanna make sure people know that it's all forms of STEM and science and you're learning these universal skills that you can literally apply anywhere.

[00:04:21] **Tamara Poles:** So it's for all scientists and STEM professionals. The audience is for everyone. And the skills that you learn, you can apply everywhere. So that's why it's like a universal remote. You can apply it anywhere. So that's why we changed our name to Universal SciCom.

[00:04:36] **Sarah McLusky:** Fantastic. Point and click. I love it. And so you're working, you've said they're with researchers, STEM professionals, are these people who are working in universities and companies where whereabouts are.

[00:04:50] **Tamara Poles:** Yeah. Yeah. So we have clients from all over yes. A lot of our clients are labs at universities that want to learn science communication so they can conduct outreach in their own communities. There's a lot of like nonprofits that will hire me so they can learn how to, and it's researchers still or scientists still that do lab work that want to be able to write for different audiences or present or communicate to like their churches or their they wanna go into a school group, things like that.

[00:05:22] **Tamara Poles:** Pretty much anybody can use us. And also, so my background is biology in environmental science, but I went back to school and got my higher ed degree in education. So what I also do is I create curricula for universities or schools or nonprofit organizations so they can help teach others how to communicate their research or get across their point.

[00:05:45] **Tamara Poles:** Recently I worked with this organization called Field Inclusive, where they train other scientists how to be more inclusive when they're doing their field work because not everybody's created and treated the same when they're out in the field. So they want to bring awareness of that. So they hired me to develop their curriculum and we can put it online.

[00:06:04] **Tamara Poles:** So there's gonna be an online curriculum, and that's all done by me and the folks at Universal SciCom. So we do a lot of different things to help researchers and STEM professionals get their outreach out there.

[00:06:17] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Fantastic. I imagine that's so valuable. So you said there, you've done some work specifically on inclusivity, and I know that's something that's a really big, is interest for you.

[00:06:28] **Sarah McLusky:** And so when it comes to making this science communication more inclusive, what sorts of things have you found help there?

[00:06:36] **Tamara Poles:** Oh, that's so good. That's an excellent question. So one of my most popular workshops is actually called Power of Authenticity and Science Communication, how to bring your whole self to a group or when you are writing or when you're speaking about your research or when you're even conducting research, where are you reflected in this? And a lot of times it's representation matters. So that's why we have these shirts that say this is what science communication looks like. And it's because a lot of people think that in order to be a researcher or a STEM professional or a science communicator, you have to look like it's usually what old white guys with crazy white hair.

[00:07:16] **Tamara Poles:** They always think that those are the scientists. But no, you could be a black scientist, you could be a woman scientist. I'm a scientist and a science communicator.

[00:07:25] **Tamara Poles:** What I do is I try to give people the tools to bring them their full selves to when they're doing their research or when they're doing their outreach.

[00:07:33] **Tamara Poles:** So in that workshop that I do, I ask them. Where are you in your research? Why are you doing this research? And we talk about that and we actually start brainstorming ways that they can add themselves to their research or their outreach. Maybe they're queer scientists. Are you doing something that targets queer professionals?

[00:07:51] **Tamara Poles:** Let's see how you can do that. And I have examples of me personally doing that

[00:07:56] **Tamara Poles:** because I didn't see myself in science or science communication as a lesbian black woman in STEM. I didn't see that.

[00:08:02] **Tamara Poles:** So I created a program called Sirens where it's a science themed drag and burlesque show.

[00:08:07] **Tamara Poles:** And by no means am I the first person to come up with that idea. But the niche that I'm fulfilling is, it's a science themed drag and burlesque show. So it's for everybody. So if they do not identify if they identify as them or they, they're welcome. If they're trans, they're welcome. Past two shows that we've done, we've had every color in the rainbow, every orientation, everything. And they're there.

[00:08:32] **Tamara Poles:** And it's a way to show that scientists can be anybody and you can communicate science in more than just reading and writing and speaking. You can perform it.

[00:08:42] **Tamara Poles:** So what they do is they're in their performances, they're actually performing scientific content and relating it to the audience and it's so much fun. Strongly recommend everybody looking it up or checking us out. But yeah, those are just some ways that I try to show up for my community and that the people at Universal Sitcom tries to show up for their community as well.

[00:09:01] **Tamara Poles:** So try being as inclusive as possible and creating more opportunities to let everybody be at the table.

