

[00:00](#)

In any way that we need to [inaudible] sound check. Are we good on here? Would you be so kind as to start by giving us your name and the title that you have? So many titles which are tied to like us.

Cristina:

My name is **Christina Bicchieri**. I am a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. I spare you the title, but that's, that's just [inaudible]. And uh, ...

[\[START\]](#)

Cristina:

I work in the intersection between behavioral theory, uh, game theory and, uh, you know, psychology. So it's a wonderful intersection of all these fields. Yes.

Tim:

How did you come to that intersection?

Cristina:

It's very interesting. Um, I was born as a, a philosopher of science, also studied economics and, uh, I got, uh, very interested at the very beginning of my career. It studied in Cambridge, in England. I got very interested in decision theory and then game theory and the epistemic foundations.

[01:08](#)

And one of the problems in game theory is that as multiple equilibria, and it's very hard to predict which equilibrium the player would play. And I remember, uh, you know, looking at a small paper by David Kreps who was a very famous game theory stuff. Any of these papers, he said, "Oh no, that the, the problem is, is not that great the problem because some equilibria are social norms." Oh, that's interesting. And uh, and from then I went and look at all the literature I could find on social norms, what they are and so on and so forth. And there is lots of later, of course in the social sciences, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, et cetera. The problem for me, um, and they come to my life now was the definition was not what we call operational. What does it mean? That the concept was not defined well enough to make predictions or explain.

[02:19](#)

How can we say that there is a social norm? How do we measure it? How can we predict that people will, you know, follow the norm if we cannot measure it? Okay. So my work has been dedicated since then to give that a very specific measurable notion of social norm. And this is the 2006 book, *The Grammar Society* that lots of people are quoting. Of course, after I did that work, then I started getting interested in actually using these, you know,

Tim:

what a great idea!

Cristina:

Exactly. I started doing it, uh, experiments, lab experiments, uh, in which I basically play change people's expectations and I come in and go to the definition of expectations and see if their behavior changes. Why do I talk of expectation? **Because social norms are bundles of expectations**. Okay. So what is a social norm is, are all of behavior within a population is not huge on university and they are often very local.

[03:37](#)

**And within this population, uh, people will have beliefs about other people in the population following this particular role.** They will have, and this is what I call them theoretical expectation, is the belief about how people behave. Okay. And, but they also will have a normative expectation, which is a belief about what people in the population approval of or disapprove of what they think should be done or shouldn't be done. Now we can have all these things, all of these sorts of expectation and they have no effect on behavior. This happens. **Now the interesting thing for the social norm, these expectations must have an effect on behavior if it's to be a social norm.** Exactly, yes. So we need both these expectation, but we also need what I call a **conditional preference**, a preference for following the role given the existence of these expectations. Wow. These is crucial.

[04:44](#)

So I started doing experiment, uh, you know, relating to cooperation and fairness. Well, w we sort of know what people think, especially in America, but even cross-culturally, you know, it's, it's quite clear. And what I did that I manipulate people expectation and see if I change that empirical expectation, will they still behave? Nicely answer no. If I change that normative expectation, will this be behaving nicely? Answer no. So I wanted to prove to show that behavior. Okay. **The preference for the type of behavior is conditional on expectations. So, if this conditional expectation, it means if I varied, the expectation behavior will change.** And I show that in many experiments I did. Now UNICEF got really interested in my work

Kurt:

I can understand why.

Cristina:

And they said, Oh, we never thought that, uh, you know, our policies are aimed at changing behavior back to, we never thought about the manipulating expectations about social norms, et cetera.

[05:57](#)

And so I started doing consulting for UNICEF and I've done consulting on lots of issues that going from child marriage to female genital cutting to child nutrition to violence against women. And finally, with the Gates Foundation on open defecation elimination. And in all these cases I have developed measure of people, beliefs, expectations and tools to decide whether these expectations have a bite on behavior or not. Right. Okay.

Tim:

So tell us about the, uh, the work that you're doing in India right now. This, this project, this study sounds fascinating.

Cristina:

Yeah. Okay. So one thing that I must premise is that the best technology will not help unless people have a reason to adopt it.

Kurt:

Right.

