

#WorkTrends Podcast Episode Transcript

The Evolved Executive

11/2/2018

Meghan M. Biro: On this week's episode of Work Trends, we're talking about becoming a more evolved leader, moving beyond the traditional command and control work culture and creating something that's better for everybody, and that's in all caps by the way.

Meghan M. Biro: Welcome to the WorkTrends podcast from TalentCulture. I'm your host, Meghan M. Biro. Every week I interview interesting people and brands who are reimagining work. For more information, be sure to check us out at talentculture.com and join us live on Twitter every Wednesday at 1:30 PM eastern using the hashtag #WorkTrends. I'm joined by my friend and co-host Kevin W. Grossman.

Kevin W. Grossman: It's the most wonderful time of the year, Meghan M. Biro.

Meghan M. Biro: How is that? You mean doing this podcast and show again?

Kevin W. Grossman: Absolutely that that's. There's that. Absolutely, but there's also the fact that Halloween is now behind us and there's nothing but pie in the sky ahead.

Meghan M. Biro: Okay. Boil this down for us. Break it down for me, fellow.

Kevin W. Grossman: So the holidays, that's what I'm talking about. Pumpkin Pie and Pecan Pie and Apple Pie.

Meghan M. Biro: Hi. Yes, we get pie, but let's kind of keep this podcast pie moving. Okay.

Kevin W. Grossman: All right. Time for the news anyway, and today's topic of courses on leadership.

Kevin W. Grossman: New Research from New York University finds that both men and women see stereotypically male traits such as assertiveness and competitiveness as must haves for successful leaders. Meanwhile, stereotypically female traits such as patience and sensitivity were considered nonessential or just nice to have. And I read this and I thought, what the what! I feel that they're essential.

Meghan M. Biro: I hear you and agree and I'm rolling my eyes a little bit, but what else can we learn? Can we get to the good stuff of this research please?

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Kevin W. Grossman: So yeah, there was a lot of back and forth in the research, Megan, that I didn't necessarily agree with. The research did have one surprising bright side that women may be more supportive than men have leaders who exhibit more stereotypically Feminine Leadership Style. So this could be pretty transformative because when you're talking about traits such as communality, that could help define leadership in the 21st century. This could also give women an important advantage. And I would argue men as well, and you know, we have two girls at home, which that gives me hope. So there's that.

Meghan M. Biro: Well, absolutely. About your girls at home who I adore and other women out there. This is very important. So I want to keep this theme going with our first guest today.

Kevin W. Grossman: Yeah.

Meghan M. Biro: Our first guest is Heather Hanson, Wickman, author of "The Evolved Executive: The future of work is love in action." What a cool title. Welcome to WorkTrends, Heather.

Heather Hanson Wickman: Well, thank you. I'm so excited to be here.

Meghan M. Biro: Where are you calling in from today?

Heather Hanson Wickman: You know, I am in Colorful Colorado here on a beautiful Friday morning.

Meghan M. Biro: No, I'm so jealous. I love Colorado. It is beautiful. What part?

Heather Hanson Wickman: I'm in southern Colorado, so near Pueblo actually.

Meghan M. Biro: Beautiful. Well, speaking of all things cool and beautiful and all that good stuff. You wrote this book. First of all, I love this book title. What inspired you to write a book about rethinking the way we lead people at work?

Heather Hanson Wickman: You know, unfortunately, or fortunately it was here firsthand experience. I spent 10 plus years climbing this proverbial corporate ladder, doing my very best to find success or what I thought success would be and if on the other side, but unfortunately what I found along with a lot of good learning, I found a world of work that was full of toxic management practices, kind of to keep us in control, to keep our egos alive, to keep kind of status in place in a workplace where we were spending so much time just covering up who you are. I'm covering up what we thought our weaknesses. Then we were actually doing our work

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and towards you know, the end of what I called this corporate climb I was witnessing kind of a turn towards is taking on a physical manifestation. So think migraines that would send people to the ER, heart conditions, severe stress reactions, and just came to this feeling and realization that the way that we're working isn't working anymore. And in doing some of the research early on for this book, I found a stat that said basically many workplaces today are as harmful as secondhand smoke. And that really sent me back. Like we have to do something dramatically different here, and so after my kind of crack in terms of my corporate career and taking some time to really reevaluate where I was and when I wanted to do in my, in my life, and in my work, I realized that I need to, you'd be a part of designing a different way of work. And that's really what I'm doing today is just really passionate about evolving organizations through kind of the civil leadership practices.

