Kathryn: Welcome to episode 38 of Compass, I'm your host Kathryn Hunter. Are you looking for a remote job, but it seems like your resume isn't even being seen? Today, Rucheli Berry and I talk about that and more when we discuss becoming a remote support engineer. I wanted to let you know, currently, I am offering free one on one brainstorming sessions, to help you find your location independent path. To book, visit compasspod.com/brainstorming and let's get started. You're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent womxn about their work and the paths that got them there. We get into their stories of struggle and success, finding clients, figuring out what to charge, and of course, we talk money. Join us and take the next step in finding your direction. I wanted to let you know, currently, I am offering free one on one brainstorming sessions, to help you find your location independent path. To book, visit compasspod.com/brainstorming and let's get started. Rucheli, welcome to the show.

Rucheli: Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Kathryn: I like to start with your early life and see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five?

Rucheli: I was completely convinced I would be an astronaut.

Kathryn: And how had that changed by the time you left high school?

Rucheli: To be honest, it actually didn't, I was still pretty convinced that I was going to work in the space industry. I actually developed scoliosis in high school so I knew I wasn't going to be an astronaut, but I decided I was going to be an aerospace engineer instead.

Kathryn: So I'm guessing you pursued college?

Rucheli: I did. I went to college for aerospace engineering originally and ended up switching my major about halfway through to manufacturing engineering.

Kathryn: What does that entail?

Rucheli: So a lot of it is working in factories to make things more efficient, to make things more cost efficient, time efficient, higher quality. So, I went into that instead of aerospace just because there were more job opportunities and it ended up being a pretty good decision because it also gave me some leadership experience as well.

Kathryn: Is there anything from that you use now?

Rucheli: I think the problem solving approach is still very similar in terms of how to like troubleshoot and really get deep into the process of what a customer is doing, but I don't use any of the actual manufacturing skills because now I'm working more in software.

Kathryn: How did you get into being location independent?

Rucheli: It actually started when I was still working in a factory. I switched into software engineering several years ago, but I did work in factories for a little while and after I graduated college, the factory that I had been working at wanted to keep me on as a part time contractor, even though I was determined to go travel for a year or two. And so I started doing data analysis remotely for them while I was in Israel, actually and just kept it, kept that up after I got back to the United States for a little bit before moving on to my next job. And that was really my first foray into it.

Kathryn: So I'd like to talk a little bit more about how, how you swung that. So you went in to them, you said actually you tell me...

Rucheli: So I, I had worked for them for about a year and a half during college as an intern and then an independent contractor and I decided that I was not going to accept a full time job at this particular factory but wanted to travel instead, but managed to somehow convince my boss that I would be able to do something for the company while I was gone and my specialty there had really been data analysis and I went in and I'm like, look, I don't need to be here to do data analysis I'll buy myself a really good computer and I'll just take it with me and I can do data analysis from anywhere. And he was like, you know, I haven't really done this before, but you're right, you don't necessarily have to be here for that. So we ended up making an arrangement that I bought myself my own computer that could handle the type of data crunching that I needed to do and took it with me.

Kathryn: How do you describe your job to people who are just being polite when they ask?

Rucheli: So now I'm not in manufacturing engine engineering anymore. I'm in support engineering for a tech company in San Francisco and when people ask what I do, I usually just say I work in tech.

Kathryn: And when you're talking to somebody who really wants to know the details.

Rucheli: When I talk to someone who really wants to know the details, I'll get more into the fact that I'm a support engineer at a tech company in San Francisco. Which means that for the particular company that I happen to work for, which is named Plaid, it's a financial technology company, I help our developer clients like Venmo, Cash App, Robinhood, Square. I really help them use our technology in the most effective way possible.

Kathryn: How did you get started in support engineering?

Rucheli: So I actually got started in sport engineering as a result of going on maternity leave with my first child. I realized that I wanted a more flexible schedule, that I wanted to be able to stay home with my kid a little bit longer than the typical, you know, six to 12 weeks of maternity leave. And I decided that I would get into the tech industry cause I had heard great things about the tech industry having a lot of flexibility and really good pay and great benefits. So I started teaching myself how to code and I got to a point where I knew a little bit but not enough to be a full developer. And so I started applying for technical support positions at tech companies instead and ended up landing a really

fantastic remote job at a company called GitHub, which is one of the biggest startups in San Francisco. And I was totally blessed and fortunate to land that job. It was definitely a dream job and I've since moved on from that particular company, but I still do very similar work, still remote.

Kathryn: So were you specifically looking at remote listings?