[00:09:07] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah, I love, that's one of the things when we were talking about before the call and you showed me some of the pictures and things from this drag and burlesque show that you do. And I think definitely we need to get some pictures of that and put them in the show notes so that people can go and check it out.

[00:09:21] **Sarah McLusky:** And it is it's wonderful to be creating spaces like that, that feel inclusive, and I think that is especially. You know, things like when you are working with schools or when you're in an environment, we, you know, with the, the science and all about publishing and this assumption that you have to be a certain way to be taken seriously as a scientist, right?

[00:09:45] **Sarah McLusky:** And so the fact that you're doing some things which really challenge that and create some safe spaces, I think is fantastic.

[00:09:53] **Tamara Poles:** Thanks that's my main goal 'cause once we start doing that and once people start seeing us as people I think people will start seeing themselves as a scientist, especially people coming up.

[00:10:03] **Tamara Poles:** The kids coming up, they'll see themselves as a scientist and be like, oh, she looks like me, or they look like me. They identify as they, this is cool. I can be a scientist too. And that was something that I didn't see a lot of until I got I've graduated that I started seeing black female scientists that were doing outreach and I was like, oh.

[00:10:24] **Tamara Poles:** I could do that too. Yeah. So yeah, it was a journey for me and I'm trying to make that journey a little bit easier for everybody else.

[00:10:30] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Oh, fantastic. You've said there that this has been a bit of a journey for you, and you said that you originally came through doing biology. Tell us a bit about what you've done and how you've ended up where you are now.

[00:10:40] **Tamara Poles:** Oh, how much time do you have? Yeah. My undergrad biology and environmental science, and I realized that when I was working in labs, 'cause I worked in a bunch of labs in undergrad, I kept contaminating my Petri dishes with my own DNA. And so that was a clue that I talked too much. And so when I but I went to my advisor. I was like, Hey, is there a way that we can I could be like a liaison between scientists and general public because I realized we were doing some really cool research at the school I went to, but the community around us had no idea. We were doing some really cool stuff and my advisor told me, you might as well just become a teacher like it was a bad thing, and that seems to be really systemic within the research world, at least here, is that a publish or perish. You don't want to become a teacher even though the professors are technically teachers. But it

[00:11:36] **Sarah McLusky:** seems that it's a really strange thing, isn't it? Is that, yeah. If of the fact that it's like if you become a teacher, you've somehow like given up, even though, as you say university staff or teachers by definition. Yeah.

[00:11:51] **Tamara Poles:** And it, that actually took me eight years to overcome though. So I kept that in the back of my head and was like, okay, I've gotta do research somehow. But then I took a year off 'cause I was supposed to go get, because my PhD and evolutionary ecology. But I took a year off and went into museums and science centers and absolutely loved it.

[00:12:09] **Tamara Poles:** I worked at the Virginia Museum of Natural History, then I worked at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, but at VMNH, that was where I learned I wanted to bridge that gap and bring researchers to some of the outreach that I was doing as an educator. Because my job was to provide nature and outdoors education opportunities for the community.

[00:12:27] **Tamara Poles:** And I was like, why don't I bring the researchers out here and I was like, first, you know what? That first one didn't really work out well, let me train them up first. And then I took them out. And then I worked at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences where I was coordinator of virtual education.

[00:12:42] **Tamara Poles:** So my job was to provide a museum experience for people that were unable to attend the museum. And it started really fun program. So essentially, I was doing this before this was cool. So I had my props, I had my animals that I would show, I would did pre pediatric hospital programs, things like that.

[00:12:59] **Tamara Poles:** But one of my programs that I did start was called The Smarts Program, which stood for scientists making answers relevant for teachers and students. That was an all-nighter, just letting you know. Okay. Coming up with that acronym. And what I did

there was I trained scientists how to communicate their research using digital technology, because this was back in 2016.

[00:13:20] **Tamara Poles:** This was from 2016 no, 2012 to 2016. Yeah, this was definitely something that wasn't being used. So when I did that, I started training scientists how to do that, and I really started really liking that and I thought, this is actually what I wanna do for a living. This is fantastic. And then getting to see the kids' eyes and aha moments when they would see like a woman scientist presenting from their lab like to their classroom. And that was really cool. And I really liked that and I learned so much from that program. And then Morehead Planetarium and Science Center that they host the North Carolina Science Festival, which is one of the largest celebrations of science in the world.

