

The future of work reimagined with Justin Marcucci and Peter Newhouse - Part 2

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SETH CLIFFORD (SC): Welcome back to the Tech Reimagined podcast. My name is Seth Clifford. I'm here with Peter Newhouse and Justin Marcucci. Peter, the Global Head of Reward for Unilever, and Justin, the Chief Digital Officer of Endava. In part one of our discussion, we had a lot of interesting conversation about the future of the way that we work. And in this part of the discussion, I'd like to hear a little bit more about both our guests, how they got to where they are today and some other things that they might be willing to share with us. So, Peter, let's start with you. You studied and you have a law degree and started your career in reward in 1980 when you joined Organization Resources Counselor's Inc. Was it always your ambition to work in this space?

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PETER NEWHOUSE (PN): Oh, hell no. In fact, it's still not my ambition to work in this space, but something went badly wrong there. So, yeah, accidents, a complete—I think the wonderful thing about life is that you can't predict it. And sometimes the best things happen to you just completely by chance. So, I think being open to opportunity, being curious and being persistent also helps, you know? So, once you get into something that you enjoy, stay with it.

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SC: Very good. And Justin, I know a lot about your background, but you've had a pretty interesting journey, too, over the course of your career. You started with a degree in fine art. You spent time on stage in a band. You started your own business. Why don't you tell us a little bit about your journey?

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JUSTIN MARCUCCI (JM): Yeah. So, I was a fine arts major—painting and sculpting and illustrating—and got to the end of my college career and realised I didn't actually have a path forward to earn any money. I'm not sure if this is a surprise to anybody, but there's not a huge industry available for oil painters these days. So, I learned Photoshop at the end of college and then my first job out of school was as a graphic designer. Applied that fine arts competency in creating things that were really pretty to look at digitally. And then that evolved through, you know, the very, very early stages of interface design as the Internet was just really becoming graphical at that point, all the way through art direction and creative direction and into product strategy stuff. And it's been quite a ride. But I would agree with Peter. It's been a series of really bizarre breaks and really odd scenarios that have got me here. And, you know, that's kind of some of the spice of life, I suppose, is that you've no idea the path you're going to end up taking.

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PN: Yeah, and I love to hear that, you know, from you, Justin. I mean, it's such an interesting journey. And I think because you come from a different place, it allows you to bring creativity, innovation and imagination to what it is that you do. And that's fantastic. You know, what a great story.

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JM: Peter, I bet the law background is devastatingly useful in the kinds of conversations you have to have these days. So, I would imagine that it is a— it's a wonderful arrow in your quiver, so to speak.

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PN: Yeah, so it sounds good, doesn't it? But when I did my law degree, I found law quite boring. And so, I kind of deviated and did anything that said, 'of law', you know, so sociology of law, philosophy of law, anthropology of law—anything that said 'of law' was really good. Now, I did do quite a bit of stuff on contract, because you can't avoid it. And so, I can write a pretty good legal document even these days. But yes, it probably sounds better on paper than it is impressive. But all these things, I think they contribute to the way that you think. And it's really the application of your mind to new environments and the work that you do that makes all the difference. And so, I think a bit of eclecticism in what it is that we do has got to be a good thing.

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JM: Absolutely.

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SC: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. I think one of the things that has probably done me the most good in my career and, you know, in my growth as a human is the fact that I didn't set out to do what I'm doing now. You know, I had a lot of different experiences that shaped me in different ways. And, you know, everybody brings that to whatever they're doing in the current. And it's very interesting to kind of peel back layers of people and see what's happened previously, because, you know, more often than not, you'll be surprised as to people's journeys and both how similar and how different you expect them to be. But I think, Peter, you're absolutely right, those experiences shape us, and they mould us. And they give us insight into doing things differently so that we do have that eclectic kind of, you know, way of looking at things.

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JM: I think it's also interesting is that you never really know what you're going to love, what you're going to want to do. And to be really happy as a professional, I think you do have to love what you're doing to a certain extent. And that takes time to figure it out. And it should be not just within one industry, it should be within several industries. And you should have the necessary spectrum of experiences to be able to triangulate where you really are happy professionally. And I think you can only get that by trying out a bunch of different stuff.

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SC: Yeah, definitely. So, when you think back, both of you, to the beginnings of your careers, what things stand out to you the most about how things have changed? And that could be from any angle, it could be about the specific work that you're doing or have done or, you know, the way in which you're doing it. Justin, what do you think has changed the most in the time you've been working?

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JM: For me, it's been the focus on the human—how much we have now as a number of industries, but globally started to realise the role that the human plays in what we do with technology and what we do from an experience standpoint. 20 years ago, as a designer, we never talked about the user. It wasn't something that we discussed. A lot of the things that we did as we were creating some of the early interfaces for websites, we were trying to care for some of the same situations—how to get people to click on a button and that sort of thing. But there wasn't this science or this knowledge or this understanding that the user has to sit at the core of all your decisions. And I've actually been incredibly impressed, but also heart warmed that so many industries now are bringing it back to what an individual human needs that's going to be interacting with that

technology or that product or that whatever. Because I think it has really focussed and clarified a lot of the approaches and the decisions that we make as professionals these days.

