

Meghan Biro: On this week's episode of WorkTrends, we're talking about building the future of HR. We're going to look ahead at HR Transform, this is a conference all about the company of the future.

Meghan Biro: Welcome to the WorkTrends podcast from Talent Culture. I'm your host, Meghan M. Biro. Every week we interview interesting people who are re-imagining work, and join us on Twitter every Wednesday, 1:30 PM eastern, using the Hashtag, WorkTrends. And here's my cohost of the WorkTrends podcast. And my travel buddy, for HR transform, Kevin W. Grossman.

Kevin Grossman: Yes, we're heading to Vegas, Meghan. We're excited, March 26th to the 28th, for HR Transform, and I know we can't wait. And the theme of the conference is, "Where the company, a future begins", so sign us up.

Meghan Biro: Two words, Vegas, baby. We are going to be there, along with 200 speakers. We're talking to senior HR executives, innovative entrepreneurs from the HR tech space, and the investors that are kind of putting up the cash for the future of work. Some of the companies participating includes Slack, Lift, Allbirds, Walmart, Capital One, Panasonic, Zume, Accenture and TripAdvisor. So pretty cool stuff.

Kevin Grossman: Yes. Well established, and new brands alike. So today's show, what we're going to talk about really is just to give you all a sneak peek of the kinds of themes and topics that we're going to see here, and see at HR Transform. And I've got some related news first, so let's get to that.

Kevin Grossman: So Meghan, one of the big themes this year at HR Transform, and top of mind for many, many organizations, is of course the focus on diversity and inclusion. And it's something that we've talked about even a few times of late, on the show. Now I found an article in the Harvard Business Review from just a few couple of weeks ago that was referencing a Boston consulting group diversity and inclusion survey. Would you like me to share with you?

Meghan Biro: Please? Because I mean this is ... it's not only about diversity, but the whole inclusion part of that, is something I think we need to be talking a lot more about.

Kevin Grossman: Agreed. I liked actually what this research was all about. So first, let me just kind of set the stage. They surveyed about 16000 employees, in 14 countries around the world, to see what obstacles that those individuals face, and what kinds of diversity and inclusion interventions are used at their workplace, and what they find more effective for women, racial and ethnic minorities and LGBTQ employees as well. What I liked about this is that they identified this set of hidden gems for each of these diverse groups, policies that they thought were effective, but were undervalued by employees in the majority groups. So for example, for female employees, hidden gem interventions are those that provide a viable path forward and give them the tools to balance career and

family responsibilities. So, women wanted to see visible role models in the leadership team, but can you guess the difference of how women and men ranked this in terms of their ability to produce a desired or intended result? What do you think?

Meghan Biro: Oh, I'm going to say it's probably much lower for men.

Kevin Grossman: Yeah, pretty much right on the money there. In fact, it was ranked fifth in terms of efficacy by women, but 17th by men. That's 109%-

Meghan Biro: Wow.

Kevin Grossman: Yeah, it's a 109% difference, it's pretty stark disparity there. So the last thing I wanted to share about this research and what was important, at least to the theme, one of the themes at HR Transform, what we're going to talk about on the show today as well, is that the Boston consulting group's work with corporations looking to boost their diversity and inclusion points to three organizational aspects of implementation. The success of these initiatives require leadership commitment, that's one. A Tailored approach based on the unique needs of the organization, that's two. And of course, there's no better way for tracking engaging metrics and progress, but with your HR technology systems. So that said, I kind of came full circle to come back around again talking about HR Tech. So let's talk shop with [Samara Jaffe 00:00:04:30] who is the co-founder and executive director at HR Transform.

Kevin Grossman: Samara, thank you so much for being on the Work Trends podcasts. You know, there are a lot of great HR recruiting and technology related conferences in our industry, in our space. The first big question I want you to answer for us, on WorkTrends, is why HR Transform? Why this conference?

Samara Jaffe: Let me begin by just saying, I really appreciate both Meghan and you having us on today to talk a little bit more about HR Transform. There certainly are a lot of other HR conferences out there. I think what differentiates us compared to many of the others, is that we're really bringing kind of fresh voices and perspectives together. So we're bringing together chief people officers from rapidly growing VC backed companies, HR executives from the fortune 1000, and entrepreneurs building next gen of technology that support the workplace of the future. This is a really passionate, innovative audience, that's thinking about how to create a company of the future.