Cristina: Okay. And what give people a reason to change behavior? Very often, um, international organization have relied on giving people information. So I give you information about how bad the open the vacation is for your health.

[07:13](#) I give you information about how fantastic the implementation of technology is. Exactly. Yes. **We know that people don't respond that well to information.** And so the question is that what will you give them a reason to change behavior. And so what we do, we do surveys. I do surveys in which I analyze people's expectations about, well what are the people that matter to me? And I come to this point in a moment, are doing or are planning to do and uh, and other kinds of the normative expectation, what do these people think should be done? You know, I'll get just people think, Oh, are your to do know who are these people? Okay. It's not that world. No. But is what we call the **reference network**. Yes. So when I, uh, ask, uh, you know, uh, in a village, uh, about, you know, what do you think other people are doing or planning to do?

[08:23](#) I exactly know who these other people are because I do, before this kind of a questionnaire, I have an analysis of networks. Because properties of networks, not individuals, but these are individual networks.

Tim: This is my network and your networking. Kurt's network.

Cristina: Absolutely. Individual network, usually in a community. Okay. If we think of a, an open suffocation versus using and building toilets, et cetera, the network we can define very clearly the network. And I tell you some piece surprising one obvious uh, you know, action would be Oh the neighbor's matter. Yeah. **And what we discover is the neighbors don't matter at all unless they are relative or close friends.** These are the people who matter when you have to decide to build a toilet, if it's broken, how to repair it. Um, if you need to borrow money home to ask and so on and so forth. And we don't you talk about that.

[09:34 \(Kurt:\)](#) So in, in the India component, what you found is that my neighbors don't matter as much as those family close friends, regardless of how you said their small villages. And even if you're living across the street from them, it may not matter. That is fascinating. Which is that what we would have possibly expected would have expected. I,

[09:57 \(Cristina:\)](#) I myself expected [inaudible]. This is why it's so important to do a network analysis. Yes, exactly. Because we cannot talk normally in general, they are really a relative to a reference network. So we have to know that reference network basically in order to enact changes.

Tim: So then how do you start to enact changes if information is not enough? No. Is simply telling people this is not enough. Are you going to rely on the reference networks?

Cristina: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. That's very, very important. And there is another component that I'm very keen about, which is **TREND SETTERS**. In every community I have studied, not only about open the defecation, but you know, uh, violence, uh, feeding children and whatnot. There are some people who seem to be more dedicated to change, more convinced that things should, uh, should be better in a different way. And, uh, the interesting thing is what are the characteristics of these trend setters.

[11:14](#) And, uh, I just published on a, you know, Wharton has a, uh, a little, uh, website journal and I published, uh, the result is to basically have the study that I've been doing in India for the government and UNICEF on the following thing. Uh, in India the government enacted a program called swatch butter. And the program wants basically to change the face of sanitation in it. Yeah. Okay. Say it, everybody will have, every family will have a, and we'll use it and keep it functioning on its own as well. And the interesting thing that the project have been relatively successful, if you think that India is an enormous continent, you know, it's very hard to change and change it quickly. But it has been, again, not completely, but I let him be successful and they eat that. I've seen fingers. How, what was it coordinated from the president down to the villages?

[12:24](#) Yeah, because you need a lot of coordination and a lot of cooperation. And my view trendsetters at every level have induced, basically change. And so I studied the properties of these trendsetters and I try when we do something new to identify them within a community. [Okay.] And one analysis I have done is that that will be trend setters that initiate something completely new and that will be trendsetter that will initiate abandonment of a norm, which may be bad, like female genital cutting or violence against women. You know, using toilet to, you know, start,

Kurt: ...start something versus stopping something.

Cristina: Exactly. When you start, something is good if you are at the center of a network, because there are lots of people have serving you, people generally trust you. You know, you have to be trusted to get the center of a network you are, and therefore you have a lot of leverage in convincing people, start showing people you can do it.

**[INADIBLE FROM 13:27 TO 13:37] CUT AT 13:26.**

[13:33](#) You have to be pretty fun. Wow. Abandoning the norm is that to be pretty fair out. Why? Because norms that come with sanctions if you don't obey the norm, I doing this action. Yeah. No. If you go to the center of the network, two things may happen. First of all, lots of people absurd. You. Yeah. So the potential of lots of people sanctioning you is very high.