Meghan M. Bir: Many workplace practices are as harmful as secondhand smoke. Weigh in out there WorkTrends community. We want to hear from you. This is powerful stuff and I can totally relate. Heather, I went through this same transformation in my own personal career, um, been studying this for more than a decade now. Leadership Culture, why we are not still where we need to be with feeling good at work. So thank you again for being here. I think this is such an important topic and if you're listening today utilizing the hashtag #WorkTrends, we want to hear from you. We know each and every one of you has your own story. So please share. Okay, Heather, so as I was saying, some of our listeners may be thinking what does love have to do with work?

Heather Hanson Wickman: And yes, I actually was going to start singing that, but later it's a great question and I realized that talking about love at work is kind of a taboo and there's a lot of risk with it, but at the end of the day it's where I think we need to move. So I put it out there. So the subtitle of the book is the future of work is love in action. So if you think about it, most of our management practices that we use today really are, are still rooted in this old paradigm of command and control. And if we kind of dig a little bit deeper in that space, command and control are all based in fear. So fear of maintaining control, being able to predict all these kinds of things. And so if we want to create a different world of work and a new experience and how we come to work, we have to look in the opposite direction and that's where love comes in.

Heather Hanson Wickman: So if we want to pull out the limiting elements of fear in the workplace leaves a voice, we need to fill it in with something, and in my perspective, we need to fill it with something that fuels our soul and that is love. And so I think about it in terms of embracing love, the beliefs that foster love, the practices that embody love and the words that really share love is the magic for building organizations in the future.

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Meghan M. Biro: What if I'm going to play devil's advocate for a moment and say, what if I don't think love matters? What if I think it's another word? What do we do with leaders who just say that's too soft and fuzzy for me? Like I don't care. I'm, I'm looking at my revenue. I'm looking at my bottom line. Is there another word? Is there an inbetween here for those nonbelievers?

Heather Hanson Wickman: I'm really glad you actually pointed that out because it ends. I mean people have a lot of baggage around the word love and so I've seen leaders be just as successful when they use the word care. So caring about their people or their teams or the collective entity or even joy, finding ways to bring joy infused joy back into our workforce and into our work practices. So if there are those words that feel more comfortable and feel more just an ease, absolutely, and the basic ideas that we're needing to pull away from fear and so replacing fear with something that's much more life giving. And for me it's love, but absolutely to your point, some leaders may resonate with a different word that at the end kind of say has the same essence. It takes on different language.

Meghan M. Biro: So tell us how can the average manager really create this kind of change, especially in large organizations. How can people start to make these changes? It's tricky when we see those numbers rise as we know.

Heather Hanson Wickman: Absolutely. So when I think about love and action, it's not the soft squishy things. It's much more and difficult challenges that we need to think about. So it's about freedom and the autonomy. It's about human connection. It's about growth. And the good thing is there's a ton of things. The average manager or the average employee can do, I would say with one caveat that they and their team need to be willing to work as a bit of an experiment together and to use it a way to test new ideas and iterate. So there needs to be some general agreement that, hey, we're going to try some new things and we're going to see how they go and we're going to see what sticks and what doesn't.

Heather Hanson Wickman: So the first thing that I would suggest is finding small ways to give power and control back to your team members. So if you're the average manager and you have five team members, is there a decision you run into this week that someone else can take on that you don't have to take on and actually they can do and maybe learn something through process. Do you have a team member who maybe has a great idea they want to run with, but they're feeling held back because they have an assumption they need you to give your effort to it or you're okay to it won't let them run with it. See what they see. What happens for any manager that is familiar with some of these self management practice says you could give any one of these a try, so an advice process, so implementing an

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advice process where a local team has the know how to make decisions on the fly really quickly without you or maybe moving away from strict job descriptions to more of a role based kind of idea of giving someone that authority to run with a passion project.

