

Bonusly Presents

Company Culture: 1 on 1

Interviews and insights from some of the world's top people ops and culture leaders.

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Dr. Michael Moon: Social Technology and HR Analytics at Work

Dr. Michael Moon is a leading expert on HR analytics and social technology in the workplace. Her work has helped many organizations improve performance and retention through understanding and strengthening the relationships that are their foundation.

She joined us for a discussion on the influences these tools and strategies can have on the workplace, and how organizations both large and small can benefit from them.

Putting Data to Work

During her first year at Raytheon, working for John Malanowski, the then VP of Talent Development, Dr. Moon was required - as were all employees - to become Six Sigma certified -- a methodology she found an immediate use for on her first major project, focused on candidate impressions and new hire retention.

"It was the first time that I used data for something practical. That really was the eye-opener for me. It was very exciting for me to do interviews and surveys, analyze the data, and do a root cause analysis of what was going on, and then to be able to make suggestions as a result."

This was before people analytics was really on anyone's radar.

The opportunity to use data to uncover root causes and help make more informed decisions to rectify problems worked: she was able to improve the first year new hire retention rate by 40 percent for corporate positions.

Dr. Moon realized early on that running reports, analyzing data, and making recommendations were seen as three separate competencies, yet she wanted to combine those skills into a cohesive strategy.

Social Technology

While implementing HR systems, Dr. Moon identified more untapped opportunities, recognizing unique applications social technologies could have in the workplace.

While working on her PhD, Moon stumbled upon an app previously available on Facebook, called [Touchgraph](#). It essentially produces an ego network where the user is pictured in the center, and their connections appear, based on the structure of the relationship you share with them.

"I had a cathartic moment when I saw that graph. I didn't feel alone. I felt like, 'Wow! I'm a part of something I'm actually connected to other people.'

That was the moment I realized there is an application for this in the workplace. Something as simple as being able to see how you're connected to other people can be so incredibly powerful. It was from there, I decided to explore how social technology could influence the creation of relationships between people in the workplace — creating connections that might not otherwise be there — and other outcomes such as how it impacts collaboration both positively and negatively, enhances creativity, potentially reduce duplication of effort on projects, and facilitate increased knowledge sharing."

A More Collaborative Organizational Environment

Although human capital can be plural, Dr. Moon pointed out that, "the focus on human capital tends to be on individuals, usually your high potentials and "A" players". In other words, answering the question "how do we develop the people we've identified as having the most impact on the organization?"

Dr. Moon then outlined the concept of social capital, which has a different

focus.

"When we talk about creating stronger employee relationships, not relationships in general — that's social capital.

Social capital in an organization represents the relationships that exist between people and the value that results from those relationships.

Relationships at their core are formed by trust and norms of reciprocity: an expectation that if I help someone, they're likely to help me. I'm going to help them in any way I can, and trust them to do the same.

Social capital is really the fabric of an organization that you cannot replicate. You can't replicate the connections and relationships that exist in an organization."

When an organization prioritizes social capital by focusing on creating better and stronger relationships in the workplace, the benefits that can be expected include:

Reducing duplication of effort -- "If you think about the number of people that may be working on a similar project across an organization, if they just knew that the other five people were working on it, the amount of time it takes to solve a problem could be reduced."

Increased innovation -- "You're also putting together people from different parts of an organization that might have very diverse backgrounds such as different educations, levels of tenure, or fields. By bringing diverse individuals together, you have opportunities for what's called creative discord, which can lead to more innovative ideas. Collaborative social environments can support more innovation. "

Improved communication flow -- "The more connected people are also helps with communication flow, more likely ensuring that everyone's on the same page."

Improved emotional commitment and retention -- "Social support and social integration are two things that actually help create stronger emotional commitment to an organization, which can affect retention."

Improved mental health -- "Research shows that stronger social support outside of the workplace can help individuals with mental health, help them get through stressful situations. So, feeling like you're in an organization where people care about you, that you feel supported, that you feel as if you're a part of something, could have some significant benefits to mental health."

Social Integration

The social networks we develop at work are a vital element of success, both on an organizational and individual level.

Dr. Moon explained that onboarding and pre-boarding are crucial in facilitating the sense that employees have been integrated and welcomed into an organization, department, or team.

This echoes the [advice of Button's Steven Milbank](#), who reiterated how important onboarding is -- and how important that experience is overall from the moment the candidate first interacts with the company.

"It's such a challenge, and you only have a very short period of time once employees start in general. You have a limited window when employees are willing to say, 'I think this is going to work for me. I'm locked in. I'm going to open up. I'm going to be transparent. I'm going to be vulnerable and I am just going to work my hardest.'"

Stronger social networks can help that process along, so that new hires reach that state more quickly and more reliably. See

http://www.robcross.org/Documents/tad_report.pdf

Strategic Application

Though clearly beneficial, adopting social technology in the workplace requires a thoughtful application.

Dr. Moon also noted that not all collaboration is good. It's not something you should do just because everyone else is doing it. [A recent study by Robert Cross and Adam Grant](#) found that in some cases, collaboration can have a negative impact on an organization, and on people's productivity.

"There's always another side to the story. You can have too much collaboration. You can have situations where maybe you shouldn't be collaborating.

It's not about a utopian world where everybody collaborates; it's about being more strategic around how we collaborate, under what circumstances, and why are we doing it."

Adoption Barriers

Dr. Moon outlined two fundamental areas where during her own research and implementation, she experienced the adoption of social technology facing barriers:

Leadership Barriers leaders are often focused on employee conduct within the system. Leaders also may not fully understand the benefits and impacts of social technology's use to individuals.

"For the most part, employees are not going to misbehave," Dr. Moon said. "The one or two individuals that do decide to do that are ones that probably would have done it whether there was technology or not."

Individual Barriers commonly include concerns like:

- Is this tool easy to use?
- What's in it for me?
- Why am I using it?
 - To find information?
 - Get help?
 - Connect with others?
 - Promote my personal brand?

Employees may also have trust issues. For example, some may be hesitant to ask a question because they're concerned about how their questions might be perceived.

"They might not ask the question they really need answers to in a public forum because if they don't trust their manager, they may think, 'Oh my gosh, my manager is going to see that and go, you should know the answer to that already. So, they're looking around for feedback, signals. Is it OK for me to do this? How are other people using it? This is where trust becomes a hugely important. If there isn't a sense trust and feeling like you can trust the organization not to penalize you if you said something or asked questions, that becomes a huge factor."

Developing an organizational culture that **promotes psychological safety**, and accounting for these issues in advance can make implementation much easier.

Implementation Advice

I asked Dr. Moon to share a few pieces of advice for leaders taking steps to build a stronger culture by better understanding the social networks within their organization.

Pilot it -- "You don't have to roll something out like this across an entire organization. You can always start small. Working in a small group, in a small department is one of the best things that you can do."

Build a team of people (stakeholders) from other areas of the organization -- "Build support from other areas of the organization, like IT, marketing, finance, legal, and communications, who invest in what you're doing early on in the process. They can become advocates for the program. With any sort of HR initiative focused on changing the culture, you cannot do this type of work in a bubble."

Have an analytical / business mindset -- HR requires much more than merely liking to help people. You need to have an analytical and business mindset to have a truly strategic impact. "We need to be systems thinkers. If we can't think about people and their complexities when we design our

programs and perform analysis, how can we be strategic in our roles? You need an analytical mind in general and a strong understanding of finance and business administration. You can't simply say, 'Oh, we have a collaboration problem? We'll just implement social technology and that will solve it.' No. The technology is not the solution, it is an enabler, but never the answer."

Hire the right person for today and for the future -- "The person you need right now isn't necessarily the person that you're going to need to take you to the next level. Hire the type of person that you know you're going to need two to three years from now."

In Summary

No matter the size of organization you work in, it will always be beneficial to improve your understanding of the social fabric it's comprised of, and make informed decisions based on that understanding.

There are many tools you can use to help achieve this state of operation, but the most important tool will always be the one that rests above your shoulders.

Shopify's Brittany Forsyth: Scaling Company Culture



Shopify

grew from 5 people working together in a coffee shop to a commerce juggernaut, totaling \$7 billion in annual sales in only a few years. Scaling at that rate is challenging by anyone's standards, and scaling culture under those conditions can be even harder.

We met with Brittany Forsyth, Shopify's VP of Human Relations for a Q&A session to learn some of the keys to successfully scaling company culture.

Q: How was Shopify able to maintain its company culture through rapid growth (any tips for other fast-growing companies)?

