

things. And we said, yeah, sounds great, we'll probably be in touch, but we need to give it some thought, because I think Anh, you had just finished your first book at that time...

Anh: Right.

Jen: ...and you were like "I need a break from this book writing thing." So, we took her card and we kind of went back to life and work as we knew it and things got busy and we're often kind of our worlds doing our jobs and doing our life. And I think it was about like three months later that we got an email from the editor and she was like, "hey, just checking in, what do you guys think about writing this book?" So, Anh and I got on the phone at the time and we're like, well, what do you think we should do? And we kind of took it as, you know, the fact that she was following back up, just this is a sign from the universe that like this was a book that was needed, this is a topic that was needed. It's a topic that we're both passionate about that we believe in, you know, that's why we presented on it in the first place. And so, yeah, I think we just kind of took that as a sign and said alright, let's do it. And Anh being the book writing veteran in the group, I think I was kind of looking to her, trying to sense her mood around it to say like, okay, this a good idea or this not a good idea, but she jumped all in and so there we went.

Jesse: You talk about struggling to make relationships a priority at work, I mean that language sounds kind of alien to work...

Anh: That's the common myth, right?

Jen: Yeah, when I talk about that in the book that kind of the aha moment that I had somebody that worked with me and came to me and was leaving, had accepted another role within the organization, and was leaving the team and was very upfront and blunt with me about why she was leaving the team and the essence of it, which we get into in the book was really because as a leader, I hadn't really taken the time to get to know her, to understand what was important to her, and what mattered to her, and what was meaningful for her and the work that she did. I just expected her to show up and do a job because that's what she was there for. And she was very open and honest with me and of course, I think in the moment at first I was defensive and I deflected it, I processed it more as well. Maybe the role is too challenging for her, maybe it's just that she doesn't, you know, this isn't the kind of work that she likes to do or she's not cut out to do it. And I think it was a few years later after, you know, I had kind of experienced burnout and gone through some other things in my life that I really stepped back to process all of these things and to realize that what she said to me in that moment, even in that moment that I kind of chose not to accept it and not to hear what she was telling me, I did later on hear what she was telling me and it changed me and it changed the type of leader that I am today and the type of leader that I want to be. And at that time when I had this realization and I was redefining a lot of these things for myself in my own life. I actually sent her a note and I told her what her words meant to me and how I hadn't really taken them seriously at the time, because I chose to deflect them or to protect my own ego, but that she was absolutely right. And she's somebody that, you know, now that we've that conversation, she's somebody that, you know, is a friend and will probably be a lifelong friend because of that gift that she gave me just in the work that I do and I'll let Anh talk about her work. I mean there is nothing more important than the strength of our relationships when it comes to our well-being. And there's multiple studies, but in particular a Harvard study that's been going on for something like 83 years on human longevity, and they've looked at, you know, everything across the board in terms of the things that most impact our long-term health and well-being. And the number one thing that has not changed over an 83 year period has been the strength of our relationships, the strength of our personal relationships, and since we spend the majority of our waking hours at work. If we're not developing those relationships at work, we're inadvertently impacting the length of our life to be quite blunt, right?

But just like our long-term happiness as well, and it's interesting because it's been long debated like should you have a BFF at work and we talk about this in the book, not everybody...not every relationship at work has to be your best friend. There are different types of relationships at work, and so we really advocate and promote understanding the different types of relationships at work and why they're valuable and why they matter and so that not, you know, it's impossible to like, love everybody that you work with. You don't love everybody in the world, right? Relationships are hard, you have to invest in them. Every relationship is hard, you have to invest in it, it takes time. So it's not possible for every single person at work to be your best friend, and that's not what we're saying, but being aware and intentional about the relationships that you create and the environment that you're in and the relationships that you do, choose to invest in.

Jesse: And what about you, Anh? Do you have a similar experience or an experience where you kind of had to like think about how you were interacting in this relationship at work?