Heather Hanson Wickman: So those again are areas where you're trying to just give back some freedom and autonomy to your team members in whatever way potentially pops up in the week. Another example is definitely symbol but not an easy one and I almost feel silly for say unit because it is super simple. So lockout time to actually connect with your team, like be human with your team. We get so all endowed with emails and just constantly at our, at our office with the door closed, so get put your computer away or just walk away from your computer and go out and talk to your team members without any expectation of asking them to do something. Just get to know them, what are their passions, desires and dreams, whatever it might be. It's truly amazing how a team comes together, can come together when they feel really valued and cared for by their manager.

Meghan M. Biro: And this also goes to virtual companies because more and more of us are virtual, so we don't have that luxury of walking in to another office and saying, hey, you know, tap on the shoulder. You're doing a great job today. You're not off the hook leaders, all of you out there. I see you. I'm not off the hook. You're not off the hook. Regular calls, skype video. We have so many other ways in which we can connect with other people, right? Oh absolutely. And you know, we have such an innate need for kind of that belonging and connection. So we need to find ways to make that happening. You're absolutely right. Zoom and skype and phone calls, a text. It can go a long ways to just creating that sense of kind of belonging. You brought up the word fear and I've been thinking a lot about fear lately in working through some of my own fears in portions of my career that I want to improve getting up in speaking on stage. Anyone else kind of have that fear? I, I am working through that right now. Everyone, if you have chips you want to share with me, send me a tweet at work trends, share some love would share some advice. You know, it's one of those things I was onstage as a kid and a teenager and I find myself as an adult going, why is this? It's like that thing, right? Then I'm that I'm working towards and we all are right.

Heather Hanson Wickman: If we're all being transparent, what are the big fears people have to get over in order to make these changes here is ridiculously pervasive and I am right there with you in terms of getting up on stage. I love connecting with people, but there's something about yes, I have to do it tomorrow and I'm like, Oh God, why is causing me an issue? It shouldn't be an issue. I love what I do. It's so bizarre, but I think that these fears are incredibly pervasive and I you do a lot of

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Kudos for diving in and trying to figure out what it is so that we can move beyond it.

Heather Hanson Wickman: And so I, I see a couple of common ones pop up all the time when I'm working with leaders. So the first one in no real particular order would be this idea of losing control, and so I'm not going to know what's going to happen, who's going to do it, when it's going to get done, and where they're going to do it, whatever it might be. Losing the sense of certainty, which is kind of bizarre in this world of work, when we really. The only thing that we have is uncertainty, but it's real because we think that we need to hold onto that idea of control. The second big one is this fear that I'm going to look in competence if I don't have all the answers, if I give away my power, these kinds of things, and at the end of the day that again is just a huge lie.

Heather Hanson Wickman: I mean the greatest gift I think we can give others is a place to grow and the only way that we can do that is if we allow them the opportunity and give away an opportunity for them to learn. The third one that I would say pops up pretty regularly is this fear that I may not be needed anymore. I think this is a sneaky one, especially for leaders and managers because when we begin to shift out of this really kind of masculine commanding control type of leadership into a much more collaborative space in a much more kind of a nurturing space, coaching space, there's this idea of like, well, am I even important here anymore? And the opposite. It'd be more true. We need those leaders to create the space where people can learn and grow and really unleash their greatest potential and that kind of aligns with the last one in terms of I may be seen as weak, you know, my colleagues may see me as a weak leader now that I allow my team to do so much, whatever it might be, and I think these are kind of at the core, all the fears that really hold us back and hold us in this old paradigm and make us struggle to kind of move into this new space of work.

Meghan M. Biro: Okay, so tell us, let's look to the future a little bit. Are there any organizations that are already, and we'll use the word evolved in at these evolved organizations, are their servant leaders there. Talk a little bit about what that is and what that means to you and your career.

Heather Hanson Wickman: The part of the transformation that I'm probably most excited about to keep learning about these organizations that are popping up to an incredible things that are kind of paving the path for this future work to really emerge. So one that I would call out first and foremost is the decurion organization and know I've been looking into this organization for quite a long time and they have what I think is the organization that's demonstrating what it means to be a deliberately developmental organization at its best and that is really about how do we create

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this idea of human flourishing at the same time as an organization is flourishing in everything that they do.