A: When companies are going through a rapid growth period, it's easy to forget about the importance of culture when you're so focused on recruiting more people and building the right tools and processes to scale the organization.

For Shopify, even when it seems like the top priority is to meet hiring demands and to quickly build the tools and structure needed to scale, our primary focus is always on our culture. We are always focused on hiring the right people to the team -- the people that will enhance our culture and not take away from it.

The other key part of maintaining a great culture is the constant focus on the behaviors and values that best define it. We understand what our culture is and we live true to it. A great example of this is our philosophy around design.



We put a high value around great design and a great user experience. When we moved to our current office we had new microwaves installed on all of the floors. Unfortunately they were confusing, ugly and hard to use. So what did we do? We decided to remove them all because we realized that they didn't live true to our

values. It's not always the big things that make the difference, it can be the small things that add up to make a larger impact!

The tl;dr of this is - Determine what behaviors and beliefs you value as a company, and have everyone live true to them. These behaviors and beliefs should be so essential to your core, that you don't even think of it as culture.

Q: What was the greatest cultural challenge exponential growth posed (how do you work to solve it)?

A: Realizing that things evolve, change and need to scale. Nothing is ever fully complete and there's always room for more iterations and development! More importantly, understanding that great ideas have an expiry date. We have a saying at Shopify: 'strong opinions, loosely held.' We talk about this often because a lot of great ideas might be right for 100 employees, but completely wrong for 500.

This was pretty hard to swallow at times, but once we came to terms with this, we were better off for it. We were able to adapt and evolve certain tools, processes and behaviours to be more inline with the current culture, instead of the original '50 people culture'.

Q: A great quote from one of Shopify's employees: "The problems we have to solve can be tough. But we all work together." Teamwork is crucial, particularly in a multi-location company that is growing exponentially. What are some tools the team at Shopify use to stay cohesive?

A: We live on collaboration tools like Slack, Google Hangout and Sococo.

Without these tools we wouldn't be able to communicate and work together like we currently do. We encourage ad-hoc brainstorming sessions and in person meetings. We also encourage people to travel to different offices and meet new teams and challenge new problems. We've built our offices and culture to facilitate this type of teamwork.

Q: "Shopify's culture is defined by the great people who work here." How has Shopify's culture changed with the addition of so many new hires; how has it remained the same?

A: Shopify's culture is a manifestation of the amazing people on the team. With every new hire, the culture changes slightly. This is something to be acknowledged and celebrated. We openly accept and look forward to the constant evolution. However, with this evolution, there are still certain aspects of the culture that are fundamental, and these are defined by our values and the leadership team. Some of these things include: a high trust battery, getting things done, and building for the long term.

Q: At Shopify, employees are encouraged to "experiment, take risks, and push the envelope." Why is it so important to maintain an environment that encourages creativity within a safe, supportive environment?

A: Shopify is only as successful as our people and the products we create. To ensure we continue to build the best product out there, we fundamentally believe that we need to always experiment with new ideas, take risks and iterate on past ideas. We believe the only way to do this successfully, is to do this in a safe environment where people know that it's okay to take risks and at times fail. It's about failing gracefully and being transparent about these failures - that we value.

Q: Autonomy at work is a priceless motivator, and Shopify's Hack Days are an extraordinary way of supporting that. What is your favorite project that shipped as part of Shopify's Hack Days?

A: There are so many awesome projects, it's hard to pick! Some of my favourite projects include: Expensely, our internal expensing tool, Shopify Stories and Lunchify. My favourite probably being Lunchify.

The team built an app (Lunchify) which automatically pairs two employees up for lunch every week or month (depending on their setting). The idea was simple - we have so many amazing people at Shopify and we wanted a tool to

connect them. This was especially valuable during all of our growth. The app sends you an email with a link to the person you'll be having lunch with. You can check out their profile in our internal portal - Vault - to get an idea of their background, role and interest and then you find them in the lunch line and the rest is history. I've had some pretty great lunches as a result of this app!

Q: An increasing number of studies show the importance of employee development. Shopify's career page states "We expect you to learn and grow, and we'll provide you with the resources to make that happen." What are some of the ways Shopify helps employees develop their skills, and how has that improved operations at the company?

A: We are a performance based company that understands the importance of constant development, both personally and professionally. Without this development someone wouldn't survive Shopify's growth and constant change. To ensure we support the team in this, we provide a lot of resources including:

A team of coaches that support everyone on their development. They do specific initiatives like: 1:1 coaching, Coaches Corner, Managify Workshops, Lean Coffees and breaking people talks.

We provide a professional development budget that the team can put towards conference travel, classes and workshops. Whatever they want to develop both personally and professionally.

Lightning Talks - This is a chance for anyone in the company to get up and talk about something that might be of interest to others in 4 minutes or less. It can be Shopify related, but generally it's outside of that.

We do Lunch & Learns on a range of topics including finances, wellness and new skills.

Ongoing demos and knowledge sharing with the team.

Q: We came across Shopify's 'Draw the Owl' video and sent it around our entire office. Did you ever have to draw the owl, or is it really just "a metaphor for resourcefulness?"

A: Haha I haven't, but many people have. I was around pre-draw-the-owl... or else I may have had to. It began as a metaphor for resourcefulness, but over time it has become a part of our everyday sayings. We've had a lot of people

send in drawings and really creative owl inspired applications since the video. It's always fun seeing a candidate's take on it.

Q: Tell us a little about Shopify's UNICORN peer bonus system. What worked best about it, what didn't, and what drove the ultimate decision to discontinue the program?

Over time it became clear that Unicorn wasn't working like we originally planned. It was a hard decision, but we ultimately realized that the original Unicorn worked great for a 100-300 person company, but it just didn't scale with the needs of a 500+ company. We believe this is because we've referred to Unicorn as a peer based bonus tool, but realize now that it functions more accurately as a peer based recognition tool.

So technically we haven't discontinued Unicorn, we've just decided to change it from a peer based bonus tool to a recognition and communication tool. It's a place to thank and recognize the amazing things that people do at Shopify. Like many other things here at Shopify, it's definitely still a work in progress that will continue to evolve.

Q: What is the best thing about working with your colleagues at Shopify?

A: You're constantly learning from them. We hire some of the coolest, smartest and most authentic people I know. I'm always upping my game to keep up with the rest of them. Not to mention, it's a hell of a lot of fun!

Although scaling company culture is never simple, it is possible -- and important -- to get it right. Not every company will see the kind of exponential growth Shopify experienced over the past few years, but these insights are applicable for companies of any size or trajectory.

Imperative's Arthur Woods: Finding Purpose at Work

Purpose is one of the key drivers of employee engagement, and finding it can spark a transformative experience. We were lucky enough to meet with Arthur Woods, Co-founder of [Imperative](#), who shared his insights on understanding and finding purpose at work.

Purposeful Work is for Everyone

Imperative's mission is to transform work by empowering everyone to work with purpose. According to Woods, Imperative's research revealed that so-called purpose professions aren't exclusive to any particular type of work.



"Many myths about work say that the only way you can experience purpose is to find a cause or work in a certain profession, like healthcare education or sustainability," he said. "However, there are countless nonprofits where employees are not fulfilled, and there are countless corporations that have nothing to do with a benevolent mission, but whose people are fulfilled."

Woods explained that this points to an intrinsic need that has less to do with the content or category of your work and much more to do with who you are, how you see work, and how much fulfillment you experience.

"We find that purpose is derived from your relationships, your sense of impact, and your sense of personal growth," he said. "If you think about it, those three things are possible in any job. Anyone can build deep, nourishing relationships; anyone can feel like their work matters, and anyone can push themselves to develop in any setting."

The Purpose-Driven Generation

Though anyone can find purpose in their work, research has shown that purpose is particularly important to millennials.

"I think the millennial generation -- for a number of reasons -- looks at work very differently than their parents. One reason being that millennials grew up with technology in their hands. The idea of your personal brand and your ability to self express became a major, major imperative out of the gate."

He said that a sense of self-awareness and the idea of "building your own creation" were instilled in this generation -- and a sense of impatience.

"In many ways, we looked at work in previous generations as a means to an end, a means to retirement, a means to have the life that you one day wanted to have."

Woods said that for the millennial generation, work is no longer the means to an end -- it has become the end itself.

"This means that work that people are doing every day needs to be fulfilling, and needs to be enriching. And if it's not, something needs to change," Woods said. "That's where I think we have a tremendous opportunity. This generation is putting pressure on the workforce to be something that is delivering purpose right away."