[00:14:00] **Tamara Poles:** And they received a grant to start a statewide science communication training program. And I got hired to do that. So I got to actually do Universal SciCom in this like smaller protected environment where I created this curriculum, went around the state and prepared the scientists to do outreach.

[00:14:19] **Tamara Poles:** And it was a very fun program. And then I was like, alright. This is something I definitely need to do. So after, after I left Morehead, start at Universal SciCom and have not turned back since. So that is essentially my journey and the most straight of a line that you can make. But just know there were so many other hundred things.

[00:14:41] **Sarah McLusky:** So many squiggles along the way.

[00:14:43] **Tamara Poles:** It's so true. And whenever I do like a keynote address and they want me to talk about my life, I always have a Super Mario themed PowerPoint where it's like going through like the tubes. And this is where I played for the US International Softball team. And I did this for a little while.

[00:15:00] **Tamara Poles:** And then like I just talk about all of my little like side quests, because as an ADHD person, I have a lot of those. So

[00:15:09] **Sarah McLusky:** I love it, side quest. That's a fantastic way to fantastic way to describe it. But as you say, you've got this kind of central channel running through now the central theme of science communication and it, it sounds like you've been able to, to really get into lots of different kinds of communities and different ways of delivering information and different kinds of scientists.

[00:15:34] **Sarah McLusky:** What are things that have made the biggest difference to how people share their research, share their science?

[00:15:43] **Tamara Poles:** First of all, like all, there isn't a difference when I'm training scientists in different fields because we all have, first off imposter syndrome. We always think that we're not the one that should be doing this, but who better?

[00:15:54] **Tamara Poles:** So please remember, if you're a scientist or a STEM professional listening to this, you are the person that should be doing this. 'Cause who better to do it than you? ' And also I think what's really important is getting the scientists to learn how to share their personal stories and connecting their personal stories with either their research or the community that they're speaking with.

[00:16:17] **Tamara Poles:** And that is part of my intro workshop. And then we delve deeper into it and the full storytelling workshop, because there's so much power in storytelling and sharing

your personal stories with the public. So I think those two things are crucial for scientists to learn.

[00:16:35] **Sarah McLusky:** That's really interesting that's your go-to is helping them to share and make connections through their personal story, because I think a lot of people.

[00:16:44] **Sarah McLusky:** When you ask for advice about science communication, it's all about, oh, you need to not use jargon and you need to, simplify it for your audience and stuff like that. And. And actually in many cases, that isn't really what connects with people. We're

[00:17:03] **Tamara Poles:** Right.

[00:17:04] **Sarah McLusky:** Humans connect human to human.

[00:17:07] **Sarah McLusky:** And when actually when you're actually trying to make a difference to somebody. That human to human connection I think is often more important than the content of what you're

[00:17:18] **Tamara Poles:** a hundred percent

[00:17:19] **Sarah McLusky:** sharing.

[00:17:20] **Tamara Poles:** Yep.

[00:17:21] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah, so I love that that's your approach.

[00:17:25] **Tamara Poles:** Yeah, and you're absolutely right, and that's the first thing I teach my scientists and all of my workshops is why do I care?

[00:17:31] **Tamara Poles:** Why? Why do I care that you are studying this gene on this loci? And then that's where we start. And because a lot of times the scientist cares about this like small thing that they're researching. And I'm like, why? But, and they'll say, they'll essentially go like this. And then I'm like, why? And then they go like this.

[00:17:49] **Tamara Poles:** And then I say, why? And then they sometimes go back to this. But that's where the personal story comes in. Because if you study something that's so abstract that people can't connect with, then how are you connecting with it? What is your personal story and why are you doing this? And all of my workshops I constantly am saying, why do I care?

[00:18:09] **Tamara Poles:** And I'm constantly saying, how does this relate to you and why do you care about this? And

[00:18:14] **Sarah McLusky:** That's really interesting as well, because we have got this culture at the moment of people being almost anti-science, anti evidence, whatever kind of language they're using for in the US in the UK it's like people are, it is like we've had enough of experts and sometimes I feel that it's because we think facts are gonna change somebody's mind about something. When they rarely do, but maybe tell us a bit about what that culture's like in the US at the moment.