Heather Hanson Wickman: They focus on growth and development and not in a super fluffy way by any means. It is. You are stretching every day of your, of your work life, not only in your own personal goals, but in the organization schools and I'll chat about two other companies and then I'll jump to the servant leadership question because I think they align here perfectly. The other organization I would give a huge nod to his, they're called August and they're a consultancy based out in New York and they have jumped on this train of radical transparency like I have not seen before and with one specific examples, so salaries, salaries is something that we all covet with such secrecy and they have a completely open compensation system so everyone knows what everyone else makes and they also have kind of this open negotiation system with their peers, with their colleagues when they get pay raises.

Meghan M. Biro: Interesting. It's fantastic to see something like that happen and to really blow away our fears around kind of this whole compensation structure. That's when it's fascinating.

Heather Hanson Wickman: So it's a company called stoke and it's a real estate company.

Meghan M. Biro: Wait a minute, hold on. The company is called Stoke. Okay. Yes. Love this. Yeah, no more instantly. Boom. I'm a sucker. Can you tell I'm a sucker for words and names you had me at stoke? Yeah, it's perfect.

Heather Hanson Wickman: And they are following a philosophy called organizational biomimicry. And so it's this idea that we're going to follow nature's design to create new organizational structures. So instead of the traditional hierarchy, they've created these pots so you can kinda think of networks of teams, but the trick is they have no managers and no bosses and so it's this self directed, self managed, um, Utopia. It's fantastic, but be able to, to be able to get to these levels of different organizational functioning.

Meghan M. Biro: I think to your point, we need a different type of leader and servant leadership is really, I think the core of our evolution as leaders. And for me personally, there's a sweet spot in deep, deep self awareness combined with other centeredness [inaudible]. And so the side that, that we know who we are, we have healthy levels of self worth and self love that we can let go of our need to focus on, you know, me and me. And instead we work every day to focus on the growth and potential of our team in pursuit of a shared goal and from what I know about these organizations, the leaders here and kind of the ethos of these

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cultures are in this base of realized self awareness. We need it and we need to focus on growth and we need to let go of these fears and these practices of the past that really have held us back.

Meghan M. Biro: And you're really talking about the future of work in the word we w e, right? Absolutely. So looking ahead, what do you hope is different for the next generation network?

Heather Hanson Wickman: Yeah. So I don't have kids, but I have nephew, nieces that I look to it and I. you're young and they're going to be coming into work and I want them to experience a different world of work. And so I think about a place where we all find meaning that we can experience our own personal unfolding in a way, and that is much more a natural extension of who you are versus this compartmentalized thing we do for a paycheck. In my most ideal scenario, it was a, it would be a place where our souls really awakened and I think we're moving in that direction and that's what I hope for my my nieces and nephew and you know, all my friends and all these types of things and we're on our way, but we've ways to go as well.

Meghan M. Biro: Heather Hanson Wickman, you rock you as well. Thank you

Kevin W. Grossman: Meghan. Thank goodness she talks about leading with soul purpose and love because I'm so tired of the tough guy alternative. I am a guy and I'm tired of it and I want more for us all. Count me in. So Meghan, I want to do explore this idea more. So I reached out to Susan Basterfield. She runs a group called Enspiral. It's a global network of entrepreneurs who are dramatically rethinking the traditional later run a company. She's all the way in New Zealand, so it was really excited to get her on the phone.

Kevin W. Grossman: Susan, thank you so much for being on WorkTrends. First, why don't you tell me a little bit more about your work at Enspiral.

Susan Basterfield: Pleasure, Kevin. Thanks for having me. So Enspiral is a collective of entrepreneurs that originated in Wellington, New Zealand, and is now worldwide. The key premise to inspiral is more people working on stuff that matters. We and we're completely under an opinionated about what that is. So for me, for example, I help organizations and leaders transition into more participatory and human workplaces. My colleague Bart, for example, is a climate change activist. My colleague Joshua runs a coding school, but the main premise is that we have intentionally come together to practice our work in nonhierarchical organizing and we use that as our practice field for how we share what we do to the world.