Woods explained that the average millennial doesn't want to feel different in work than they do outside of work. "Friends and colleagues become blurred. The idea of having money outside of work to do things that you want to do: perhaps you're able to do the things that you want to do within your work today," he said. "That blur of what has been a very segmented approach is becoming much more integrated."

Woods also noted that the average millennial seeks the intrinsic value that work creates -- more than pay, promotions, or reputation.

"We really believe the ability to measure that intrinsic value and manage to it as a company is a secret weapon," Woods said. "At Imperative, we're designing the first tools and platforms to manage intrinsic motivation everyday."

Purposeful Work in Action

Woods shared how **West Elm** has helped its employees find purpose by reframing their jobs.

"They've enabled a process called job tailoring, which is actually helping employees manage changes to improve the way they work, to make it more fulfilling," he said. "Retail employees aren't just selling furniture; they're serving as ambassadors for new people to move into a city and feel welcomed."

Woods explained that West Elm uses Imperative's diagnostic and assessment tools across the company to regularly measure how fulfilled their employees are and what intrinsically drives each one.

"From employee empowerment all the way to performance management, West Elm has made a seismic shift in the way they are approaching this problem."

The Ultimate Power of Purpose

Increasing employee engagement consistently ranks as a top priority, and instilling a sense of fulfillment is a key factor in doing just that. As important as purposeful work is to the workplace, the benefits extend beyond the nine-to-five.

According to Woods, people who experience fulfillment in their work:

- Have a better work-life balance
- Are healthier inside and outside of work
- Are more active members of society
- Are more involved in their communities

"I think purposeful work provides benefits beyond the job itself," Woods said. "We really believe that if we help make employees more fulfilled in their day-to-day jobs, they'll ultimately become better members of society."

How to Inspire a Greater Sense of Purpose

Woods offered simple advice to employers seeking to inspire a greater sense of purpose in their employees' work:

- Acknowledge that purpose is possible for anyone
- Capture and manage metrics
- Identify the purpose-driven individuals in your organization

"We really believe there's this whole new archetype that companies can start to screen for, manage to, and propel in the organization every day," Woods said. "That's a huge opportunity for companies."

Find a Greater Sense of Purpose in Your Own Work

Woods also offered advice to anyone trying to find purpose in their work:

"A lot of people believe if they're unfulfilled, the first thing they need to do is go find a new job. Purpose is possible in any job, and the ball is in your court. As an employee, you're in the driver's seat. Your company, we hope, is in the passenger seat helping you navigate, but you're the one primarily able to control your destination," he explained.

If you're struggling with fulfillment, challenge yourself by asking:

- How can I improve my relationships?
- How can I make more of an impact in this work every day?
- How can I push myself to grow more?

"If you're asking those questions, that's really where your work starts to become more fulfilling; where you're starting to manage what gives you purpose every day, and identifying the experiences you can create for yourself so that you have a sense of fulfillment."

TINYpulse's David Niu: Measuring Happiness at Work

"When employees are happy, engagement, productivity, retention, customer service and ultimately your bottom line will all improve."

Powerful words and a metric we can all understand: happiness. But how do you measure that?

TINYhr's employee engagement solution, TINYpulse helps leaders take the pulse of happiness at work, giving them the information that they need to address potential problems before they lead to attrition.

TINYpulse's emphasis on frequent, bite-sized feedback from employees offers some valuable perspective. Wanting to learn more, we spoke with David Niu, founder and CEO of TINYhr.

Although the information TINYpulse can provide is valuable, it is not for everyone. Niu explained that TINYhr's website is very clear about who should *not* try TINYpulse.

"Hey, don't try TINYpulse unless you're a leader committed to change. Don't try TINYpulse unless you're going to share the feedback. And don't try TINYpulse unless you're actually going to take positive action based on that."

A Disconnect Between Priorities and Action

According to Niu, if you ask CEOs what their top two or three competitive advantages are, almost all of them will say people or culture. However, most measure people and culture by conducting annual surveys.

If you ask them how they measure other aspects of their company, they'll often respond with a "real-time" solution such as real-time inventory, real-time finance, and so on.

"You just told me that your most important assets are your people, your culture," Niu muses. "But you measure that once a year versus these other things that are less important, you measure all the time?"

Granted, it used to be more difficult to measure ongoing employee sentiment and engagement, but technology changes that.

"The organizations that measure these attributes are going to be much more proactive about issues than reactive. People are beginning to realize that it's not just cool and fun to care about people and culture. But investing in it and continually listening and improving actually provides bottom line results and a sustainable competitive advantage."

The Power of Happiness



As Deming taught, you can't improve what you don't measure. TINYpulse attempts to discover if the efforts that leaders put into employee engagement are actually working.

Though the term "engagement" is often used in HR, Niu's team ultimately chose the word "happiness" as a North Star because everyone understands it.

"If people are happier, it has a cascading ripple effect. You go home, you're going to be a better father, husband, wife, mother, sister, brother," he said.

"So that's great. Internally at work, you're going to give better customer service, you're going to be more likely to go the extra mile, and have passion. You'll be more likely to refer friends and family to work there or even evangelize about your company's offerings to other people. Happiness starts with each individual and has a positive external effect on other things that they touch in their day-to-day lives."

Niu discussed a 2013 TINYpulse employee engagement survey that found that employee happiness is more dependent on co-workers than direct managers.

"Now that people are much more mobile and walls are coming down, there's an opportunity to increase collaboration. So, if you want to collaborate, we have what we call the Zen Den, which has our gong and a massage chair. People can go and sit down and collaborate there. Or they can go to a local coffee shop and collaborate. We encourage that creativity and working with your coworkers.

We also number the desks and put everybody's name in a fish bowl. We draw, and wherever you're drawn, that's where you sit. We blow up the concept of sitting with your team, and we force you to sit with people you don't know with the hopes that you're able to build these bridges and bonds with people. Enjoying your coworkers and being able to collaborate with them is so important."

Changing Workplace Attitudes

Niu also noted that measuring happiness is often considered soft -- kind of like "I pay you, so you should do your job." In the past, people tended to stay at their jobs, even when unhappy. Today, millennials are less inclined to stay at job they don't like. They jump around a lot more.

"If you're like most companies, in five years half of your workforce will be millennials. If you don't get in front of that and start measuring things to figure out where these blind spots are, you are going to be left behind because if your competition can out-talent you, then they will out-compete you."

Niu said that with millennials, pay is not the most important thing; they're looking for meaning, fulfillment, and social responsibility. "Many of the more progressive companies are starting to get behind that now that they realize that it's not just a trend to invest in your company culture, it's a strategy.

Transformative Feedback

Niu explained that as millennials enter the workforce, they don't just want to get feedback all the time -- even though they want and crave that feedback. The modern employee wants to be able to *give* feedback too.

"It's a two-way street. For some managers, that's a little bit uncomfortable but that's just the reality of the way the world is going. Hopefully the manager sees bite-sized, quick feedback mechanisms and loops as a great opportunity to improve his or her managerial styles and skills just as it is for the employee to improve his or her skill levels."

While managers are accustomed to giving feedback to their employees, receiving feedback from employees is not as common. Bilateral feedback helps to build goodwill between the parties versus, "I'm not happy, I can't get feedback, and I'm gonna take off."

"I think that for leaders who are progressive, that's the only way they're going to get better. Why *wouldn't* they want feedback from their team?" Niu said.

Annual Surveys versus Bite-sized Feedback

According to Niu, annual employee surveys don't work because employees have to spend a great deal of time filling them out. "By the time they're at question 37, they're just throwing in numbers to complete the dang thing," he said. "That's why some large companies using these big, huge pulses actually have to write algorithms to detect people doing that. On the flip side: employers, executives, and HR managers get analysis paralysis because if you ask 50 questions and you have 1,000 people, that's 50,000 responses -- every data point is going to corroborate or contradict another one."

By keeping pulses tiny and dripping out one lightweight question at a time, both the employee and the manager can focus on one element at a time and then be able to take action or make an acknowledgement based upon that.

TINYpulse offers an anonymous option. "Believe it or not, people are still intimidated to go and talk to their manager or their boss," Niu said. "By having anonymity, you're able to give them a safe harbor to share the critical insights that will really make a difference in the company or the employees' lives."

Steps to Take to Improve Happiness at Work

According to Niu, the most important employee or team metric that every company should track and work to improve on a daily basis is this: How happy are you at work?

"Do it on a scale of one to ten -- super easy bracket -- once a month, once a quarter, whatever cadence makes sense for you. Hopefully it's not once a year or every half year because so much happens in that time period."