Kevin Grossman: And this is the second year, correct, that this conference has been produced?

Somara Jaffe: It is.

Kevin Grossman: Well there you go. Year two, that's awesome.

Somara Jaffe: It is.

Kevin Grossman: So, that setting, and you just touched on a couple of things, but tell us more about the big themes that are going to be explored at this year's HR Transform conference.

Somara Jaffe: We have four key themes for the show this year, so it's coming up in just a few weeks now. The first is the balance between technology and humanity. So, thinking about how does technology enable us to free up time and mind share, to enable greater human connection to allow us to focus on the human gift that technology really can't replace. The second big theme is diversity, equity, and inclusion. So, ensuring that we have a diverse workplace, that people feel valued and welcomed, and that we're ensuring access to all people to the same opportunities.

Somara Jaffe: Number three is the identity of HR. There's a lot of conversations around the role of HR and the strategic shift that's underway, within that function, to ensure that there's a voice of the people at the C suite and the board level. And then last, is the future of work. So, how do we think about this new pool of talents, that's working as ten ninety nine, gig employees. How do we also prepare our employees for the kind of future state workplace, by re-skilling and up-skilling their talents. So, we have a packed agenda, and these themes will be really thread across a number of the sessions, in terms of narrative.

Kevin Grossman: So again, Samara, with these four interconnected threads of what's going to happen at the HR Transform conference., how are those rolling out into the specific tracks that are going to be offered at the conference?

Somara Jaffe: So we'll have three tracks this year, which are technology, humanity and transformation. And we'll see these themes really as threads that come up in all of the sessions, both across the three tracks, as well as on our plenary stage, which will be kicking off the program on the morning of the 27th. And the plenary stage will actually have sessions that are going to hit on all of these key themes. So, it will kind of all tied together, across the program.

Kevin Grossman: And, we're excited about the panel session that we're going to do, that Meghan is going to moderate and I'm going to be one of the panelists, and we've got a great crew that we'll be announcing soon as well for that particular session. So, really looking forward to it. But what I know right now though, I want to drill down a little bit further about one of the exciting speakers you are going to have at HR Transform. So, tell us why you were, again, super excited to book Ron Storn from Zume. Tell us that story.

Somara Jaffe: We are excited to have both Ron and Alex, the CEO of Zume, onstage at HR Transform. They have a very interesting story. To begin, they are a unicorn. It's recently raised a lot of capital, and it's getting a lot of attention within the marketplace. They are also, I think, a terrific example of a company that's leading the way in both the intersection of technology and humanity, but also the future of work. And I know Ron's going to give a little bit of a teaser as to

that, when he talks to you guys on the show today. So having both Alex and Ron together, a CEO and the chief people officer together on stage to tell their story and how they collaborate, I think is really a great example and a great role model to show other leaders in the audience who are looking to create that same type of dynamic and relationship, with their C suite and their board.

Kevin Grossman: In summary, Samara, why should the WorkTrend's listeners come to HR Transform this year?

Somara Jaffe: So, I know the WorkTrends listeners are all very interested about ideas and insights around re-imagining the workplace. Now, the audience at HR Transform is similarly passionate and interested in learning from one another, discovering new ideas, to really create the company of the future. So I think the reason to attend, is to be a part of the community, to learn from the other senior chief people officers and other HR executives, that will be in the audience, hear some new perspectives that will actually give you tangible items that you can take back to your own organization, to make the difference.

Meghan Biro: Next, let's talk to Ron Storn. He's going to be speaking at HR Transform. He is the chief people officer at Zume, and they are a company with a big old mission, to be the most powerful source of health and wellbeing on the planet. Talk about big, right? I can't wait to hear more.

Meghan Biro: Welcome to work trends, Ron. What's happening?

Ron Storn: Thanks Meghan, excited to be here. I look forward to this podcast.

Meghan Biro: Where are you today?

Ron Storn: I'm actually in San Francisco.

Meghan Biro: Geez, go figure. I feel like everybody's in San Francisco ...