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Kevin W. Grossman: That's fascinating. So and also in a sense, this is a large mentor network too, isn't it?

Susan Basterfield: Absolutely. We, we certainly mentor each other and in fact in some cases pay each other for our coaching every month, but it is really working on the premise that our ongoing development as humans shouldn't stop just because we enter the work. I think it's always been quite fascinating that when we're at school, the assumption that we continue to do and actually enact our social psychosocial behaviors in the school yard through building relationships, understanding power dynamics, understanding kind of how we sit with our opinions and our reactions and then all of a sudden when we get to work, the assumption is that that all stops well. The fact of the matter is it doesn't actually stop. It actually probably accelerates, but we're not encouraged to pay attention to and notice how we can use a workplace to do our ongoing development and that there doesn't have to be a compromise between great outcomes, commercial outcomes for the business and humans that are working within that organization. Continuing to develop socially and personally and professionally.

Kevin W. Grossman: We have got to keep those synapses firing that way.

Susan Basterfield: Absolutely, and like I said, they do anyway, but we're just not encouraged to notice that it's happening.

Kevin W. Grossman: One of the things that I do during the day is also run a research firm all about candidate experience and what it's like to go through recruiting processes around the world. And one of the things that we find every year that continues to grow on the candidate side that they want more of is they do want to understand more about what are their development opportunities at the organizations that they're working for big and small across industries. And it's, you know, we used to talk about the corporate ladder. Then it changed to the metaphor was the lattice. And now sometimes when you talk about somebody kind of career path, it's could be this very much a firefly lighting up the sky moving, going back and forth and all over the place. But we still want to know what those development opportunities are so that we want that kind of enriching environment. Wouldn't you agree?

Susan Basterfield: Yeah, absolutely. I was in Quebec last week at the, uh, a professional society of HR professionals speaking about this topic of, of how, especially in this ongoing environment were attracting and retaining great talent has become more and more competitive. We need to move beyond the table stakes of ping pong table and beer on Friday and really live into our organizational mandate. I think to

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be focusing on the ongoing development of the people that choose to join us, because as you so eloquently stated, this is what millennials and this generation are looking for from employers. Yeah, very much so. So what else about traditional norms about work?

Kevin W. Grossman: Should we be challenging today?

Susan Basterfield: There are so many of these things. I've written a couple of books on the topic, so reinventing scale ups, radical ideas for growing companies really talks about how we can choose to notice and pay attention to things like transparency in the workplace, decision making, assumptions about our great ideas correlated with tenure. I mean, I think the obvious answer to that is no, but also thinking about it from the perspective of the current leaders in the organization that might have this feeling and consciousness about wanting to start to decentralize our distribute decision making, but holding those rightful fears that without the context that leaders have, how can they trust for the decisions to be made with all of the information so there's so many things that we need to think about in terms of not necessarily leveling the playing field, but to create the conditions for more participation really needs a lot of scaffolding. I also do believe that many leaders in organizations these days wants to leave or transition and not leave the same old pyramid shape behind, so how can we create the learning opportunities for leaders to feel really great about decentralizing some of the tasks that have traditionally sat within job titles and allow organizations to be more focused on roles and how the gifts of individuals can be used across all sorts of domains that might not fit into the traditional job title.

Kevin W. Grossman: Can I put that on a gold plaque and put it on my desk? Yes, please. Yes, I will. I will do that. Thank you very much for that. So that was great. Great insight in regards to what leadership needs to be looking at, but for us that, you know, some of us, US old gen xers like me who had been working for a long time that try to be open and mindful on a regular basis, but there's some things that just, you know, are kind of baked in right into our behavior and how we approach the world of work. What is the hardest thing for folks like me and others across generations to rethink when it comes to work?

Susan Basterfield: I think it has to do with trust. I think that acknowledging that we've all been, and maybe this is too dramatic of a word, but I'm going to use it anyway. Traumatized in some work experience. Sure. Either had a great idea that was shot down or had been promised something at the end of the year that an excuse it was made that it didn't come to pass or even like more obvious bullying behaviors in the workplace. I can't tell you how many times you know, before I transitioned to my entrepreneurial career, I spent 20 years in senior leadership

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positions in multinationals like IBM and Vodafone and Telstra. So I am, you know, all too aware of the institutionalized behaviors that I think are mainly fear and ego based that do impact us and our hearts. Right? And if we're constantly trying to protect ourselves from harm, which is the natural human instinct, then that's going to limit our ability as individuals to be open and conscious and trusting of one another.