**[INADIBLE FROM 13:27 TO 13:37] RESUME AT 13:58.**

Kurt: So it comes back to my personal, uh, components of potentially having a negative impact of changing that.

Cristina: And the, and the second issue when you're out at the center of the network, uh, probably you have a certain power, but the power is a two-edge sword. That thing that you know, goes against what people firmly believe or follow. They may not trust you anymore. So is that a delicate to change, a bad norm when you start from the center?

14:34 [Kurt:] So if you're in the center and you change the norm, you might actually lose that center of power because you are no longer being the trust. That is the risk. So if it's less likely that you're going to do that, but if you're on the peripheral, you already, you're not in that center of power. It's easier for you to do what you have to do it.

Tim: Yeah. So, so also I'm taking away that the person who is promoting the new norm versus the person who is demoting the old norm. These things would be different.

Cristina: Different type of network positions, different network positions. Okay. And probably different people. People. Yes. Yes.

**CUT AT 15:17.600**

15:18 [Kurt:] You were talking before we get on the podcast, we had talked a little bit about the fact that behavior isn't changed by normative, uh, components. It is, however, on the descriptive or the empirical component, which surprise me because the idea that we should do something is, is in my belief would be a component of saying yes, that should drive my behavior. However, what you're saying is that doesn't drive behavior as much as hear what people are actually doing.

**[INADIBLE FROM 15:55 TO 17:16]**

**CUT AT 15:18.250.**

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15:54 Not that, uh, [inaudible] normal inflammation versus, uh, empirical information. Have definitive signaling power. Okay. Okay. So if I gave you normative information, for example, Oh, most people that [inaudible] network, they cared about cut that one should do XYZ. Okay. What do people infer? And I have data to support what I'm saying. People do not infer that most of these people do access. No, not even lying. Got your before me. We may say, yes, these should be done by then. I don't know. So it's the political reasons why we don't do it,

but so in my experiment, um, I show that when you even notice that the message that [inaudible] to them con is not straightforward.

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**RESUME AT 17:22.000.**

16:58

It's not. So it's the political correct answer that people feel that you're giving, but you don't actually, I should say this, but I don't, but we don't necessarily believe that they're doing that.

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**CUT AT 17:10.670.**

17:11

Oh no. That the normative doesn't lead to the empirical. Instead, if I, most people do XO, keep it curly, people infer, Oh, most people approve of that. Most people think that should be done. Okay.

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**RESUME AT 17:22.000.**

Cristina:

Now of course, if I tell you most people wear shoes, yes. You know, that's less relevant. But did I tell you, you know, most people do not accept it, but I write what do you infer that most people disagree with being bribed is not acceptable. **Okay. If instead they tell you, Oh, most people think bribing is not acceptable. You infer that most people do not take bribes. Not necessarily. Not necessarily that there's in a symmetry in the inference withdrawal from the empirical to the normative.** Now, why do I think this is important? Because when we do nudging and so forth...

Kurt:

...one of our favorite terms.

18:15

[Cristina:] Okay. We give information about other people and the information may be empirical with other people too or normative. Yeah. even in a normative message. **Now what I am warning people is that they pay attention to the message you choose because if you just give a moralizing message and normative message, people make completely discounted.** Okay. May not fair that all. Yes. People that do that, not at all. When you give an empirical message, you have to pay attention to something different. That is if, let's say he need that. If I give you the message: "99% of people pay their taxes." Are you going to believe that? No. Well, because he's a, his calls, it feels a little shy.

Tim:

If it were 75% or 65% then I might be willing to believe it.

Cristina:

Exactly. Or in a country where there is a lot of bribing and it is quite endemic. You know, letting people know how many people bribe, they say it's a really high by being, uh, these induces people to buy more, right?

[19:32](#) Because they start thinking is accepted. It's the norm. Exactly. So you have to pay a lot of attention when you give an empirical message what sort of message you gave.

Kurt: And does it have to relate back to that referential network to, to, to be, uh, relevant as well?