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Ron: In San Francisco.

Meghan Biro: Ah geez, go figure. I feel like everybody's in San Francisco right now. I don't know what it is. Like every single time I ask that question, I'm in San Francisco. Like I don't know what's going on over there, but clearly lots and so not surprised.

Ron: Yeah. I think the tech center is right now in San Francisco, but it's evolving. It will spread out as time goes on.

Meghan Biro: No question. So tell us, how did you get into HR?

Ron: Well, I had a little bit different experience and background to get into HR. I actually started my career as a CPA way back in the day, but I was always a people oriented person and I leveraged my five years in public accounting into a recruiting role that was focused on accounting and finance. And my career evolve from there where I had my own search firm that focused on executive recruiting and I had my firm for about five years. And unfortunately during the recession, things changed and I was lucky to have a connection into Google. So I started my tech career at Google, focusing on some of the HR initiatives within their business operations group. And then my career pivoted to Facebook. I joined Facebook about a year and a half before the IPO, led a lot of the recruiting areas on the non tech side and then pivoted to the tech side. And I started at that point interfacing with HR and started doing some of my HR work. And that really prompted me to really want to expand my horizon and to lead an HR practice for an organization. So then I get lucky enough to be the first HR leader at Lyft in 2013.

Meghan Biro: Right. I mean, is anyone listening to this trajectory? That's huge. When you look at your career, and I mean congratulations to you for getting your face out of spreadsheets, by the way, and taking the leap for a more human approach, right?

Ron: No, thank you. No, absolutely. I remember when I made that decision to go into the human world, people questioned, well what am I doing? Am I crazy? But obviously, was a lot of fun. And my experience at Lyft was amazing. It was 80 people when I joined, I was there for four and a half years. And you know, having a competitor like Uber really helped push us, but also made us unique and tried to make sure that we did things a different way. And when I left it was about 2,500 people and we were operating across the entire US. And I wanted to then take my career to the next level, to have impact even on a broader area. And that's how I joined Zume, which is changing the whole face of logistics and supply chain within the food industry.

Meghan Biro: Interesting. And by the way, I'm a big fan of Lyft. Uber, not so much ...

Ron: That's why we get along.

Meghan Biro: We're off to a great start, you and I. So what are some of the specific decisions you made? It Zume to build a different way to work? 'Cause that's what we're really talking about.

Ron: Correct. Well, I mean my philosophy is the whole employee and candidate life cycle, where it's like hire, grow, keep. And one of the things that people are ... There's a couple of things that people focus on when they join a company. They want to work with smart people, they want to have impact on the role and they want to be connected to the mission, vision and values of that company. So one of the things I focused on was, we wanted to hire the best people no matter where they were, because Zume is solving such a complex problem, that we

need the best minds. And so we took a different approach where we said it doesn't matter where they are, geographic distribution will be an asset, not a liability. Because a lot of companies, they want people to be in one headquarters or in one location.

Ron: We are not. We have hired an exec team that spans across all markets within the US and we're soon going to be open internationally as well too. So our thought process was you could build around leaders as long as they have the right value fit. And so that was one of the things that we really want to focus on. Another thing was about automation and we wanted to try to do things a different way from a business standpoint as well. And so we were focused on trying to automate the simple and dangerous tasks. And that is a combination of being in the business as well is in the HR side. So those were a couple of the key things that we were trying to focus on in building the company in a different way.

Meghan Biro: Did you just say dangerous?

Ron: Dangerous. Yes.

Meghan Biro: What do you mean by that?

Ron: So in the pizza business, when you put a pizza on the line, then you have to, you create the shell and you put some of the sauce and the toppings on it, but then you have to put it in an oven. Sometimes you have to take it by hand and put it in the 750 degree oven. So instead of having a person do that, you have a robot do that. That is one way of taking a dangerous task out of the human side.

Meghan Biro: Okay, so you're being literal.

Ron: Correct. Very literal.

Meghan Biro: You're not being ... I thought you were going somewhere wacky with that, so I'm glad. It's like no, this is very specific and we can have a robot do that. That's very cool.

Ron: Yes. Yes it is.