"Not only ask that, but ask them, 'why'?" he said. "If they are unhappy, hopefully you start getting trends that you can deal with because one of the most haunting feelings is when an employee says, 'George, here's my two weeks notice' out of the blue. At least, hopefully, you're filling that goodwill bucket and you're looking around that curve a little bit to be able to address some of these things and be proactive instead of reactive."

Niu offered a couple of pointers on how to improve workplace happiness:

Ask your employees.

You can use Survey Monkey or Google Forms for free to conduct an anonymous survey about how happy they are at work, how the company can improve, or how valued they feel.

Share the results.

Once you get that feedback, don't simply hoard it at the HR or executive level. Take it back to the team and say, "This is what I heard and here are some low-hanging fruits for improvement based on your feedback that we can do." Or, if you can't do anything about it, acknowledge that their voices were heard.

Be generous with recognition.

Recognize people for the small stuff as well as for the big accolades. Make recognition organic and ongoing so it's not always coming from the top down.

When you empower and entrust your team, you'll be surprised by the type of delightful, intentional feedback that comes out. It's easy to get started, and the results are more than worth it.

One Medical Group's Christine Morehead: Mission-Driven DNA



*Christine Morehead is the Vice President of Human Resources at **One Medical Group** and has been instrumental in developing the department from the ground-up, selecting a talented team of HR and recruitment professionals. She has experience with rapid-growth companies and brings innovative HR solutions to meet the needs of quickly growing organizations. Prior to One Medical, Christine served as a founding member of the Virgin America team that brought the company from incubation to an award-winning airline.*

Q: In a business sector normally plagued by burnout and high turnover rates, One Medical Group has built a strong, dedicated team. What are some of the keys to that success?

At One Medical, all our team members share a vision for offering affordable, accessible high-quality health care. We have a uniquely mission-driven culture, and we select the right individuals who truly believe in that mission. From our administrative professionals to our health care providers, our employees have the time and tools they need to make the right decisions.

Our team members truly believe in what they are doing and that connection to the higher mission is what drives us to provide the best care possible for our patients. Everyone works in teams, so they feel supported and can focus on caring for our members. Moreover, we offer continual opportunities for our team members to engage with each other and with the leadership.

Q: One Medical Group is disrupting the healthcare industry with its people-centric approach to medicine. How has that approach translated into people operations?

A major strand in our DNA is being “human-centered.” This is the driving force behind our business, and we carry it into all of our people operations. Whenever we’re considering a new program, we consider how it will affect our team members.

We take care of the needs of our teams so that they can take great care of the needs of our patients. *It has to start there.*

Our employees have to feel like they’re well-cared for, so they can then focus their energies on caring for others.

Q: Sense of purpose plays a crucial role in motivation. How does purposeful work motivate employees at One Medical Group?

At One Medical, we’re so fortunate to have a strong mission, and it is important that we find people who are aligned with that mission. We then take the time to celebrate and nurture the great work that is being done here every day. One way we do this is through storytelling – highlighting the work others have done and how it supports our goals. We talk a lot about what we do, and we provide people with the opportunity to reflect on how what their roles impact the mission.

Q: One Medical Group has experienced sustained, rapid growth, which can often strain company culture. What are some of the biggest challenges that growth posed, and how did you solve them?

Either it will happen organically or thoughtfully. We want to be mindful about our growth and how we can maintain a healthy, engaged culture. Thus, we want to influence it thoughtfully.

At a recent all-company meeting, we chose to use the power of storytelling to share our DNA instead of just presenting a PowerPoint deck of company values. We had some of our most tenured team members speak about times they felt we best demonstrated our DNA. By sharing those stories, we demonstrated our culture for our newest teammates, so they could better understand it. This is how we ensure that our strong culture lives on and evolves during our rapid growth.

Q: One Medical Group has employees all across the country. What are some ways the team stays connected and cohesive?

We offer frequent opportunities for team members to engage, and we find it often happens organically through internal social media and spontaneous gatherings. We also have quarterly all-company town halls where employees can hear from leadership and peers and learn about what other team members are doing across the business – and across the country. In addition to our town hall meetings, we also host events quarterly where the teams can interact, share ideas, and build relationships with one another.

At One Medical, we have a strong preference for employees to hear from our leadership versus an intranet or company newsletter. Our leaders understand it is an integral part of their job to communicate often to their teams, so that everyone stays connected.

Q: What is your favorite thing about working with the team at One Medical Group?

This is the most highly-engaged team and passionate group of people I've ever had the privilege of working with. Because people here feel so passionate about what they're doing, it makes coming to work so exciting. Everyone is going at top speed and doing great work. It motivates you to put forth your best effort because you don't want to let your team down. I am so proud of the work that is being done here.

Q: If you could give one piece of advice to a leader working to build an extraordinary, people-centric work culture in a fast-paced environment, what would it be?

Find the time and resources to make those connections happen. When businesses grow at a rapid pace, it's easy to forget to take the time to nurture the people that make the business run. Make time to reflect on the mission of the business and celebrate success.

Hospitality Quotient's Susan Salgado: Building Company Culture

Legends, heroes, traditions, values, belief systems, celebrations, and language are all characteristics exhibited by cultures, whether those cultures are familial, ethnic, academic, religious, or organizational.

I had the pleasure to speak with Susan Salgado from [Hospitality Quotient](#), who shared some priceless insights into culture, and some great advice on building one that truly sticks.

Defining Company Culture

According to Salgado, organizational culture is the same type of culture that we see in our day-to-day lives and society. While the individual elements may be different from one culture to the next, all cultures rest on this foundation.

In a company, the leaders become the patriarchs or matriarchs of that culture, setting the tone by establishing the company's values and beliefs. "That will then dictate what the acceptable behaviors in the organization are," she said. "How do we interact with each other? What is it like to be a part of this organization?"

Salgado compared company culture to the family traditions, rules, and guidelines taught to us by our parents. "We learn to live by them over time," she said. "We learn from our families -- from the role models, from the way we were taught, and from what our families taught us. And when we think about how we learned it at home, the same things need to be happening in an organization."

She explained that if leaders fail to define the culture, the culture will be defined by the behaviors that are tolerated. It's a missed opportunity to deliberately define a culture that enriches their organization.

"The most effective cultures are defined at the top, where you have a leader with a clear vision of what he or she wants the organization to look and feel like, and what it should represent in terms of value systems. They put that vision into action and live it out themselves. And that is not a minor point when you think about how we learn the culture as children."

The Foundation of a Great Organizational Culture

Clearly, leaders need to take responsibility for defining the company's culture; otherwise, it will grow organically and "be defined by the behaviors they tolerate."

According to Salgado, the foundational elements of a great company culture are:

Leadership:

For example: if you say that you value integrity in your organization but leaders act according to a different set of rules than they enforce for the rest of the team, that fails to create a sense of fairness.

"People want to see the very same values embodied by their leadership that they are expected to be exhibiting themselves. I think it's foundational to start with leadership and the values and beliefs that leaders put into play."

The People You Hire:

The people you bring into your organization need to align with the values and beliefs that you have defined as part of your company culture. Beyond hiring, make sure your staff exhibits those behaviors over time. It's not just about getting your foot in the door; it's about living by those values every day.

Systems and Structure in the Work Environment:

Provide your team with the structure they need to act within the culture and inform decision-making. This includes everything from policies, guidelines, and rules to protocol -- all elements of culture that create a structure for people to operate within it.

A Deeply Connected Work Environment:

Salgado emphasized the importance of a deeply connected work environment -- how it feels to be on the team, how easy it is to connect with the leadership team, the flow of respect, appreciation and caring for one another. "These are all elements of workplace culture," she said. "There is a lot of buzz today about getting employees engaged. Employee engagement is directly tied to what it feels like to work in the organization -- in other words, to the culture."

The beauty of these pillars of company culture is this :

It doesn't really matter what industry you are in or how large the business you are running, the people factor, the quality, the structure of your work environment, and a deep connection to leadership still apply.

The Hospitality Quotient: An Important Part of Organizational Culture

While preparing for this interview, I noticed several parallels between hospitality and organizational culture, and Salgado explained further:

"At Hospitality Quotient, we define hospitality as being on the other person's side. That means for hospitality to occur, the other person has to truly and authentically believe that you are on their side in every way. That is such an important part of creating a culture where people will take care of one another and will take care of their stakeholders in a really authentic and caring way. So to me, it is hard to imagine creating a culture where hospitality isn't a significant part of it."

When hospitality is present, it creates a strong sense of belonging, which, in turn, builds enormous pride for employees.