Susan Basterfield: So I think that practices that allow us to connect even simple practices like one of my favorite practices is what we call the check in. So every time you get to a new meeting and the day just take a time to take a couple of breaths together and say what you need to say to transition from the thing you were doing before to the meeting that you're president now. And it might be as simple as, oh, that was hectic. I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm glad that we have a opportunity to take breath so I can focus on this new thing. It might be, oh gosh, I didn't sleep at all last night. I'm really stressed about particular project. Or it could be, wow, I'm feeling like I have a lot of energy today and I'm glad that I have the opportunity to say that I'd like to support anybody that might be a little bit low today.

Susan Basterfield: So little micro practices like having a human element of us showing up as ourselves as we're transitioning from one thing to another is again, one of the little micro practices, but I think that as they become muscle memory can allow us to be more trusting. Allow us to be more open, allow us to connect more at work. Because I think that that's the root of it is expressing our agency, being autonomous and making good decisions about the work that we do, but also understanding that the workplace is a relational contact and we need to pay attention to that can really liberate us to be happier and more productive in the workplace.

Kevin W. Grossman: That's the second plaque to thank. Thank you for that. Every week we have many standing meetings, but when I'm with with one of my team members and our web designer every week and one of the first thing we do at the beginning of every call as we talk about TV for a few minutes, always about TV. We're a big walking dead fans and some other shows that we watch collectively and so that's stuff and that's just a nice because usually I've already. I've already been lining up calls before that one like planes at O'Hare. Right. Trying to get off the tarmac so that those kinds of things and I did that with some other other team members too. I would agree. I think that really does help. It helps to solidify the relationship, the in-between relationship at work as well as I think just better nontoxic way of getting things done too at the end of the day and better working with each other. That's awesome. The last thing that Susan I wanted to ask you about is kind of as it relates to leaders in the organization, but particularly human resource leaders. How can we make our organizations better places to work?

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You've already touched on a lot of things, but how would you kind of summarize this, especially from the HR perspective?

Susan Basterfield: Yeah. I really love Carol Sanford's work. I don't know if you're familiar with her, but she. I like to really think about what is our. What is the highest intention we can have for what we're trying to make possible in the organization. Is it about simply extracting more from from employees? Is it about arresting disorder, like fixing things that are broken? Is it about expressing our opinions on best practice or is it really about creating the conditions for everybody in the organization to build their, their individual capacity and try to restrain ourselves from being opinionated about what that is? So I think that one of the things that hr leaders can do is really take a take a minute to mind check when you're planning interventions or trainings or learnings or portfolios, where has that intention coming from and what could it look like if we strive to do it from the intention, the highest intention of capacity building.

Susan Basterfield: I also think that really looking at the compliance competencies that so many people in hr have been focused on and understanding. If you look at any research about what the new competencies in the workplace need to be moving forward, we often look at them in terms of the people that we're recruiting. So things like being able to be comfortable with ambiguity, being comfortable with things that are changing all the time. Being comfortable with strategic plans. That may not be three year plans, but maybe six month plans that have more of an agile methodology wrapped around them. I think that oftentimes I see hr professionals look for those qualities in people that we're recruiting but not in how to reorient ourselves around building our capabilities in that area. So I'm not sure if that quite answered the answers the question, but I really feel that that for me is the challenge that I always put forward to the very talented professionals working in this.

Kevin W. Grossman: Yeah, I would have to agree with you on that. I do. There always tends to be this tendency to look outside to refresh spring, a new from others from externally in the organization and we talk about the internal development side. I think that's partly where you were going and we just that that does that fall short unfortunately, but I would say again, the end of that right there. Susan that was plaque three, so I've got three gold plaques now from this conversation with you that I want to thank you very much for, for being on work trends. That was a great. Some great insights for the work that you're doing at Enspirial, and thank you again so much for your time.

Susan Basterfield: Thanks Kevin.

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