Meghan Biro: So I love the push to hire the best people wherever they are. I agree with you. That's always been my mantra as well. What have you learned about building a distributed team? Because not always easy.

Ron: No, it's difficult. I mean it takes a concerted effort I think, and a lot of the attention has to be to inclusion, culture and values. And the way that we've been thinking about how remote employees feel inclusion is very important for us. So when we build that type of workforce, one of the examples that we do is we want to send care packages to them as part of the onboarding experience,

because they not all the time can come on site to a full onboarding experience. We want to make sure that they feel included. And again, we don't want to just hire people remotely. We want to make sure they're engaged and we keep them. And so we have to modify our strategies based on the different type of workers that we have. So from my experience, what we like to do is try to take someone who has been in Zume for a little while, understand our culture, our values, and how do you develop a workforce from the ground up. Take them, put them into a new location and really help grow that location. Starting with the values and then spearheading the whole philosophy of the company.

Ron: So you don't feel like you're in a remote spot and you're not connected to HQ, by having someone who has been in HQ that will help really blossom and nourish the entire environment. The other thing that we tried to do is have various landing teams. So maybe not a specific site lead, lead that location, but have people go there for a period of time, maybe four to six weeks, and really be a part of that environment and help shape that culture that we're trying to build. I think that is the best way of how you can build a distributed team.

Ron: The other piece though that's very important, there can be a lot of growing pains with technology, so we have to make sure that we have the right video technology, the right type of communication channels to ensure that everyone is included and have the right level of detailed information that they need in order to do the jobs. Because if the systems and tools aren't there or aren't adequate, the collaboration will be negatively affected. And when collaborations is negatively affected, that hurts the bottom line. It hurts engagement, it hurts culture and it hurts everything that we do. So it's tricky. It's very important for us, but it's a nuanced approach that we're trying to do.

Meghan Biro: What's your current headcount?

Ron: We have about 350 employees.

Meghan Biro: Nice. That's the size where everybody still knows each other.

Ron: That's true. That is true. Again, but when you're in different offices, it's a little trickier to do that. But what we try to do at company meetings, where one of the fun things that we do from a value standpoint is that we introduce all the new hires every two weeks and we have a fun fact about them that makes them unique and we share that at the company meeting. So usually that fun fact associated with a name will at least allow them to be introduced in or inducted into our family so that people can be aware of who they are. That's a cool thing that we tried to do.

Meghan Biro: What was your thing? What's your word? What's your mantra?

Ron: My fun fact? Well, I was a bowling champion when I was 10 years old, which no one would really expect.

Meghan Biro: [crosstalk 00:19:13] for the state of California?

Ron: Yeah.

Meghan Biro: That's huge.

Ron: Yeah.

Meghan Biro: That's unforgettable.

Ron: It's different.

Meghan Biro: Yeah. So listen, what advice do you have for other leaders with automating tasks? I mean, what have you learned here? Because this is a very big fear, I think for many right now.

Ron: Well, I mentioned it a little bit earlier on, but in the business side for pizza, again we wanted to try to automate the repetitive, the more dangerous tasks so that you can free up not only workers to focus on other things, but they can be more strategic in how they optimize their role. So you have to teach them new skills. But so for instance, a line worker in the pizza organization, instead taking the pizza, putting it into an oven, what they can do is like, what is the efficiency that we're doing? What's the throughput? How can we analyze to make it a faster process that's more effective? So just trying to change some of those tasks frees people's minds up to think differently and also become more engaged in the company. So that's one example on the business side.

Ron: From an HR standpoint, again, it's all about efficiency and creating more strategic work for individual. So a lot of times when you go through recruiting, you're screening resumes for different skill sets and so forth, there's a lot of tools and technology out there that has AI that can really do that for you, and can come up with a pool of candidates that are on point for a specific role that you're hiring, so that that individual then can take that candidate and really talk to them, sell them on the opportunity and get them through the process. Versus spending a lot of time on screening and assessing if they are the right fit. In this case, they can optimize for the actual hiring process and experience in the close.