Cristina: Absolutely. Absolutely. And now you'll have to decide what that evidence network is. Right. You know, if we're in Nigeria, I'm doing a study of corruption in Nigeria. Okay. If we in Nigeria and uh, you know, we start sending the message that, uh, most people gave us, you know, bribe the police, which is the case. Okay. Okay. Uh, what am I doing? Well, I am almost inducing more diving. Yes. So I have to pay attention. The problem is there are situation and who's that reference network is people like me living in Nigeria who drive the car, who have a high chance of meeting a police man or woman that we ask for a bribe. Okay. My network in this case. Now, in this case, when there is extensive bad behavior, what do we do? Okay,

[INADIBLE FROM 20:38 TO 20:58 – Cristina switches to new track]

**CUT AT 20:37.530.**

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[20:48](#) we want to send a message. Hang on. I think we just ran out of battery. Just lost battery. So I'm going to turn this over to you. All right.

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**RESUME AT 20:59.500.**

Cristina: So what's going to happen in a situation where the majority, the behavior is negative. OK. you cannot cheat. Uh, you cannot tell.

Kurt: No, the majority behavior is positive because people know that because they will realize the 99% of people who pay taxes, that's not true. I don't believe you.

Cristina: Exactly. You cannot tell is not very effective to give a moralizing message. So saying, Oh, you shouldn't, uh, you know, pay bribes because et cetera, people say, yeah, yeah, yeah. But you know, most people do that. So the only alternative that I see and I'm looking at that especially in Nigeria, is **try to isolate some situations in which indeed that people behave in a positive, prosocial way, but show that that is an advantage to do that.**

[21:55](#) [Kurt:] What do you mean by advantage and economic advantage?

Cristina: ...advantage, you know, and not a model advantage because people may not care that much about that moral superiority, let's say. But they do care about a different type of incentives today. And some incentive can be just the monetary

incentives, you know, Oh, this community does better economically, but they can also be a reputation that is a, Oh, if people know that I behave in such a way, they want to do more business with me, they want to have more relationship with me, et cetera, et cetera. So we have to stress the positive incentive that are related to, you know, being. A small group is a positive small group.

Kurt: And by focusing on that small referential group in that context, then you can start driving change, uh, cross. Uh, absolutely, absolutely. At least that context and maybe even expanding it the larger,

Cristina: I tell you something else...

[22:56](#)

A, I am a big supporter of soap operas, soap operas, absolutely. Okay. Why? Uh, we have lots of data also. Economists have studied that and they show important demographic changes. Um, you know, uh, following very successful soap operas, no soap op. Ed, I may present characters that play the role of trendsetters. Ah, so in my book, uh, *Norms in the Wild*, the last chapter is called Trendsetters. And, uh, part of this chapter I talk about soap operas that as, because sometimes intervention that we do in villages, you know, are not scalable. Yes. You'll have to scale up intervention. And how do scale up with the media, your media are important, but what is important? There are lots of studies that show that people, especially long-term soap operas tend to identify with the character. Yes. And so good and bad absolutely go then bed. Yes. And they, the old policy of entertainment, which is soap opera that should educate people, uh, you know, in some way to behave better.

[24:17](#)

For example, think of the toilets. So let's think we have a very successful [inaudible] where people don't talk about toilets at all, but go to the toilet on and off, you know, they'd go to the toilet. So it's a normal thing to do and they have a toilet. So their conduct, which is a highly respected, a coveted model, uses a toilet. Okay. **The important thing is this character have to be people you can identify with, right? So at your level, basically age wise, demographically wise, et cetera, et cetera. But there are lots of extremely good example of scaling up certain intervention through support.**

[25:00](#)

[Kurt:] It's interesting. We did an interview with a gentleman, Rob Burnet, and uh, he's the leader of A Well Told Story, which is, uh, a nonprofit in Kenya. Uh, they don't use soap operas, but he had a comic book, um, where the main instigator of the comic or that main character in the comic book was a recently graduated, um, unemployed heist, you know, couldn't get a job, but he runs a, uh, uh, pirate DJ FM radio station. So again, relatable to the, uh, group that he was targeting. And, and they focused in on having these descriptive, you know, these norms that they were doing. Like how do you know, having safe sex, having the, you know, components around business acumen and how do you go about doing that? And that in it's been very, very effective.