Rucheli: I was, I had a short list of probably six or seven companies that I was holding out for a job at, companies that were remote or very remote friendly, that had really good pay, really good benefits and very good family oriented policies.

Kathryn: Tell us about your first major struggle.

Rucheli: So, so my first major struggle was definitely in terms of my career, finding that initial job. I think I did everything that I could possibly have done wrong, wrong. When I was doing that job search, I had the skills that I had developed, but I had my very traditional black and white times, new Roman size 12 font resume from my old engineering career that I didn't really update so much. I just like put in like, oh I learned how to code and then started sending it to every one of the remote positions that I found, like probably dozens, maybe even over a hundred different positions that I applied to. And I was blasting my resume out there without customizing it, without writing a really nice custom cover letter for each of them. And it ended up obviously being a waste of time cause I wasn't applying in a way that made tech companies excited to call me back. And it took me awhile to figure that out. And so after about three months of doing everything I could possibly do the wrong way I figured out how to do it the right way. And started taking a much more methodical approach to applying, started getting interviews and eventually had a couple of really good competing offers that I could leverage against each other.

Kathryn: How about your first major success?

Rucheli: So it was definitely landing that first job and really gaining the confidence in myself was the biggest part of it. You know, the job itself was amazing, but gaining the confidence that I was able to do this, that I was able to build a career that worked with my family life and with the lifestyle that I wanted to create opened up all sorts of doors from there.

Kathryn: Recently I've been seeing people who have been applying or looking to apply for remote positions and they're having a hard time because they need to be based in the US. Have you seen that?

Rucheli: It depends on the company. There are definitely companies that are u s only. There are also a lot of worldwide based companies that will figure out a way to contract hire you regardless of where you are. And so I think it really comes down to finding the right company to be applying for. In the tech industry, I think more and more going worldwide because really tech industries have customers that are everywhere and so if they need to support those customers that are all over the world, they need people that

are all over the world to do that. So it's really just a matter of making sure that you're looking for the right sort of tech company and that you're, you're focusing your search on those companies that do have positions available everywhere.

Kathryn: It seems to be taking people like six months to a year to find a position and longer if they're not us based. Because, it mostly seems to be us based companies and while certain western European companies that seem to be open to finding remote workers.

Rucheli: I would say there's probably about half and half in terms of like larger remote oriented tech companies. I think it's also how people apply. Again, going back to that sort of like how do you frame your experience in a way that's gonna speak to tech employers? They're looking for very specific things and sending them your standard resume with your standard cover letter without going through the effort of customizing it. It's quicker, but it's not going to get you seen faster. The fact of the matter is that a lot of these companies, like when I was hired for my first remote job, after going through that experience myself and finally figuring out this whole customization thing and figuring out how to speak in their language, the job that I ended up getting hired for, it was a 0.4% higher rate from the people that applied to the people that got hired, which is insane. It's insane. So it's really just a matter of like what can you do to like get to the top of that pile? Like 1500 people applied for the job I ended up getting and it was because I went to the extra effort of customizing my resume, customizing my cover letter, creating a project that was just for this job, like there's things that you can do, but it does take extra effort really in the end, it's quicker to just put in the extra effort.

Kathryn: When you're, when you're saying customizing, are you talking about, I don't have the language here that I think I need. There are systems that read the resumes and that's usually the first pass. Are you talking about customizing for that, like keywords there or are you talking about more speaking to the language of the person who's going to be reading it once it makes it through that first run.

Rucheli: So it's both parts. You need to be able to pass through the robot, but you also need to be speaking to the human on the other side. So when I'm working with coaching clients for example, I'm teaching them how to find the right keywords based on the job description that they're applying for. Because you need to customize those keywords for every single job you're applying for or you're not going to make it through the robot. But then once you customize with the keywords, how do you actually speak in a voice that resonates with the employer that you're trying to apply for? How do you go through that company's blog and figure out what their culture is like and what they're going to be looking for in a new hire? So it's really both sides of it, like customizing for the robot, but also customizing for further, very human hiring manager on the other side of that robot.

Kathryn: How much time do you think it, does it take to make those customizations?

Rucheli: The first few take a while. I would say once you get used to the sort of customization that you're going to be doing, it can take like three to four hours per application, but again, if you're only doing 10 of them, then three to four hours of per application doesn't really matter as much as if you're doing hundreds of applications

Kathryn: And that's also including a project?