Anh: You know it's funny, I don't have like any one particular moment of epiphany or anything like that, but I have a lot of small moments in my life and over my career. And it's interesting because, you know, I started my career in technology, but I actually have a degree in humanities, so I think the human side of things have always been really important to me, but I have gotten into moments where I've forgotten about that. So even knowing who I am and knowing that that's always been important to me. There have been times when I've lost sight of that, right, in particular, so I started off in client service. I was traveling about five days a week and I would see my team mates all day for four to five days out of the week because we carpooled together, we had meals together, we exercise together, we did a lot of things together, and so we had this natural kind of built in opportunity to become friends and to get to know each other on a personal level. And I think that was something I didn't realize I had and it was something I took for granted. And then when I shifted out of that role, stopped traveling and started working from home, I found that I was just so focused on getting stuff done and part of it was because of the remote work, there was the subconscious feeling that oh! my goodness, I need to show that I'm on, I need to show that I'm productive, I need to show that I'm available and it was all focused on just trying to get stuff done and try to show results and try to show productivity. And every time, we would start talking about personal things, I would think okay, we don't have time for that, we need to get stuffs done, we need to get to work. And I found myself slipping into that and I thought wait a second, this is crazy, this is not who I am. And as I think through all the different kinds of roles that I have had over the years, I've realized that it's never been the technology, it's never been like the project, you know, work that's been challenging. The biggest challenges I ever faced in any role, had to do with people relationships, and I realized that that was what we all needed to start to think about and work through.

Jesse: That's a really, really great point, and the main thing that keeps us connected right now is technology. Anh, can you talk a little bit about this sort of catch 22 that you describe. I think you write in the book, people use technologies to become ever more productive, often to the point of becoming less productive.

Anh: Yeah, so this is interesting because I do a lot of research in technology and I write about the impact of technology on organizations and the importance of it. So just to be 100% clear, Jen and I think technology is great, so we are definitely not Luddites or anti-tech people. We are for very intentional use of technology. I think it's easy sometimes to be able to take technology and think that you're being more efficient with it, and I think when you tie technology with this whole work is a more obsession with efficiency and productivity. You can have this illusion of being connected to a lot of people, but not really being connected to a lot of people. It's so easy I think these days for people to be sitting 10 feet apart in an office and instead of walking over and talking to that person, you're going to send them an

email instead, because it's that much easier to do that. And so you're emailing back and forth five or six times when you can just get up and walk over there and have a 5 minute conversation.

Jen: So you mean texting with my husband when we're in the same home is not good for our relationship?

Anh: I'm guilty of that too, Jen. There are times when you might need to do that, but...

Jen: It's usually when I want him to bring me something, because I'm being lazy and I don't want to get up and go get it.

Anh: Hey, isn't that great?

Jesse: Jen, is it fair to say in some ways, this is about not just the relationships that we have in the workplace, but the relationships that the people we hire have with the technology that we're using like with the tools that we're using?

Jen: Absolutely. We obviously talk a lot about social relationships and social connection, you know, person to person connection, but there are other relationships that exist, our relationship with the physical environment that we're working in, our relationship with the operational processes in an organization, and all of those relationships are intertwined, you know, you can't really separate them, they impact each other either positively or negatively. I think over the last decade or so, since technology became so prevalent in nearly every aspect of our life, but in particular, in the workplace, we've adopted and adopted and adopted technology, but we haven't really done a good job of adapting to that technology. So we're not to the point yet, like Anh said, we're not intentionally using our technology to enhance our relationships or to augment our relationships. It can be done. We also make the argument that while technology can be used to augment and enhance our relationships, it can never be used as a replacement for our relationships. And I think the pandemic has highlighted that in a big way for people, because to your point, Jesse, when all we're left to is our devices, is a way to connect with one another, we all quickly realized that our devices do not replace true in-person human connection, our devices do not give us a hug, our devices do not make eye contact, you know, our devices don't do all of those things, and so while having the technology during the pandemic is incredible and was incredible because it allowed us to maintain those connections. It's still highlighted how much it's not a replacement.

Jesse: One thing that you talk a lot about in the book is these soft skills and one of them that you highlight specifically is empathy, can you talk a little bit about that, Anh, where are you seeing that and why?