[25:52](#)

[Cristina:] Absolutely. And this is a, you know what I'm talking about with the Gates Foundation, UNICEF, etc. I say, well let's work a, and the best people doing the thing are BBC Media. BBC Media has an enormous, uh, experience and tradition of doing this kind of stuff. And the idea is let's do, uh, you know, let's scale up these interventions using the media because this character can be trend setter, can show you, Oh this can be done. This guy we'd go or girl would go to lots of hurdles like normal girl would do, but they, they try and fill the end. Okay. They triumph the end. Yes. That's fantastic. Oh I see. Is involved in pro social, Oh the BBC, is that involved in that? Yes. I talk to them in India in particular. Yes. They are involved. Yes.

Kurt:

We love that.

Cristin:

Yes, BBC media. They do this kind of work and not just in India but in other countries. Yes.

[27:00](#)

[Kurt:] All right. Well Christina, we are here at the norms and behavior change at the university of Penn. That's conference. Um, so tell us a little bit about this conference, cause I know you were instrumental in putting it together and what you're trying to achieve here.

[27:13](#)

[Cristina:] I'm trying to achieve a great cross-disciplinary discussion about norms and behavior and change and you know, economists that now behavioral economies are doing lots of experiments on, you know, behavioral change. They got very interested in norms, but sociologists, anthropologists, social psychologists have been interested in norms for a long, long time. **And so what I'm trying to do is sort of build bridges between disciplines, uh, and across the disciplines.** And you see that in some of the papers that are presented. You know, for example, today we have this paper that uses **Alan Fisker**. Yeah. And you know, idea of **scripts**, et cetera. And I myself in my 2006 book actually use **Alan Fisker** because I think norms are part of **scripts** and every society has a certain number of **scripts** ways that we have to interpret reality. Yeah. The different scripts are based upon absolutely components. Yes, yes. So I market screen, if I start showing an interaction, which exchange money typically is a market script, typically we have certain expectation about each other. Yeah. And we know from experiments the same experiment with the same amount of money pay off. If you present it as a market interaction, people will do one thing if you presented it as a corporative endeavor, people will do different things. So the script is different, the amount of money and the actions that you can choose at the same you will behave differently. So,

[28:59](#)

[Kurt:] So, bringing in these different disciplinary components, the, the economics along with the social, uh, the anthropology, geology, the psychology in getting those cross pollination between the two. And I saw this morning even the questions that came out, we had, there was a political component who asked a very insightful question to an economist who was talking and very different in perspective of how things,

[29:25](#)

[Cristina:] and, and I think unfortunately, the reason there's not enough cross-pollination, uh, you know, among disciplines, and these is particularly relevant, not just theoretically, which is already an interesting point, but from the viewpoint of the public policy intervention.

Tim:

And why isn't there more of this sort of intersectionality sort of this, this cross disciplinary work?

Cristina:

Well, uh, one reason is that, uh, when you study economics or when you study political science that are tracks that, that are not particularly interdisciplinary. So the way that disciplines are set up okay, are quite separate from each other. So you have to make an effort to bring them together. And second, there are some costs. You're not a basic human capital cost and because you have to learn something about another discipline that this costs time basically, so that there are some costs, but the benefits I think are enormous, yeah.

Tim:

But, um, yet there's all sorts of research that supports the idea that this kind of interdisciplinary work yields better results.

[30:47](#)

Absolutely.

Tim:

And, uh, and is, is your program here at the university of Pennsylvania intending to, uh, obviously you're very intentional with bringing this to the students, uh, as well as the academic community. Is the hope that the students will actually go out and in their application be more interdisciplinary?

Cristina:

Absolutely. Um, you know, you may know that I started this Master in a Behavioral Decision Science at Penn, which is getting really very successful. Evidently there was a need for that and is not like the typical master's MBAs in business schools. Why? Because there is lot of interdisciplinary work. We push very much applications. Okay. And uh, uh, for example, at the end of the course that he is a so called capstone experience where students can do either research with a professor, with the faculty, but most of the students, uh, do internships with the, it could be UNICEF people that the Gates Foundation, it could be Microsoft in their corporate world as well.

[31:59](#)

[Tim:] Right. I'm from corporate world.