"You can't understate the value of pride for any company. When employees are proud to tell people where they work, when they love telling stories about their organization and when they are telling other people 'you should come and work here!' That feeling becomes part of the whole business. The customers feel it; your suppliers will feel it. It becomes an energy generator that has such an enormous, attractive quality. People will be drawn to the organization."

"I truly believe that that sense of hospitality and belonging -- being on the other person's side -- is what makes many of the organizations that we look at today effective in their organizational culture."

Organizational Culture is Deeper than Perks

We also discussed a source of common misconceptions that surround organizational culture: ping pong tables and free food. Yes, some companies with great cultures have great perks, but what are the underlying values that are driving those perks for those companies?

"If your goal is to create a creative environment where people are innovating ideas all of the time, and if you believe that people will be more creative and innovative if they have some outlets during the day, whether it is to take a nap, or play a game of ping pong; if that is going to help a creative process then you should put those amenities into your organization."

"But for us, for instance, at Hospitality Quotient, which is a consulting firm, to put those amenities in, it would just be odd. It's not a match for who we are and what we are trying to create. The amenities that you choose have to have purpose and they have to be connected to the values and beliefs in your organizational culture for them to really be effective."

The 49 / 51 Hiring Model

Salgado shared a fascinating concept about hiring employees for their technical and emotional skills. She said that Hospitality Quotient strongly believes that emotional skills are just as important as technical skills in new hires because it wants to create a culture characterized by a mutual caring and respect. In order to instill those characteristics in an organization, you have to have team members with a high level of emotional intelligence.

She explained that technical skills are the basics. "You've got to have them. You can't hire people who are not qualified to do a job," she said. "At the end of the day, the emotional characteristics have to weigh in just as heavily. We need people who are emotionally capable of building relationships and having great connections with other people.

In order to do that, we say that you should put an almost equal emphasis on technical and emotional skills. *But, we give one extra point...we give 51 percent to emotional qualities and 49 percent on technical qualities simply because you cannot teach people the emotional skills. You have to hire for them. People either have it or they don't.*"

She said that emotional intelligence can be enhanced by being in an environment where it gets drawn out, but if the seed is not there to start with, you can't teach it.

"We advise our clients to get as many of the 49 points on the technical side as possible, but really focus on getting the 51 percent, because that is where you are going to see the payoff in terms of a great employee who is able to connect with other people and build those relationships," she said. "And where you have deficiencies on the 49 percent side, you can teach those things."

Why is hitting the 51 percent so important? A nurse from a health care group Salgado consulted with said it best:

Salgado emphasized the importance of personal accountability to the company's values and beliefs, and then holding others accountable for the

same.

"It's that brilliant clinician who probably brings in a ton of business for that hospital but is not living out the values that they are trying to instill throughout the organization. They are essentially saying 'This guy can get away with it because he drives revenue -- yet he doesn't live up to the expectations of the culture or embrace the company's values.'

That's really not OK. Employees will not tolerate that. Over time, you will lose many great employees. People will bail, and say 'I am better than this. I can get a great job somewhere else. I'm not going to stay here and tolerate this behavior.'

Not only can you erode your culture this way, you will lose the great people who would otherwise be lieutenants of that culture."

Developing and Maintaining a Stronger Company Culture

I asked Salgado for one piece of advice for a leader who wants to develop and maintain a stronger company culture. Without missing a beat, she boiled her message down to one key takeaway:

"... for leaders to be the person they want their team members to be. It's walking the talk and knowing the values and beliefs that you want your culture to have and being that person first. Without that kind of a role model, and without the integrity of living out what you believe in, the culture will never take hold."

SquareTrade's Steve Abernethy: Creating an Award-Winning Workplace

Most leaders want to build a workplace that employees are exhilarated to be a part of, but it's not something that happens on its own. Award-winning workplaces come from thoughtful effort, and awareness of what truly drives and motivates you and your team.

We met with [SquareTrade](#)'s Steve Abernethy, who shared some excellent insights into how he and his team built one of the Bay Area's best places to work.

Q: SquareTrade has been voted as one of the Best Places to Work in the Bay Area for the past two years running. For you, what makes SquareTrade the best place to work?



A: Most everyone is happier and works harder and smarter if they believe in the mission of a company, and they see their work making a tangible difference.

SquareTrade is a disruptor, and I think most everyone likes to be actively reshaping an industry for the better to benefit consumers. We're on a mission to transform the old-school warranty industry, which has a reputation for terrible customer service. SquareTrade culture is very action-oriented, so employees are aware of their daily impact on our success.

We can actually see the transformation happen as we grow, win new partners, continuously innovate and improve our services.

Q: Building and maintaining a positive work environment doesn't only benefit employees. What are some business advantages to SquareTrade's investments in a positive work environment?

A: Maintaining a positive work environment not only makes employees happy; it makes partners and customers happy too. Our environment encourages employees to think creatively about business problems, challenge the status quo and ultimately deliver better service.

Q: Making an impact is an important element of a fulfilling career. What are some ways SquareTrade employees make an impact on the world around them? What are some ways SquareTrade makes an impact on employees?

A: "Make an impact" is one of SquareTrade's core values. That means being passionate about what you do, getting stuff done and making a difference.

Within our industry, we are delivering a customer-first warranty experience and relentlessly focusing on innovation. We try to create very collaborative relationships with our retailer partners to challenge each other to innovate and improve the consumer experience.

When it comes to our employees, we hire "get it done" types who have good judgment and learn quickly. This is easy behavior to reward and for others to learn from.

We also try to give employees the ability to move from challenge to challenge across the company, versus only working on any one area. It's critical to innovation to bring in new thinking, and fun for the team to try new things. By fostering a work environment of like-minded individuals, everyone benefits. Partners get savvy business ideas, employees are challenged and rewarded, and customers get excellent service.

Q: SquareTrade's core values are prominently featured on the website: Why is it so important to have a set of core values to follow, and how does that translate to SquareTrade's culture?

A: Core values are extremely important as we continue to grow. They help us recruit for culture fit during the hiring process, and they help us reward and promote employees.

Employees call out each other internally, thanking each other publicly for making an impact and delivering on our core values. By creating a work environment that's value driven, we ensure that everyone is aligned and working together to drive the entire business forward.

Q: Transparency is a brand promise SquareTrade makes to its customers, but it's also one of the qualities mentioned in the Best Places to Work nomination. What is it that makes transparency such a valuable asset, both for customers and employees?

A: Being consumer branded and transparent is fundamental to how we have built our service. Being publicly researchable allows consumers a public place to easily comment, and allows everyone at SquareTrade to see instantaneous feedback. It also is a fantastic aspect of our culture to celebrate our team members who are called out and thanked in various forms of social media.

Q: If you could give one parting piece of advice for someone working to build an exceptional company culture, what would it be?

A: Achieving success always takes longer than you expect. Build a team that's working toward a long-term vision of success, rather than what's fashionable today. Your business will be better off.

Button's Stephen Milbank: Building NYC's Best Place to Work

Building an award-winning workplace is possible in any field, but it requires thoughtful and deliberate decisions about your organizational culture.

Button just topped Crain's New York's 100 Best Places to Work in New York City list this year, and co-founder Stephen Milbank took some time out of his day to share some insights into what makes Button an amazing place to work, and some advice on how you can apply the same principals to your workplace.

Serve a Common Goal



Milbank began by expressing how happy he is the quality of the people Button has been able to assemble and keep on their team, and how important a factor that has been in making Button a great place to work.

"They're all highly talented, with enjoyable personalities," he said.

Photo Credit: Yoichi Nagano

Another crucial element of the equation is having a common goal and purpose that everyone is engaged in and pushing for.

"While everyone brings different skill sets and focuses to the table, we've been able to channel that to serve a common goal. Having a shared purpose -- one that's clear -- makes it a really enjoyable place to do work."

Milbank explained that when everyone feels empowered to make meaningful contributions toward shared goals, they're able to bring out the best version of themselves.

Button endeavors to create a structure where everyone feels like they're growing personally, succeeding professionally, and thriving in their personal lives with families and friends as well. "Helping to make people feel fulfilled in the components of their lives where we can, and allowing them the resources to succeed outside work is one way that we've been particularly successful in creating a very happy and productive workplace."

Build a Family

Button has grown from a small team of just six to nearly 30, but continues to foster a close knit sense of community and family. Milbank was quoted by Crain's as saying, "When you join Button, you join a family."

He told me that maintaining a good balance between family life and work is something that the founders envisioned from the beginning.