Anh: Well, I think when we think about the future of work, if you want to call it that. And where work is heading, we're seeing that more and more work first of all, is becoming more collaborative. There's been a 50% increase in the amount of collaborative work that's being done, and more and more teams are becoming cross functional, which means that you're exposed to people who may think differently than you, who are from different functions, who may come from different background. There's an increase in diversity at work. So people are coming in from different cultural backgrounds, but also ethnicity and socioeconomic as well. So you're talking about an increasingly diverse workforce as well as more collaborative work, more cross functional kind of work, and in order to be able to work effectively with these people, you have to have empathy. I mean, it's the foundation of any good relationship is to be on to understand the other person or the other people that you work with, and that's the first step is developing these soft skills, being able to read emotions, being able to put yourself in the other person's

shoes, and maybe have a sense for where they might be coming from. And that's going to become more and more important especially as technology begins to take over, some of the more repetitive, predictable work that humans used to do. We're going to have to do more human kinds of work, and so we're going to have to tap into our human and our soft skills and that includes creativity, that includes innovation and all of that's fueled differently. So if you think about technology, technology is, you know, we maintain all of our systems, we make sure that we have software upgrades in our phone, we make sure that we keep our cars maintained and get a tune up whenever it needs to be tuned up, we get an oil change whenever we need to, but if we think about us as human beings, we have to figure out how to fuel ourselves and that's where well-being comes into play, so that we can perform, so that we can tap into these human skills, so that we can connect with people at work, so that we can be more creative and innovative.

Jesse: Do you have anything to add to that, Jen specifically for leaders, when it comes to implementing not only the workforce of the future, but thinking about how it interacts with its tools and implements well-being directly into what they're doing as a team?

Jen: Yeah, so I would say, you know, things that have historically been thought of as soft skills going forward are going to be essential skills and things that employers will either need to develop in their workforce or that's what they will be looking for, because those are truly things that machines can't replicate, probably not in our lifetime, not in the way that we're talking about it, and so I completely agree with Anh that so many things that we talk about with other guests on this podcast, the things that allow us to show up and be fully human and be uniquely human like prioritizing sleep and prioritizing sleep for our workforce, prioritizing rest and recovery, prioritizing movement and exercise, you know, nothing that will blow your mind, quite frankly. We've all heard it. We just don't do it and part of the reason that we don't do it is because our modern world isn't really set up to facilitate it. Our modern world and our technology has in a lot of ways been set up to facilitate quite the opposite, to keep us attached to our devices, to keep us reading or sending one more email to keep, you know, and that's just more hours behind a laptop don't equal more productivity, it actually equals less. I read a study recently that they did of 10,000 tech workers that shifted to work-from-home at the beginning of the pandemic and their hours have increased by 30% and their productivity has decreased by 20%. And I think a lot of people are representative of those tech workers. And so I think we need to rethink the way that we're working and the way that we're caring for and supporting our workforce and we talked about this in a previous podcast with Erica Volini in the Deloitte Human capital Trend around designing work for well-being and how do you design well-being into the flow of work? And I think the really exciting thing about that is that technology actually can have a huge role to play in that in terms of designing work for well-being, because if we are so reliant on our technology, I think we need to think creatively about, okay, well, how do we actually use that same technology to really support workforce well-being? If that's what we know that people are kind of tuned into all day, every day then what are the things that we can do to get people to focus on their own well-being and leverage that same technology that we know that in some ways is detracting from our well-being, because the same way that it's detracting from our well-being, I'm a big believer that same technology can actually enhance our well-being, we just need to think about it differently.

Jesse: You know it really does make me think about how symbiotic and how much they influence each other like these tools or bits of technology and how much it influences culture which in some ways is what we're talking about, it's not only does it potentially facilitate culture, okay, we're having like lots of meetings where we're connecting in this way and we do walking meetings like we've talked about on this show before, Jen, but at other times, it also feels like it can be sort of a stand in, it's like where we use this app because that's sort of the kind of company that we are. And so our relationship with the

technology in macro is kind of part of this as well, but you mentioned it, Anh, yourself when you said that most of the challenges that you faced have been about people and relationships between people on a team, and another thing that you mentioned in the book is that meaning is really important purpose, is really important to create that sense of culture, and so I wonder if you could maybe both talk about that and I'll start with you Anh.