Cristina:

They go back to corporate and try to put into practice on a specific piece of a research problem they have, what they have learned. And that's why I think it's very successful. That is terrific. Is there anything else we want to ask about the cohort specifically or or, or the, or programming?

**CUT AT 32:11:947**

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Tim/Kurt: Do you have any I don't go ahead if you have some cohort yet. Well, actually, yeah. Yeah.

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**RESUME AT 32:24.000**

KURT: So within the cohort who, who are the people that are joining this new masters? Cause we heard from Chris Nave that you have some really interesting folks.

Cristina: We have very interesting people. Uh, many of now come from industry, from companies, uh, uh, consulting. But, uh, I would say the majority, okay. Come from uh, the business world. But uh, you know, also some come from university programs. Okay, okay. Uh, some may want to go and do a PhD and they always have questions.

[33:02](#) Well I want to do an interdisciplinary PhD. How do I do that? And that I had lots of barriers to that. Uh, but apart from that, uh, uh, I would say that a lot of people come from industry or want to go into industry and consulting. And also because I was very surprised to discover that at least in the United States, but those in parts of Europe and big company seems to have now a behavioral unit. Yes. And yes. Many more in Europe. Uh, yes, in Europe also, governments are very keen on that. And even local governments seen on it. And, uh, this is that interesting because for example, we've been trying to help, but the Philadelphia government, with problems they had about recycling or way to put garbage and so on and so forth. Or also is, is incredible in Philadelphia when there is a heatwave, lots of people die.

[34:03](#) [Kurt:] Oh, a heat wave. Yes. And again, there's some behavioral intervention.

[34:07](#) [Cristina:] Yes. Behavioral interventions. And what they did up to now was to give information to older people, especially that, that the most vulnerable about, Oh, that are cooling places. You can go to the library, you can go to the church, but people don't do that. Right? And so the question is how do you change this behavior? Okay. So we're working on all these kinds of very interesting problems. You're knowing which you save lights in this case.

[34:33](#) [Kurt:] Well, and that's a, again, your work in India, you know, all the stuff with UNICEF. That's what behavioral science and that component of looking at this from a different angle can really do. It's not about giving people information, it's about looking at how do we change their behavior because we're human and, and as humans we don't always act in based on information. We don't always act in sometimes even in our best interest

[35:01](#) [Cristina:] Most of the time! So

[35:07](#)

[Kurt:] Very true. Well Christine, I don't know if you know this, but one of the things that we do at the end of these sessions, and usually it's Tim that's driving this is we ask about music, cause name is behavioral grooves. And we had a, we had a thing about music at the beginning. So what type of music do you tend to listen to and do you listen to music when you're working or, or do you need it silent when you're working?

[35:31](#)

[Cristina:] Well, it depends on the type of work. Uh, if it is a little boring. I will listen to music if I have to be super concentrated, I won't. There are two type of music I like, uh, I like classical music. Okay. I like Mozart. I like opera and art.

Tim:

Uh, well coming from Italy, the best opera ever created is Italian opera. [inaudible] good. You show it.

Cristina:

I love that. I love Verdi. But I also love that like hard rock. Okay. Can you give us an example? Uh, you know, they you to or uh, you know, I love Bruce Springsteen and the conservation confession first. This is sounded out here. We did. We have, we have done confession. I love it.

Tim:

But, uh, okay. So what about in the times when the work is boring and you want to do, are you looking to stimulate your, your emotions and your brain with a particular type of music when, when the task is boring or, or a routine?

Cristina:

Uh, more than stimulating the mind. I want to relax. Okay. Because, uh, when something is boring, I get irritated.

[36:56](#)

[Tim:] And yet you and George Loewenstein,

Cristina:

Oh, George says the same thing?

Tim:

This boredom is irritating for him.

Cristina:

Absolutely. For me to, and therefore I have to listen to some things to think because I get very irritated. You give us an example that, Oh, you would go back to Mozart, that some other, uh, classical is very so think for me.

Tim:

That's terrific. Okay. Thank you very much for your time and being on the behavioral groups podcast with us today.

Cristina:

Thank you to you both. Thank you. It was very pleasant. Bye.

Kurt:

Oh, that was fantastic. Thank you so much.