"We wanted to help influence a good work-life balance with our employees. Work is often something that people put on a pedestal to take precedence, giving it an undue pressure in regards to the equilibrium of the demands of their life," he explained.

Recognizing the benefits that strong familial relationships have on all aspects of our lives, from perspective and grounding to health and wellbeing, Button focused on family balance as one of its guiding principles.

This guiding principle helps employees to understand it's not only acceptable, but encouraged to take the actions that they need to take in order to ensure their family life is in balance.

Button backs up this up with one of the most generous parental support policies in the industry. In the office, Button maintains a family-like atmosphere as well.

"Making the workplace like a family helps people become more empathetic to the volatility of anyone's life. Someone may have events in life that result in a week where they weren't delivering the best product.

If you're close to that person, and you treat them like family, you're going to be more thoughtful towards them. There will be weeks when you cover for them, and there are going to be times when they cover for you."

Maintain a Long-term View

The long-term view is an underlying theme in how Button's founders decided to shape the business and what they've emphasized over time. The effects of these choices Their effects reverberate across all areas.

"If you're always thinking about the immediate short-term deadlines, you fail to recognize what the consequences to that are. Nothing can be more corrosive on an employee's productivity than an unbalanced or unhappy personal life," he said.

"If you're creating an environment where someone is never able to go home and relax -- where they work all sorts of crazy hours -- the other people in their lives are going to be unhappy. This will nag at a person. It's going to distract them, and they are not going to be as efficient or productive or satisfied in what they are doing. Ultimately over the long term, that's going to be more detrimental to the business than not working the extra hours."

Button takes a long-term view with its unlimited vacation days policy as well.

Concerned about feedback that unlimited vacation policies often turn into a catch-22, where employees feel less inclined to take time off, Button offers family travel stipends of \$500 for each employee plus another \$500 if the employee is married or has children.

These stipends help to reinforce that the company really wants employees to take time away from work, and that taking that time is just as important as coming to work.

Moreover, Milbank feels that by giving employees unlimited time off, they'll actually take time off when they or their family members are sick. It's a mistaken impression that you're doing something good, or 'taking one for the team' by working through being sick. It's generally the opposite.

Some well-meaning policies like grouping personal and sick days can even lead to some fairly perverse outcomes, where employees will come to work sick to avoid losing one of their allotted days off. "There is probably nothing worse than when someone comes in sick and then gets everybody else sick," he mentioned.

"We have a pretty open policy where you can take those days off and not put other people at risk. By doing stuff like that, you allow people to be more responsible. They are going to act on the side of caution, which is ultimately better for the organization."

Prioritize Onboarding

The first few weeks of an employee's tenure are crucial for their successful integration. Button helps new hires get up to speed and feel welcomed quickly with a strong onboarding program. "A lot of the tools that we've put out there, and the process in which we onboard employees is a way of helping people get up that integration curve a lot faster," Milbank said.

"Within the first week, a new employee gets introduced to every single division of the company. A welcome book introduces each member of the team in a light manner, so that people don't feel as foreign.

We also have someone outside of the chain of command serve as a mentor to help new hires transition to being part of the organization, as well as casual outreach from members of all teams to help facilitate that process of becoming part of the whole" I think that once you can get someone understanding the information, and feeling comfortable much faster, they can be more productive for the organization."

Support Employee Empowerment

Having grown from a team of six to roughly 30, Button has been able to maintain a strong culture as it grows, and Milbank attributes their monthly retrospective process as a major contributing factor to that success.

"About a week after the end of every month, we highlight what went well, what didn't go well, and ideas for improvement. Every member of the team contributes."

He explained how helpful it can be to provide multiple formats for employees to let their voices be heard. "Not only does this help support the underlying goals of the organization as it continually tries to improve and adapt, it also empowers all of the employees to have a voice," Milbank said.

"The process also gives everyone free reign to say what they want, and how they want the organization to evolve. In the day-to-day, we have a value of speaking boldly and honestly, but you need to understand that people have different comfort levels regarding taking advantage of a forum."

It's not just about looking back. Milbank wants the Button team to feel empowered to influence change in the organization's future by contributing to goal setting.

"It's by no means a purely democratic process," he said. "But it is a process we use to understand what they want to focus on, and what the direction of the company should be. By knowing that, people feel closer to the responsibilities that are guiding this organization and feel more powerful about their ownership of the organization."

He stressed that this feeling of ownership within the company, and shared sense of purpose ultimately translates into the understanding that maximum contribution is worthwhile.

"I think the worst thing that you can do in an organization is make people feel that their influence doesn't matter.

When people feel that their influence doesn't matter, their enthusiasm for contributing declines, and then you just have people working and effectively punching the time clock. And that's exactly what we do not want to create."

Cultivate an Environment of Constant Learning and Development

Button employees are encouraged to attend professional development courses and expand their knowledge at every opportunity.

It's important to be intellectually satisfied -- there always needs to be new stimulus. You don't want people becoming static. "Most people who have taken the risk of joining a startup want to improve, grow, and help build the company. They're going on a journey of development, both with the company and for themselves," Milbank said.

"People who are well informed about the world around them make better decisions across the board. We are the sum of our various influences and if you aren't trying to expand your knowledge base, then you're going to fall behind."

Most people in this organization aren't going to be happy just

treading water. They constantly want more, and we need to provide them with more in order to help them be happy and growing."

Parting Advice

Button is unquestionably a fantastic place to work, and this sentiment is reflected in its employees, its leadership, and the recent Crain's award. I asked Milbank to share one final, summative piece of advice for others who are working to build their own exceptional company culture.

"Be true to yourself. And in that I mean build a culture that represents your personal values -- something that you feel like you can live to, want to celebrate, and want to be proud of every single day. Something you're comfortable to share with the world. A lot of people get caught up in what is 'reasonable' or 'acceptable.' What we've tried to do is understand the world around us, and make sure our values are represented in everything we do, and be bold in what those values and choices are."

iDoneThis Walter Chen: Tracking Success

Have you ever worked really hard, but had nothing to show for it?

That can be an incredibly demoralizing feeling. I recently brought it up to Walter Chen, co-founder of [iDoneThis](#), who described it this way:

"It gives you a sense of continuous stress and pressure. If you don't mark your milestones, progress or accomplishments, you often feel like you're not going anywhere -- like treading water."

Walter was kind enough to stick around to share more of his thoughts and insights about effective team management, and the importance of marking accomplishments in a team environment.

Focusing on What You've Done, and Sharing It

iDoneThis is a unique service where each team member is prompted, via email, to summarize their accomplishments at the end of the day. The next morning, each team member receives an email digest highlighting the "dones" accomplished by everyone on the team. It's simple, easy, and powerful.

According to Chen, a recent study by a Harvard Business School professor showed that [95 percent of managers are wrong](#) in thinking that financial incentive or stress motivates people at work. Rather, the number one motivator is the feeling of making progress every day toward a meaningful goal.

"Tracking gives you that sense of progress. When you reflect back on it -- that's when you see how far you have come," Chen said. "Our users say that it helps them realize that they actually got more work done than they would have otherwise given themselves credit for. It's that type of reflection that helps them do that."

Collaboration and Celebration Go Hand-in-Hand

From a team standpoint, Chen said that it's important for teams to track their progress and celebrate their milestones and the small wins that they make every day. When team members receive their iDoneThis digests, they have the opportunity to "like" one another's dones as well as offer words of encouragement, support, or appreciation.

Improving Transparency

In addition to recognizing each team member's myriad contributions, iDoneThis shares another common theme with Bonusly: transparency.

"One of the things about me is that I'm super lazy. It's easy for me to say something in front of everyone just because then I don't have to repeat it," he said. "Transparency makes it easier for everyone to get a sense of what everyone else is thinking. It provides for more of a free flow of information rather than a constrictive one where everything is taking place one-on-one. You often find that you're repeating yourself. For me, that's one of the biggest benefits of transparency, one that outweighs the risk."

Chen explained that many anxieties surrounding transparency turn out to be unfounded, that perhaps it wasn't as big of a deal as you might have thought.

"You're also putting your trust in your team that they can handle it. They will understand where you are coming from. Plus, when you know someone is going to see what you've done, then you will try to do better. When you think about transparency and you commit yourself to it, you often find it makes you better."

Listening and Understanding

Sharing your accomplishments with one another isn't just about communicating what you've done, it's also about understanding what your team has done. As Chen explained, as a manager, you're likely hands-off as far as doing the actual work is concerned, yet you're responsible for making relevant decisions. However, the individuals who are doing the work are better positioned to make those decisions because they know what is actually happening on the ground.