[00:18:53] **Tamara Poles:** Like a lot of times, especially scientists and researchers, they want to throw data at people. Look at this graph, look at this data.

[00:19:00] **Tamara Poles:** But if you can't tell me why I should care, is that gonna make me sick? Is that gonna harm someone's kids? Is that gonna make me money? Is that gonna help me eat?

If you can't boil it down to that or boil it down to where we are as humans and make it make it human focused. So intertwining your experience and helping them with their experience.

[00:19:22] **Tamara Poles:** It might make your daily lives a little bit easier if you knew this. If you can't connect it with that, you're not gonna get people, because the people that are thinking scientists are all liars and blah, blah, blah. If those people are very passionate about those things and

[00:19:36] **Tamara Poles:** you can't fight passion with data.

[00:19:39] **Tamara Poles:** You have to fight passion with humanity

[00:19:42] **Tamara Poles:** again. And say Hey, like I understand that you think that scientists don't exist, but I'm a scientist and I've been your neighbor for this long, and have you had a problem with me? Have I steered you in the wrong way? Developing, redeveloping that trust is what we need to do, and we can't do that by throwing a lot of data at stuff.

[00:19:59] **Sarah McLusky:** No, I think people often ask me things like, they'll say, oh, what would you say to somebody to convince them of climate change or convince them that vaccines are safe? And I am. I just, I think if they're that determined, I'm not sure that there is much I can say except from me saying my daughter's vaccinated.

[00:20:17] **Sarah McLusky:** That's

[00:20:18] **Tamara Poles:** right.

[00:20:18] **Sarah McLusky:** I think it's safe for my family. And again, it's that connection with the emotional part, the human part of things. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:20:27] **Sarah McLusky:** I imagine that things in the US though when it comes to science communication are really challenging at the moment because, here over in the UK we've heard about cuts to research funding and programs being shut down and that sort of thing.

[00:20:42] **Sarah McLusky:** How is that affecting science communication I guess?

[00:20:47] **Tamara Poles:** It is impacting scicom a whole lot. It's even hit Universal SciCom quite a bit because since grants are, have been taken away from research facilities, like for instance, certain grants, that researchers were receiving some portion of that grant was to conduct outreach, or publish or like some type of outreach portion or broader impacts portion is attached to a lot of the grants here. And when those grants were taken away, that means the labs are focusing on just their research' cause they barely have funding to support that. So they're not doing these professional development opportunities in which I provide, or these outreach opportunities, which I also provide and help connect research labs with the communities that they wanna engage with. There a lot of them aren't doing that, so scientists and science communicators that do want to do the outreach, we're actually doing it on our own and trying our best to get to social media and things like that.

[00:21:43] **Tamara Poles:** Me personally, part of the pivot, because so much of our funding has been taken away because people research facilities don't have the money anymore to do this type of professional development. My pivot is to start with my community because that's the best place to start, and that's what we really need to start building community again.

[00:22:04] **Tamara Poles:** So what I've been doing is a lot of community events. So like Sirens science themed, drag and burlesque show. That's one of one of the examples. Another example

actually is starting in March. And I'm gonna be doing this at a coffee shop and also at a brewery, and it's called Uncensored Science.

[00:22:23] **Tamara Poles:** I'm getting researchers and STEM professionals to come in and talk about what they can't normally share with you know, audiences under 18. And it's gonna be at a coffee shop or a bar, and it's gonna be a lot of fun. Like one of the, one of my presenters that will be presenting is trans, and they are transitioning and they wanted to present on, and their background by the way, is physics and chemistry.

[00:22:49] **Tamara Poles:** Those are like the two hardest things in my mind. But they're, and and they're transitioning and what they wanna talk about is where all the boobs go. And I was like, that is fantastic, but just know we are gonna be in spaces where you get this opportunity to raise awareness. So what they're gonna do is they're gonna talk about trans in other populations like, oh like for instance, zebrafish, they tend to transition based on their population.

[00:23:16] **Tamara Poles:** I'm sure other biologists can come up with a thousand other examples, and that's what they're gonna do. And then they're gonna talk about themselves and their transition, and then talk about the fun topic of yeah, where do all the boobs go? So different things like that. See

[00:23:30] **Sarah McLusky:** my daughter would love that, so she. She's under 18, so she would love that.