Rucheli: It depends on the role that you're applying for. A lot of times what I mean by project is, can be something as simple as, you know, if you're applying for a sales position or a business development position, reading through the case studies on the company's blog of like successful customers that they've had and then doing a little tiny bit of research on a customer that they might want to reach out to and putting together a quick like 10 slide pitch deck on how you would pitch that company for the, the company that you're applying to. Like how would you, how would you sell this product if you were already employed there? So that can take, you know, maybe 40 minutes of research and an hour and a half to put together and that's like a whole project that you've now just done as part of your application. It's going to blow the hiring manager out of the water compared to just like a plain black and white resume that someone threw at their form.

Kathryn: And how would you include that in your application?

Rucheli: A lot of times I would put a link to it in my, in my resume or cover letter. Sometimes both. Really cover letter is where you would put it, at the bottom of the cover letter. Like, I'm so excited to speak to you about this role and in the meantime, here's a sample presentation that I put together for how I would reach out to a potential customer to sell this company's product. Whatever. There's, there's better ways to phrase it that really depend on the job that you're applying for, but in the, in the bottom of the cover letter is a great place to introduce the hiring manager and the recruiter to that project.

Kathryn: If you could start fresh today knowing everything you already know, is there anything you would do differently?

Rucheli: I think obviously the, the job search itself would have been very different. I know now that it's much more important to have a very specific role that you're applying for at a specific type of company and really talk to the recruiter and the hiring manager at that company when you're writing your application and tell them why you're the perfect person for this particular role at this particular company. And that was something that took me a really long time to figure out and something that I've been able to carry over from that first role into subsequent roles in the tech industry and really I think the biggest thing that comes with that is just having the confidence to speak to your skills. Having the confidence to know that there's someone out there that's looking for me. There's some, there are companies out there that are waiting to hire me as long as I put myself out there. I'm confident in my skills, my abilities.

Kathryn: Do you have a typical workday since you're more, well not in office but working that kind of, kind of job?

Rucheli: I do have, I my typical workday, there's a lot of flexibility still and now I have two kids. I have a five year old that just started kindergarten this morning actually, which is crazy and a two and a half year old. So my day starts whenever they wake up, usually around 6:00 or 6:30 and the first part of my morning is just spending time with them, getting them fed and dressed and ready for school. And then dropping them off at school and

then I come home and I start up my computer, check my email, check my Slack for any important messages and then start working through, you know, since I'm in support engineering, I spend about half of my day answering questions from our customers and then the other half of my day fixing bugs in the product and working on new features.

Rucheli: That part of my day definitely varies. Sometimes there's something important that needs to be handled in the morning for a customer. And I spend the first half of my day working strictly on customer issues and sometimes I'm on a project the entire day and not answering specific questions at all. So it really depends. The day is actually pretty variable as far as the specific work that I'm doing. But I typically shut my computer down around 5:00 or 5:30 and my husband goes and gets the kids from school and then we have dinner together. And if I have to finish something up or if I had something come up in the middle of the day with the kids and needed to take some time off, my schedule is flexible enough for me to do that and then I can finish my day after the kids go to sleep if I need to.

Kathryn: Do you keep up with any kind of continuing education, formal or informal?

Rucheli: I occasionally will take, like an online course that's related to my job. A lot of what I'm doing now actually is I coach part time in addition to my nine to five job and all of my extra spare time that I have with a nine to five job and my two little kids. So a lot of the continuing education I've been doing recently is how to better coach people and that's really been something that it's been exciting to get into and something that I'm looking forward to using in my career in a management position as well.

Kathryn: What are you excited about right now in support?

Rucheli: Support is such an interesting field because I think there's a lot of misunderstanding around what support in the tech industry is. I think typically when we think support, we think of like very call center, sort of not high quality but more high volume sort of support and support in the tech industry isn't really like that at all. It's a really valued part of a major tech company. So there's a lot of opportunities for people from all sorts of backgrounds to get into it. And you know, I work with people that are former librarians or you know, I have a coworker that's a car, that was a car seat technician before she got into tech support. So there's really like an interesting opportunity for people from all sorts of backgrounds to use their people skills to use their empathy to use their communication skills and come into the tech industry and get all of the pay and the benefits and the location independence without needing to go back to school for a computer science degree, for example. So that's really exciting to me. Just like watching how much opportunity is really opening up in the field.

Kathryn: Now it's time to get into the numbers. What would you say your income range is and how long have you been doing the work?

Rucheli: So I've been working in the support engineering field since 2015 so about four and a half years. My income is currently $155,000 and I would say that the range can go anywhere from $60,000 up to $200,000 depending on your experience. I will say that there's a lot

of opportunity for growth in this particular field. So I came in to support engineering and my first remote tech job right around $80,000 and have since almost doubled my income in four and a half years. So it's really exciting. It's an exciting time to be in the industry.