Ron: One of the other things that I think is also very important is like having an HR help desk. So there's a lot of routine questions that people ask for benefits or for day to day world. And if you can automate that through a bot or through some other experience, those things really help people become more efficient and they're going to be more engaged in their environment. So I think the two key things are efficiency and engagement. Because a lot of the narrative right now is that by automating, you're taking away jobs. You're just retooling them and you have to have the right learning and development practice in order to help expand their skillset. And I think we've done that. And there's a couple of examples that, of people that have moved in different roles at Zume.



Ron: Like one person was a line cook that now leads our customer support area, because we invested in him and took an interest in developing his skillset. And one other person that was working with these robots and then also working with our automation on our trucks, that he became a QA engineer. So it can happen. So there's good examples of that.

Meghan Biro: Love seeing this in action. How exciting. Really.

Ron: Yeah.

Meghan Biro: Just seeing people in 3D for who ...

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Meghan Biro: How exciting, really. Just seeing people in 3D for who they are.

Ron: Exactly, because it's more about the growth of a person, too, that they want to expand their skills, and if they have this opportunity and it's within your company, you're going to get more retention, and you're going to get more engaged employees.

Meghan Biro: What's the hardest part of your job right now?

Ron: I think the biggest thing for me right now was you going through a transformation at Zume. When I joined at the end of last year, the focus was on pizza and robots, but, really, what we were trying to do is that the pizza organization was a reference client for what we would want it to do with a lot of third party restaurants, QSRs, and other types of companies. We had to rebrand the company in May from Zume Pizza to Zume, Inc., and Zume Pizza became a business unit, but a lot of the skillset for Zume Pizza may not be the right fit for the platform. What we had to do from a people orientation, create an environment where both type of workers can thrive, so people who were drivers, people who were on the culinary area.

Ron: Again, this is testing what we're going to be doing with all these third parties. What better way to take this opportunity to see what works, what doesn't work, and we tried a lot of different things. We opened a market that was not connected to the other markets so that we could test this out if we're going to be working with a company in New York or overseas. That's very important to optimize current workers, as well as transform the business so that people and strategy was aligned to the whole ecosystem of what we were trying to do.

Ron: The theory is is you had to be agile, and you had to be really intentional on how did this. That was very difficult. It's still an ongoing process, as we're building out our platform, but it's something that is top of mind for me that I focus on and my team focuses on every day.

Meghan Biro: So you're not afraid of failure?

Ron: No. Not in this business.

Meghan Biro: To say the least. Really, that's part of the culture.

Ron: Exactly. It's a [inaudible 00:24:00] iterate and make sure that you test things out, pilot things, and if it fails, that's a good way of knowing that maybe we have to pivot in a different direction. Everything's not going to be a win/win. You have to test things out, and the more that you're open to that process, and you've built that into the culture, people have an appetite for taking risks, and if you take risks, that's how you're going to grow a company and be a successful business.

Meghan Biro: What's your advice for people who feel overwhelmed by the change happening around them? I know many of us are needing to make some tough decisions right now.

Ron: For me, I always ... You have to be open to growth and learning and development, and, for me, I always like to learn new technical ways or technical products or different thoughts of how we work. If you're not evolving, you're falling behind. For me, the way HR gains credibility in this day and age is you have to be business focused. If you don't lead with a business, you will not survive. If you're more execution focused, anyone can do that. To be a strategic piece of the business, you have to understand the business, and you have to use data in order to prove your case.

Meghan Biro: Say that again. Can you repeat that?

Ron: Sure. Data is so critical, and HR, a lot of the times, is a cost center. In order to have programs and so forth, you have to use data to show how this can improve productivity, how it can build new skills for employees so that they can do their jobs in a better way and a more creative way, and then you have to measure this. I think it's so critical to make sure that you have the right tools and the right assessments for people, and that will go a long way to developing that credibility.

Ron: When you go ask for something, you just don't ask for it, "Okay, this is a cool thing to do." You have data to back it up of how it's going to drive efficiency for employees, and that is a partnership that you develop with your CEO because, for me-

Meghan Biro: There you go. There you go. Everybody out there, you got to have leadership involved. You have to. It's a partnership.

Ron: For HR-

Meghan Biro: I love that you just said that.