Anh: Yeah, it's funny because there's another book that I was working on at the same time as this one and..

Jen: She's a glutton for punishment.

Anh: It's actually coming out a few months after that, but we actually have this chapter on purpose. The book is really about how companies have survived during the pandemic and how they really kind of navigate what we're calling an acute disruption, so something that happens very suddenly, and we found that leaders really lean on purpose in order to drive their teams through uncertain times. So, if you think about what can pull a team together and what can get people behind any kind of culture. It really can start at that point of, you know, what are we all here for, but then I think you have to go down to the individual level too, and people need to feel like they have a sense of purpose, so as individuals you know, and I think that you can build cultures that enable those things to shine through, and that's how you get sort of strong teams.

Jen: Yeah, it's actually one of my favorite topics. So meaning and purpose, if you kind of peel back the onion, I think what scares a lot of people away from discovering their purpose is that we've been led to believe that like purpose has to be this big giant capital P Purpose like if I'm not doing something that's going to change the world then, then it's not really purpose. And that's just absolutely not true, I mean there is big capital P Purpose and that matters. And there are lots of people that are doing things that are changing the world, but when I talk to people about purpose, even the people that are changing the world, it's really about impact on other human beings. And so this goes back to relationships like when I walk in a room regardless of what the room is, regardless of what my day-to-day job is, if I'm interacting with human beings, other human beings, my purpose in some way is connected to like leaving the room in a better place than I came in like inspiring people, changing, helping people understand something, helping people achieve their goals, helping people, you know, so it's so often about helping others because I often get the question, you're chief well-being officer, of course there's purpose and meaning in your work, and that's absolutely true and I don't take that for granted, but the truth is, is once you know what your purpose is, you can thread that through in your job, every, literally every single day. And I think we have to focus on what I call kind of lower case p like what's everyday purpose not just like big giant Purpose and if you can't find it in your immediate job that you're doing every single day, is your job fueling your purpose outside of work? And I think we get caught up in thinking that our personal purpose has to be tied up in the work that we do every single day and I would encourage people not to tie it up in the work that they do every single day because sometimes work is just a job, but that job may come and go, but you're still you and your purpose is still your purpose, right? Like your job doesn't change your purpose, and it shouldn't. That said, I do think that for employers, it is increasingly becoming more important for, you know, the workforce and workers want to understand, you know, they downstream impacts of the work that they're doing, they want to understand the impact that the work that they're doing is having and kind of the why behind it, regardless of what the type of work is. And so I do think that going forward, that is something that is you're going to continue to have increasing importance and knowing the value and the work that you're doing is really important not just for your own personal well-being, but for employers, because it's, you know, I mean, if I understand the value of the work that I'm doing, I'm going to be more engaged in my work, I'm going to feel better

about the work that I'm doing, I'm going to be nicer to the people that I work with. It just has a lot of down like really positive that I'm going to do better work because I understand that the point behind the work that I'm doing and the purpose and the impact that it's having, and it may be way downstream, but I just think that for employers to be able to articulate that to their workforce is becoming increasingly more important, and we think about social enterprise, people's expectations of an organization now is to care about more than just making money, you know, employees or the workforce wants their employer to care about the communities in which they operate in and to be involved in making those communities better places. And so the enterprises that are going to continue to thrive if you will are the social enterprises that are investing in not just their workforce and their workforce's well-being, but also in the communities in which they operate and then the social fabric of our world, if you will.

Jesse: Is it almost like employees are starting to expect and perhaps should be encouraged to continue to expect that it should fit into a healthy life?

Jen: Absolutely.

Anh: Yeah, so if you look at kind of work and life overtime, you know, you go back a number of years before a technology, there was a clear separation between work and life. I mean you left work and you couldn't bring work home with you, right? And so there was a clear delineation and by the way, the world didn't come to an end at that time, but we had no choice, that was just the norm. And then you start to see technology coming onto the scene and there's a lot of positives with that right like technology gave us the ability to work from anywhere, but technology also gave us the ability to work from anywhere, and it increasingly continues to blur the lines as the devices that we hold in our hand are powerful enough to send us to the moon, right? So we don't even need to carry a laptop around with us anymore. It's done some amazing things, but it's blurred those lines and human beings in general are very bad at boundaries and willpower.