[00:23:38] **Tamara Poles:** I am certain if they're accompanied by a parent, especially at the coffee shop, you might be okay. There is we do have a disclaimer. Not all of it's gonna be like that, but there are, it's just a time to where we get to share what's fun and exciting and or funny about our research and our research experience that, we can't just go to a K 12 event and say it or a family event and say it. So yeah, it's a opportunity for us to learn and laugh and engage with scientists. And so trying to create these unique opportunities throughout my community to do that, and a lot of this I'm doing for a very low cost.

[00:24:19] **Tamara Poles:** Because I want people to be able to attend these events for free. Yeah. And if it's not for free, it's next to free because I don't want to have any barriers to access knowledge. Like education should be free for everybody. When these opportunities happen, especially the Uncensored Science, that's not a ticketed event.

[00:24:37] **Tamara Poles:** You just have to be 18 or over to go in. Sirens because I want to pay the performers. That is a ticketed event. But doing things like that. There's also trips that I take people on that are local that want to tag sharks. And I work with Dr. David Schiffman to do that really cool program.

[00:24:56] **Tamara Poles:** So that's how I've been pivoting and it's still part of Universal SciCom 'cause Universal SciCom is learn it, so learning scicom with the workshops. And things like that I do. And then there's do scicom, so like the people that I've trained get to go out and conduct this outreach. And then there's experience scicom.

[00:25:18] **Tamara Poles:** So the experience scicom are like Sirens and things like that we are hosting that are trained scientists or people that i've already vetted to go to these outreach events. So yes, we focused a lot on learning scicom, which we still are doing. So if anybody wants a workshop, let me know. Yeah.

[00:25:36] **Tamara Poles:** But we have pivoted to the experience scicom part because I want to focus more on community building and letting people meet their neighbors and see them as research professionals and educators.

[00:25:49] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. I think that's so important for me as well. I think we just, the way we solve a lot of the problems of the world at the moment, I think is actually being in rooms together.

[00:25:59] **Tamara Poles:** Right.

[00:25:59] **Sarah McLusky:** With other human needs, right? Yeah. Yeah,

[00:26:02] **Tamara Poles:** exactly. And then that's so true. The value of just getting to know someone. Yeah.

[00:26:07] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. It is, it's amazing what difference it makes. I am I, this may be related. Your answers, I don't know. I like to ask all my guests. Okay. If they had a magic wand, what would they change about the world that they work in?

[00:26:20] **Sarah McLusky:** So money and time are no object. What would you do differently?

[00:26:25] **Tamara Poles:** Okay. So if I could do some do the hard work, I think, and I don't know if this is the same in overseas, in the UK or not. I'm not sure if it's the same, but I know in the US. I would, and mind you, this is coming from an athlete. So my background is I was a competitive softball player for over half my life.

[00:26:47] **Tamara Poles:** And I played in college and then I played for the US international team and went overseas and played in the Netherlands. So this is coming from an athlete's perspective as well, but I genuinely think we should treat like athleticism and athletics, we should use that as a model to uplift like mental health.

[00:27:10] **Tamara Poles:** So we're all really focused on especially in schools. In schools we're like, oh, we have PE and you get to play this sport. And like everybody, when they're five, they play soccer. And so it's a thing, but why not? When we turn five, we still like focus on physical health, but then we start also.

[00:27:29] **Tamara Poles:** Putting in mental health and being emotionally savvy and dealing with our own thoughts and emotions in a proper way. Because I feel like if we put as much stress on that I think we would have more compassion and empathy and it will play more into how we treat each other.

[00:27:47] **Tamara Poles:** So we wouldn't have to do all of this like extra heavy lifting to make sure black and brown people have the same resources or people that have special needs have these resources as well. Like we would already think that, we would already realize, oh, we should listen to these folks.

[00:28:04] **Tamara Poles:** We need to make sure we have a transcript for this, or we need to make sure this is in braille. We think of these things a lot more tactfully and inclusively instead of looking at it as a pie, if I have this, you can't have it. So I think if we had more emotional intelligence and we were able to process our feelings and like we realized, oh, the reason why I feel like that is because I'm scared.

[00:28:28] **Tamara Poles:** Alright, let's figure out how we deal with fear. Like I think a lot of our problems would be solved. And like right now, you even know if you go outside and you trip and

fall and you skin your knee, guess what? You know exactly what to do. That's something physical, we could fix that. It's the same for mental health, but sadly, we don't have those tools.