Ron: It's important. For HR, for me, every business decision involves a financial component and a people component, and so you have to have that seat at the table because you can have the right strategy, but if you don't have the right people in the right role at the right time, the strategy will fail, and the product roadmap will fail. That's why that partnership is so critical.

Meghan Biro: The word that's coming to me over and over again today is collaboration. How have you fostered this collaborative culture, because a lot of people are trying to do it, and they ain't doing it so well. Newsflash. You know?

Ron: Yeah. That's true.

Meghan Biro: Really.

Ron: It's critical. The way that we started it is that one of our values is one team, and so we embedded that one team, a concept meaning you reject silos, you want to work as a whole, and it has to start from the top down, so it underpins everything that we do at Zume.

Ron: The great thing about this is now the rest of Zume sees that our leadership team is accountable and is collaborative and trying to do things the right way, and that's going to make it more receptive to everyone within the organization, and as the leadership goes through the same orientation as the rest of the organization, well, we talk about the values and we talk about how we work, so it's reinforced from day one that this is core to what we do, because if that doesn't happen, then we will fail.

Ron: Does that make sense for you from that perspective?

Meghan Biro: Definitely. The question is, can you get everybody to buy in to this?

Ron: Well, the key is is no one part of the business is the main part of the business. Everything intercepts between technology, within operations, within the GNA function. If there's a break in the chain, the whole system won't work. If we're going to succeed as a company, we have to ensure that that's part of the core to what we do. We talk about that at orientation, and then we also reinforce that through how we operate, and one of our principles that we talk about is that we reject silos. We want to make sure ... Obviously, there's going to be individuals that have to do their own work product, but if you're collaborative and you're in a team environment, when we're trying to solve these complex problems, you're going to win from that perspective.

Meghan Biro: All right. I'm pulling out my crystal ball. Ron, tell me how is work in HR going to change in the next couple years?

Ron: I think a few ways. I think I mentioned HR has to reimagine what the whole candidate/employee life cycle looks like because you have to lead with business orientation. If you don't lead with the business, then HR will fall behind. It's basically about enabling, facilitating, and accelerating the overall growth of the company. HR is the new weapon of choice in devising strategies of how you structure, scale in efficient processes. It's all about scalable and repeatable processes. This is just the beginning of what HR will do and using data driven pieces in order to have that enter a business loop that you can pilot programs and make assessments and drive people programs that are baked in data and have a lot of belief behind it that is credible to the C-suite.

Ron: The other big thing that we're focusing on now that will but the future is, as we're trying to rapidly scale across the US and internationally, we have to devise work in a different way. We're trying to come up with this philosophy that looks at the science of people, like anthropology, and then the robotics of it and combine the two, and we coined this phrase that you'll hear about at HRT that's called anthrobotics, and, basically, what we're trying to do is develop a system where we have technology that says, "Okay, we're gonna work on projects, teams, so we have to launch a new business line, so we're gonna say that, okay, we need 10 people to be on this team, so these are the 10 different roles that are needed to succeed in this project, but how are we gonna figure out who should work on that?"

Ron: We're also going to go through a process where we index all of our people so that we have this tool that can talk about this person has this skills, this background, and this experience, so we know what the skillset is, where the development is, and who are the right people for different areas of the business, and then we're going to build this algorithm that says, "Hey, so this is the project. We have these 10 roles. Here are the exact 10 people that should work on this project, and it doesn't matter where they're located. They could be across the world, but these are the 10 people to focus on that task."

Ron: I think that's where HR is going, and we're trying to do that here at Zume to be a thought leader in this area.

Meghan Biro: Well, listen, Ron, I can't wait to see you at HR Transform in just a number of weeks, so looking forward to it. Thanks for stopping by.

Ron: Thank you. Look forward to seeing you, as well, too.

Meghan Biro: Let's keep the conversation going. Join us for WorkTrends on Twitter to talk about how HR is changing and the shifts you're making at your organization. We're going to be on the Twitters on Wednesday, February 27th, at 1:30 PM Eastern, 10:30 AM Pacific. Join us and tell us why you're excited about coming to HR Transform, and if you'd like to get our Twitter Chat questions in advance, sign up for our newsletter at [talentculture.com](http://talentculture.com).

Meghan Biro:

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