Kathryn: You said you, you started learning to code, so is this a field where you really need coding skills?

Rucheli: It's interesting. I think for support engineering, some coding skills are necessary. You definitely don't have to have a computer science degree. You could be a self taught programmer and you don't need to be completely fluent in programming to be a tech support engineer. But there's other support fields within the tech industry as well. There's account support, there's terms of service and billing support and those you don't really necessarily need any coding at all. And there's still a lot of really good career growth opportunities. So I would say it depends on what type of support you're doing, but not necessarily.

Kathryn: When it came time to the negotiate your rate, how much play was there in that, do you know?

Rucheli: Yeah, so it's interesting. My first job, I was totally clueless on the concept of negotiation and I was so excited by the number that they threw out there that I was like, yeah, let's just do it. Cause it was very, it was like ahead of anything I had ever had before. And that's pretty typical in the tech industry, I think. People coming in from other industries get these offers that are so far above what they had outside of the tech industry just because that's how the tech industry works that they are hesitant to negotiate. And I've obviously since learned better that there is pretty much always room for negotiation and have subsequently done that both in you know, reviews during a current job and also during switching jobs. So there's, there's usually a pretty fair amount of negotiation that's possible there and not just in the pay.

Rucheli: Also in terms of equity, for example, tech companies are really big into stock options or restricted stock units and those are pretty much always negotiable and even sometimes benefits, you know, if moving across country and you are taking a remote job for the first time, a lot of times you can negotiate that. You can get an office stipend to help set up your new office or you can negotiate getting an internet stipend or a mobile phone stipend. These are things that they may not necessarily bring up during the conversation, but a lot of times companies are more than willing to make accommodations for stuff like that.

Kathryn: Are there any skills or programming languages that you would recommend beginners get a grip on before they start applying?

Rucheli: I think it depends on the type of support again, so you can start applying for support positions in the tech industry without any coding knowledge whatsoever. Any sort of accounts or billing or terms of service sort of support positions, you don't need any coding. If you're specifically interested in tech support and the career path that that

provides, and again, I wouldn't, I wouldn't recommend learning how to code unless it's something that you're actually interested in. I think people who attempt to learn how to code just because someone told them it was a good idea isn't necessarily a great option because it takes a lot of really intense focus to learn. But if it's something that you're interested in and you've always kind of liked logic puzzles or mathematics or things like that, then I think personally in my opinion, Javascript is probably the best language to start with because it's used by every company everywhere. Pretty much like even if even companies who use something different for the back end of their applications are still using Javascript somewhere in the front end. And there are companies that use Javascript for both front end and back end of their applications. So in my opinion that that's a language that's always really good to start with and you can learn from there because once you know one language, it's really just a matter of changing syntax.

Kathryn: What's your number one tip for women looking to get into remote support?

Rucheli: Have confidence. It's really my number one tip. Know that you're worth it. Know that there are people out there looking for you. Know that the skills that you have, even if they don't seem related, are absolutely applicable to a job in tech. And it's just a matter of learning how to frame it in a way that tech employers really resonate with, but that it's totally possible. Don't doubt yourself. You're worth it.

Kathryn: What are your next steps?

Rucheli: My next steps? So I'm currently working on getting into a management position in the support engineering field and also working on building my coaching business where I help women break into remote roles in tech as well.

Kathryn: Where can listeners find you?

Rucheli: So I would definitely recommend finding me on my website remotelypossible.tech. So, just like it sounds remotely possible. And then .tech instead of.com that's my website where I do career coaching. But I also have a really cool free newsletter that I send out every week with dozens of remote jobs in the tech industry. So if anyone's interested in finding a remote role in the tech industry similar to the one that I have, that would be an awesome place to go. And you can find me on facebook.com/remotelypossibletech there as well. Or on Twitter, R. U. C. H. E. L. I. B. E. R. R. Y.

Kathryn: Alright. And we will get all of that in the show notes just to make it super easy for everybody to connect. Rucheli, thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.

Rucheli: It's totally my pleasure. Thanks so much for having me on.

Kathryn: If you want your own location independent life and are eager to take that next step, join us in compass insiders where every week I send you actionable tips, inspiration, and motivation so you can take that next step towards going remote. Join us now at compasspod.com/insiders Did you enjoy this episode of Compass? If so, please take a moment to write a review. Leaving a review helps other women find us so they can find

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