"That's why it's so important for the manager to be a good listener. Managers need to, without doing the actual work, have that sense of what is happening on the ground."

Tools for Distributed Team Management

Like Bonusly, iDoneThis operates as a distributed team. With members in New York, Wisconsin, Germany, and Italy, iDoneThis uses a variety of tools to ensure asynchronous communications no matter where individuals happen to be located. I asked Chen to share a basic starter toolkit for effective distributive team management, and he shared these recommendations:

iDoneThis

Naturally, his own team uses iDoneThis extensively. Chen said that clients such as Buffer, who are famously distributed also use iDoneThis. "When all of your people are in different time zones, real-time communications can be a huge pain. Not only time zone-wise, but logistically," he said. "For example, video conferencing tends to drop out all the time. It's much easier to update each other asynchronously using a tool like iDoneThis."

Slack

Like "nearly everybody else" Chen said that his team uses [Slack](#) for nearly all of its other team communications.

Hackpad

Chen recommends [Hackpad](#) for organizing notes, sharing documents, and

general collaboration.

Alternative Video Conferencing Tools

Sometimes face-to-face meetings are a must, even among distributed teams. Chen likes to use Google Hangouts or an alternative tool like [Sqwiggle](#) that enables easy face-to-face video conferencing.

Parting Advice

Chen shared one final piece of advice that applies not only to leaders who want to start building more effective teams, but to anyone working in a team environment:

"No matter how good you are at your job, or what you perceive to be the technical part of the job, you always have to deal and interact with people at work. Learning how to do that in a way that is productive and positive is one of the more difficult, but more importantly, valuable things that you can do. It's all about people no matter what."

Making Good's Julian Caspari: Generational Difference and Work Culture

Generation-X, Generation-Y, millennials, and boomers -- these are common terms that are used to represent generational differences, and there are few places where these differences are more present than in the workplace.

The [Making Good @ Work](#) research project is a fascinating exploration of the shifting role of millennials in the workplace. This research revealed five primary points of difference between millennials and previous generations:

1. Celebrating Difference
2. Life-Work Balance
3. Bleeding Digital
4. A Passion for Learning
5. Mission Driven

Julian Caspari from Making Good was kind enough to sit down with me to discuss their findings.

A New Generation, a New Way of Working

Caspari described millennials as a "bit of a Trojan horse... bringing a new way of working in the 21st century. They bring a different global consciousness. They're bringing with them a different set of learning expectations and processes."

The Value of Diversity

"If you look at the multicultural milieu that the boomer culture worked and grew up in versus what the millennials did, you see that millennials were immersed in multicultural communities, classrooms, soccer teams, art clubs or whatever it was," he said.

"When there isn't diversity in a room, millennials will recognize that there is something wrong with that picture; whereas boomers, having grown up in more homogeneous communities, do not tend to notice it as much."

Caspari brought up the [Diverse City Program](#), spearheaded in Toronto by a group called Civic Action. This program is designed to build diverse set of civic leaders, many of which will have an impact in the workplace. "They found that a more diverse workforce increases business revenue, productivity and social cohesion in the office," he said. "Having people from different cultures and all walks of life naturally creates links to global markets, and it enhances creativity."

Mission Driven

Millennials are also known for being mission-driven, and focused on purposeful work. "Many boomers have a practice of philanthropy. They would participate with a select group of charities, their child's PTA, or a local sport league, perhaps," he said. "Whereas, the millennial generation is looking to the company that they are working for to actually be connected to a mission, and to a larger social goal behind the development of whatever products or service their company is creating."

Caspari explained that that 58 percent of students today say they would take a 15 percent pay cut to work for a mission-driven organization.

Work-life Integration

"The terminology has always been work-life balance, but we say life-work balance because there is a narrative around 'what is your life's work?' and our life's work is to be engaged with a company or organization that is aligned with our values and flows naturally between our personal and professional spaces.

There's a bit of a blurring of the lines between the personal and professional in a lot of millennials' lifestyles. That is something that many people from this generation actually desire."

The Influence of Technology

To that end, technology has empowered the millennial generation to be able to pick and choose when and where to work, while also allowing them to be productive and follow healthy work and family practices. "They can 'have it all,'" he said. "There is a big opportunity to use technology to empower workplace flexibility." In fact, 45% of millennials would choose workplace flexibility over pay.

Education

Caspari also described the millennial generation as the most educated generation in the workforce, and one that recognizes that today's career might not be the career they will be in five years from now.

"Millennials don't want to stop learning after their first week of training. They want to have opportunities in different departments within the organization. They want to have more opportunities to be mentored by senior level VP's or executives.

They want to hear the stories, challenges, and successes of the company. They want to see how they fit within that, and they always want to be learning new skill sets.

Learning is something that improves our quality of life. It keeps our bodies, minds and souls engaged."

This can be a massive advantage for an organization. When discussing companies that invest in immersive learning programs, he said, "To engage the individual with their full mind, body and soul -- and to help them move along their path and build skill sets they can parlay into other departments of the company -- is a huge opportunity."

Similarities

Despite differences, millennials and boomers are similar in many ways. "Everybody wants to be part of a productive team, they want to be part of a culture, they want to be recognized and appreciated, and they want to continue to learn in their careers, they want to use technology," he said.

"We all want the same thing. We want to have good family lives. We're all human, from the same gene pool here with similar desires."

Working Together

In order to succeed, it's important for boomers and millennials to see the common goals they're working toward, and understand the strengths in their different approaches.

"They need to have points of intersection, shared stories and rich moments that they can refer back to and feel connected around," he said. "So there can be more empathy and people can be seen for who they are and not for the rules they follow or the policies that they are strictly abiding by, or the pay scale that they sit at. But who are we all as people."

Caspari shared one of his favorite quotes from James Temple from Price Waterhouse Coopers who said, "Inclusion is the journey and diversity is the mix."

"Being on that journey means sharing stories, working on projects together, and understanding each other deeper," he said. "I think there is a huge opportunity for creating spaces for that journey to be rich and to help contribute to company culture."

Eldership

Caspari explained the value of "eldership," which he defined as the reverence with which we see our grandparents, mentors, uncles and aunts -- the people in our community who have been through so much and have seen certain trends, things rise and fall.

"There is an opportunity for companies to encourage eldership, especially for those who are in the twilight of their career. Help them to transition into a role that is more about mentorship, bringing up the new talent around them, finding ways to tap into that energy, and sharing their wisdom so it can be infused throughout the organization."

He explained that getting *older* does not necessarily mean that you become an *elder*. Eldership comes with a commitment to intergenerational learning, which requires millennials and boomers to build stronger relationships.

There are many generational differences in the workplace. Those differences can be a divisive weakness in your organization, or a source of strength. It's up to you and your team to determine which they will be.

BlackbookHR's Chris Powell: The Evolution of HR Practices

Human resources must evolve to remain relevant and foster an engaged workforce.

Chris Powell, CEO of [BlackbookHR](#) shared some time with me to discuss the evolution of HR, and the importance of facilitating, rather than just measuring, engagement.

Why Technology is Important to Human Resources

I wanted to find out Powell's thoughts on why these tools are so such an important advancement for the field. When I asked him, he explained, "It's not only a tool for the organization to use and benefit from; it's also a tool for the manager and employees to benefit from."

He explained that HR tools and solutions are often one-dimensional, exclusively beneficial to the employer, and of little use to the employee.



"Our design strategy is to create a unique value proposition for the organization, the managers inside the organization, and the employees," Powell said.

"In terms of the design usefulness and valuable insights to help them retain talent, produce more, and perform better, all of it is designed for a higher outcome and not just exclusively around engagement as a means to an end. It's all about creating better outcomes."

Closing the Information Gap

Powell explained that during his time as a human resources practitioner he

always felt like he was "a day late, and a dollar short," -- that the information he had was dated, and never addressed the problem at hand.

Meanwhile, his colleagues in sales had up-to-the-minute information, and operations always knew what was happening on a real-time basis. HR, he said, had to wait 30 to 40 days to get any relevant information. "And by that time, it was no longer of concern."

"Tools like ours are able to give insight in a much faster, more relevant way to shape business decisions about where to put resources, where to change, where to pivot. And where to stop what you're doing, because HR is notorious for adding stuff on instead of saying, 'What should we stop doing?'"

How Employees Benefit from HR's Evolution

I asked Powell what positive effects employees experience when HR embraces modern tools and processes.

"What we are seeing in our use cases with customers, is their engagement increases," he said. "When the organization brings in tools that are contemporary, the employees are using it more -- they're more engaged.