Jesse: Yeah.

Anh: And so absent of our employer, helping to set those behaviors and norms and give them permissions and create that culture and create those dynamics within the culture of the organization, the human beings aren't going to do a good job of doing it themselves, because no one wants to be seen as the outlier like, you know...

Jesse: It's so true.

Anh: ...Jen doesn't answer email after 9 o'clock at night. She's not committed, what you mean, she's sleeping, what sleep?

Jesse: True.

Anh: It is the responsibility of employers to create the cultures that not only support and empower employees to develop strong relationships with one another, but to value well-being, and we talk about that in the book, we would lay it out in kind of a quadrant a two by two and the upper right quadrant is called trusted teams and then trusted teams, you have all of these things, you have a culture, environment on the team that not only highly values the relationships of the team members, but also the well-being of the team as a whole and the well-being of each team member.

Jesse: So, Anh, for the person out there who maybe is having like a little bit of trouble letting go of the idea that, you know, I want competition like that's what makes us great, do you have like a final

takeaway about the book, maybe your final pitch to them, if not to completely change their mind for why they should be open to giving the book a read and considering a different way?

Jen: I'm so glad you got that question.

Anh: So, I do have a thought for this and I think that my response to that person would be, you know, if you are able to open yourself up to having meaningful relationships at work, not only do you have an opportunity to increase your level of engagement, your level of personal connection as a human being, but also I think the potential to achieve so much more than you could achieve on your own, because you know there's this myth of like the lone genius who goes all about it alone and it's just not true. I mean, some of the most amazing things that have been accomplished have been done in teams, and if you think about something that is really thorny or big, or arduous, what better way than to tackle that with somebody that you trust and someone that you're friends with, I mean I look at this book project with Jen and I think that we couldn't have produced such a great book if Jen and I weren't friends, and if we didn't absolutely 100% trust each other and that's at the heart of it. So when you have competition, you don't have trust or that kind of competition that you're talking about, you don't have trust and when you don't have trust, you can't share knowledge. And if you don't share knowledge, you can't achieve some amazing things that you could achieve from a creative perspective, from an innovative perspective all of that.

Jesse: And what about you, Jen? Do you have any final takeaways?

Jen: I think my hope for the people that read this book, you know, that they will learn one or two new things that they start to practice and employ in their life, but I also think that bigger than that, you know, purpose of the capital P perhaps, you know, that we'll all realize, regardless of our role in an organization from C-Suite executive on down that, you know, we all have a role to play in the culture that we want to create, and culture starts with the people that we interact with most regularly, right? And that's our team, and those are the people that also have the biggest impact on our day-to-day well-being. And yes, the tone does need to be set at the top, and leaders need to walk the talk, but we all have agency for the culture that we want to create and we all owe it to ourselves and everybody that we care about to take action on creating a better culture for workplace culture and societal culture for ourselves one that really, truly understands and values, you know, personal meaningful connections and well-being, and I think we all Purpose with a capital P, the world will just be a better place for all of us.

Anh: Jen, I'm so glad that you said that one in about everyone having a role to play in the culture, yeah.

Jesse: The book is Work Better Together, where can people find the book?

Anh: The book is available now, it was released on June 29th and so it's available at Amazon, but also any of your favorite book retailers. And if they don't have it in stock, I think you should ask them to order it.

Jesse: The last thing I'll say Jen, I've been as your producer, I've been here for a lot of conversations about well-being, I've soaked up a lot of knowledge from listening to the show, and it has definitely given me the sort of strength of will or, you know, nerves to just have tough conversations at work and I would have been like, you know, like they said on the WorkWell podcast so I hope in some way that this book can be like that for other people, and I think even it's right there in the title, so giving people the language to have those conversations is it's really meaningful, and it's happened for me, so thank you.

Jen: Awesome, I love that. Thanks Jesse. I'm so grateful that my co-author Anh could be with us today to talk about our new book, Work Better Together, and to Jesse, special thanks to you for guest, hosting, and producing. You can find the Work Better Together on Amazon or your favorite book retailer. Thank

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