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SC: Alright, Peter, so how about you? Thinking back to the beginning of your career, what things stand out to you the most about what's changed?

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PN: Well, I go back quite a bit further, of course. So, you know, I remember an era before technology. And I think the biggest difference for me is speed. You know, so when I first started working in an office, we'd receive a letter through the mailbox, and we'd read it. That used to take a while. And then once we'd read it, we'd think, 'Oh, OK, well, we need to reply to that. Probably a month will do, you know, because if we don't reply within a month, then we'll probably get a follow up letter, and somebody will wonder what we think of it.' And of course, these days you receive a message and it's really a question of responding almost immediately. So, speed, I think, is the biggest single difference from my point of view. I think the current situation is also going to be quite fascinating because, of course, things, again, have slowed down quite dramatically because there are so many fewer things to do in the current pandemic crisis environment. So, there are fewer distractions, whereas, you know, general life before this, we had so many things going on, so many distractions, so many demands upon our time, and everything was speeding up so relentlessly. So, yeah, speed, I think is the biggest difference for me.

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SC: So, Justin, I'd like to ask you, in terms of your development in business, did you have a mentor somewhere along the way? Did you get advice from somebody that you really took to heart that shaped you? What kind of experience have you had with people in business that you looked up to and wanted to learn from?

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JM: Yeah, absolutely, I had—I've had a number of mentors. One of the most important ones, I was probably 25 or 26. I had started my own business, but I was still working for a couple of big companies in the telecommunications space and my boss's boss's boss, somebody that I wasn't even allowed to get onto their floor of the building at that point, I had met in a meeting. He was interested in things that I said, and he became a mentor of mine as a professional, both within the company we worked in, but also encouraged me to continue to build this business that I had been building—Nickelfish, at the time—and he was enormously influential and had a completely different background. He was a finance MBA from Harvard and just had a completely different set of experiences than I had had. But I learned so much about how to behave as a professional, what to expect of myself, what to do and how to interact, that I wouldn't be where I was today if it wasn't both having explicit conversations with him about what to do, but also just watching and learning from the way that he handled himself in certain scenarios. And so, I think that the importance of a mentor both, again, someone that you've had the conversation with about being a mentor, but then otherwise just emulating the behaviour is essential in any sort of a professional environment, and as a human in general.

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SC: Peter, how about you? Any advice from specific mentors? What's your experience with mentorship?

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PN: I think if I were listening to this, the advice I'd prefer to give to listeners is that there's so many opportunities for learning from the experiences that you have on a day to day basis. You know, every interaction with somebody is an opportunity for mentorship and an opportunity to learn from the interaction, learn from the way that somebody is responding to you, you know, get their advice about something if that's something you want. So, yeah, I'd say that there's a lot of opportunity about. Don't look for someone with the halo or a golden staff. You know, it's OK to learn from everybody.

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SC: Yeah, that's very valuable. Something you both touched on was kind of observing how other people act. I think that's been very critical for me personally learning that over time. And I have a tendency to think about things a certain way, but probably the most beneficial thing that I have done for myself is tried to slow down and see varied perspectives, and I've done that only by being able to observe other senior individuals, you know, whom I respect. And it's been very valuable. So, Peter, what advice do you have for the next generations that are now entering the workforce and just beginning their careers?

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PN: I think Justin touched on it earlier, which is do what you enjoy doing. It's very important. But also, you know, be prepared to do things that you don't enjoy doing because it's only by doing things you don't particularly enjoy well that you practise doing the things that you will enjoy doing properly. You know, so it's no good just sort of saying, 'Well, I'll reserve the best of my ability for the things that I actually like doing', because you won't get that opportunity so often. So, you know, just doing things is a great start. I think the other thing that I would sort of say is it's taken me a long time to learn that I'm not right. And that actually, it's much better if I go into things assuming that I don't know what the answer is and then I can work better with other people. And together we can come to some kind of a solution that is much better than any one of us would have achieved individually, simply because we can contribute to a much better outcome and that none of us in our own right are correct about anything, but we can learn from each other.

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SC: Very good. And Justin, how about you?

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JM: The advice that I always give to people and what I've found is the best advice that I always got, which is take the time and build and cultivate relationships with those people around you. Not transactional relationships—actual relationships where you care about what happens to them as individuals and you know their kids' names and you know what motivates them. Those are so critical in a business sense that you have that strength of relationship with people because we don't know what's going to be thrown at us as we're moving through our professional career, whether within the companies we're in or within other companies. And the value of those personal relationships that you've actually built means that you have options. You have conversations you can have with people. You can get honest points of view that are different from your own to help you make decisions throughout your career. And those relationships end up being the most important savings that you can have as a professional, being able to bank those relationships and understand the value of those. They work both ways. You have to contribute as much to those relationships and provide as much input into those as value you're extracting. But that relationship and the value of those relationships will absolutely determine your success and your ability to pivot effectively throughout your career.

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SC: That is excellent advice and a perfect place to leave our discussion. So, we're just about out of time. Thank you both for joining me and sharing such great insights into your careers and the way that you see us working in the future. Hopefully we'll have many more conversations like this on the Tech Reimagined podcast. If you like this podcast, please make sure to hit the subscribe button and stay up to date with all our shows.