There's a higher sense that, for one, 'I'm at a place where I can share my voice and have impact and realize my purpose.' But also, the ability to co-create faster happens when you have tools that facilitate this data in the workplace. And so, clearly, we're measuring engagement, but we're also working to facilitate engagement."

Focusing on the Here and Now

Powell shared one of his pet peeves about HR practices: asking employees about issues that you have no plans or resources to do anything about.

"They're not concerned about three years from now," he said. "I'm in this job, I need help *now*, not three years from now."

Powell explained that HR professionals need focus on strategic planning as well as day-to-day productivity and performance.

"Our focus should be on what are those things that have a much more immediate effect in driving retention, performance, productivity or culture," he said. "That doesn't discount strategic thinking, but as somebody described to me the other day: 'Great athletes don't focus on what's going to happen in the fourth quarter of the game. They're focusing on each play and what's happening in that moment.' I think that's where HR has the greatest opportunity -- and products and solutions like ours and yours have the greatest opportunity to really reshape the play at hand in the near term, versus always thinking about the strategic three and five-year plans."

The Human Element

A self-proclaimed humanist, Powell believes deeply in the power of humans:

"Anything that gives me the ability to understand, facilitate, manage, track, execute, organize -- anything that helps me on that continuum -- so I can leverage that human power, I want to know about it. Why wouldn't you want to know?"

He explained how modern technology can help HR become more agile with its workflow, processes, and problems.

"It allows HR to focus on the greatest asset that we have," he said. "Driving engagement is about focusing on equipping and enabling people managers to be better at managing people... to get high levels of engagement and performance and productivity and retention. So, if HR is able to optimize itself, then it can focus on higher value things like equipping others and enabling others to be successful."

Again, he stressed how technology doesn't just benefit the HR department. "The agency worker is becoming a higher percentage of the workforce. If I'm a contract worker, I'm going to need tools to help me manage me: a unit of one."

"If I'm a people manager, I'm going to need a tool that allows me much more flexibility in managing the workplace, which has not just full-time employees, but contractors as well. The world of work has changed, and I don't think that technology and organizations have kept up to really make sure that we're equipping people to be successful."

Crucial Decision-Making Resources

Powell expanded on that concept he touched on earlier, about how his sales and operations colleagues all had current relevant data at their disposal.

"Measurement happens in the consumer marketplace everyday. Coca-Cola, Macy's, P&G, and all these companies are constantly sourcing data on consumers and can easily give you predictive insights and analyses on engagement and satisfaction.

They can predict when are you going to buy that next roll of toilet paper. Why wouldn't we (HR) want to have that kind of insight as it relates to the workforce? For example, what's going to help this organization produce more, retain better talent, and achieve its business goals? These are the same principles."

An Ultimately Human Endeavor

Technology provides crucial tools, but artificial intelligence has its limitations. "The one thing computers don't have is a conscience. Decisions are based on data and consciousness -- not just data," Powell said.

When asked to give one piece of advice to anyone working to modernize their management practices, Powell put it succinctly:

"Use all of your data resources to make better decisions."

That advice could mean different things to different people, but it comes back to that crucial notion -- the data and resources HR technology provide are priceless in the decision making process, but that decision is ultimately human-driven. And isn't that what people management is all about?

People Analytics Conference's Lisa Donchak: Talent Management Evolved

People analytics is an increasingly popular approach to human resources management. According to the [Wharton People Analytics Conference](#) website, it is "a data-driven approach to managing people at work." People analytics involves the use of both data and analysis in recruiting, hiring, promotion, leadership, performance evaluation, compensation, and other people-oriented processes.

Wanting to learn more about this new discipline and its increasing popularity, we met with people analytics thought leader Lisa Donchak, of the [Wharton School](#).

Enriching the Decision-making Process



According to Donchak, managing people at work has traditionally been a subjective process. "A lot of times, decisions that affect hiring, retention, attrition are made with a gut feeling. Those gut instincts aren't something to be discarded, but people analytics is able to provide an additional, objective way of looking at the whole process," she explained.

For example: a hiring manager may instinctively feel that an applicant would be a good cultural fit. People analytics and its research-based approach can provide that manager with additional information to help guide hiring decisions toward the most effective outcome.

In some ways, this new development is similar to that of marketing, which

evolved from a gut-focused endeavor where marketers guessed what consumers wanted to a more effective data-driven model.

Fears and Misconceptions

As an emerging field, people analytics has its share of naysayers. Donchak explained that some resist implementing a data-driven management approach due to fears about the robotic side taking over the process completely.

"There's fear that machines will be making hiring decisions," she said. "What if they make a mistake on a grand scale?"

In reality though, people analytics is an evolution of the process, not a replacement for it.

Others have concerns about privacy. Donchak explained that with or without data, it's easy to cross the line. Human resources has long been subject to strict privacy requirements such as what types of questions you can and can't ask, and data doesn't necessarily change the course of that conversation.

"Ultimately talent management is a human task - the best managers relate to their team in a meaningful and human way that makes them feel valued. Organizations who try to manage strictly based on data will run into problems."

Benefits for Employees/Job Candidates

People analytics addresses a lurking fear many job applicants share: a candidate who is better connected getting accepted over them. Using a data-driven approach improves everyone's chance of getting in based on their own merits, rather than who they know.

"What people analytics can do is make the hiring and team-building processes more fair," Donchak explained. "From an applicant's perspective, I feel like I've got a shot, even if I don't know the HR manager personally. It's going to be a much more fair way of looking at the pool of applicants that will focus in on the traits that team cares about."

People Analytics and Small Businesses

Small businesses may not be able to leverage people analytics in the same ways larger business can due to their smaller sample sizes, and the impact new hires have on small organizations.

"For smaller businesses, it can be hard because every decision is very important. If you're a five person company and hiring a sixth person, that's a 20 percent increase in headcount."

At the same time, small businesses have the largest potential upside to benefit from the people analytics research being generated by larger companies.

Donchak discussed [Startup Genome](#) as an example of the benefits big data has in store for small businesses.

Startup Genome examined several hundred startups, picked criteria, and compared the traits of successful and not successful startups. This analysis helped to determine success factors such as the optimal number of co-founders (which is between two and four; if you have too many, it's like having too many cooks in the kitchen; if you have just one, then the startup is more likely to fizzle out).

Shared outcomes of people analytics research can result in actionable insights for small companies, helping business owners determine early strategies.

Why People Analytics is Taking Off

Donchak said that people analytics evolved from a handful of early pioneers facing massive headwind, to a community of practitioners. Interest has exploded -- people really want to do this. Since the launch of the first People Analytics Conference, two or three more have sprung up in the space of 18 months.

What's driving this interest?

Acceptance

Donchak explained that there's simply more acceptance that data can help make hiring decisions, even in comparison to a couple of years ago. In general, there's more acceptance about data being able to help make business decisions in spaces outside of HR. Using data in the HR space is a logical progression.

Data Abundance

Many business leaders have access to an unprecedented amount of data, but they're not quite sure what to do with it.

"The biggest component of this excitement is the fact that the data finally exists; if it doesn't exist, there are methods of collecting it in bulk. Even 15-20 years ago, there were very few institutions rigorously collecting this data about anything, much less about their employees or who they might want to hire."

Technology

Contemporary computer technology provides storage options that make the data easily accessible, and new tools to make it easier to work with.

The Future of People Analytics

With interest running strong, the future for people analytics is bright. Donchak predicted that over time, some people management truths will emerge that will be accurate about 90 to 95 percent of the time.

"As we continue to do research, we'll find out what those truths are. Many of those truths will be very low hanging fruit that companies can deploy easily."

As these truths are discovered and shared, other businesses will benefit -- even if they are not conducting their own people analytics research.

Basic People Analytics Strategies to Implement Today

Donchak is passionate about people analytics, and it's infectious. We're excited about it too, and eager to tap into its potential. Her advice on implementation: Start now, and fail fast.

Start now

Otherwise, you're going to get left behind. If you do nothing else, start collecting the data, or you won't have anything to work from later. Many organizations are already doing this, and they're going to be *killing it* in recruiting a few years from now. Remember, the decision is reversible. If you don't use the data, no problem.

Fail fast

Be comfortable with the fact that you're going to make mistakes. It's OK to be wrong. In fact, it's expected due to the scientific nature of this approach. By failing fast, you can discover unforeseen issues quickly and change course accordingly.

Finally, remember that people analytics is not a tool to replace human decision; it's there to compliment human decision with access to powerful datasets.

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