[00:28:45] **Tamara Poles:** And I will say like in the curriculum in the US, that is becoming a little bit more prevalent, but it's not like huge. I think New York is the only one that has it built in to their curriculum from K to 12. But I, like you just, I know for me, I didn't see it and even in fifth grade, I played like the recorder.

[00:29:04] **Tamara Poles:** So I'm like, how can we do these things? But for mental health?

[00:29:09] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah.

[00:29:09] **Tamara Poles:** Throughout, I don't know. Hopefully that made sense.

[00:29:12] **Sarah McLusky:** But yeah. No, I think more empathy and compassion. It just, again it fits with everything that you've been talking about science communication and the way that we connect to each other as human beings and almost the way that, that you've said throughout that it's almost like the subject matter is less important than this kind of shared humanity. And and I think yeah, and if we, I think you're right, we do spend too much time teaching. Yeah, I've mentioned my daughter before. She's about to do her like, what in the UK are called GCSEs, it's exams that you do when you're 16.

[00:29:46] **Sarah McLusky:** So she's about to do her like school exams at 16 and some of the stuff she's learning, like quotes from Shakespeare and weird mathematical formulas and stuff, and you think you're never gonna use that ever again. Whereas some of this emotional intelligence stuff, you would use it every day.

[00:30:03] **Tamara Poles:** Yeah, you use it every day.

[00:30:05] **Tamara Poles:** And then the emotional intelligence, when you start like delving into it, it also becomes problem solving. It also becomes critical thinking. And then guess what? Here's your science stuff. We snuck that in there.

[00:30:16] **Sarah McLusky:** Always gotta sneak it in there somewhere.

[00:30:18] **Tamara Poles:** Sneak it there. But yeah, just like me being a part of athletics, literally all my life, I learned a lot of problem solving skills. I learned teamwork. I learned all of these cool skills that you don't learn in school because I was put in sports. You could do the same if you did something similar. If you did something relating to emotional health and mental health, and you prioritize that as well as you do physical health. Like we have physical fitness testing. Why not mental health testing? Yeah, like that. That sounds a little weird, but I think people got what I said. Exactly. It sounded weird, but as in holding it to such a level of respect and appreciation 'cause right now it's always seemed as like an other or, oh, you're just being too whatever.

[00:31:03] **Tamara Poles:** Yeah. Whereas somebody that's an athlete, if you're being too whatever. That's awesome. That sounds,

[00:31:08] **Sarah McLusky:** Yeah. Considered a good thing in certain situations. Yeah. Oh, fantastic. If I think we should think about wrapping up our conversation, so if people want to get in touch with you, what's the best way? Where do you hang out? Where's the best places to find you?

[00:31:26] **Tamara Poles:** I am always online so I am, you can find my website at universalscicom.com, and that's with one m. You can find us on Instagram, you can find us on

Facebook, you can find me on LinkedIn and you can even send me a DM or an email via any of those platforms, and it'll get to either me or my staff.

[00:31:47] **Tamara Poles:** Because I 'cause I don't do this alone. I have volunteers that volunteer their time and help out greatly, and they're amazing. And I also have consultants. So if you are a scientist or a STEM professional that is very specific and you have very specific needs, I do have a, an entire bench of scientists and stem professionals that do align or will likely align with your questions or your field. So I can even pair you up 'cause we do consultations, we do workshops, we do all kinds of stuff. So you can find me anywhere. But yeah, your first guess is universalscicom.com.

[00:32:22] **Sarah McLusky:** Fantastic.

[00:32:22] **Sarah McLusky:** We'll make sure we get those links and put them in the show notes if they can find them.

[00:32:25] **Tamara Poles:** Awesome. That'll be great.

[00:32:27] **Sarah McLusky:** Thank you so much, Tamara, for joining us.

[00:32:30] **Tamara Poles:** Thank you so much for having me.

[00:32:32] **Sarah McLusky:** Thanks for listening to Research Adjacent. If you're listening in a podcast app, please check you're subscribed and then use the links in the episode description to find full show notes and to follow the podcast on LinkedIn or Instagram. You can also find all the links and other episodes at www.researchadjacent.com.

[00:32:50] **Sarah McLusky:** Research Adjacent is presented and produced by Sarah McLusky, and the theme music is by Lemon Music Studios on Pixabay and you, yes you, get a big gold star for listening right to the end. See you next time.