Meghan Biro:	Two words, religion and politics. Two things we're not supposed to talk about, especially at work. But on this week's episode of Work Trends, we're going all in everybody.
Meghan Biro:	Let's talk politics at work.
Meghan Biro:	Welcome to the Work Trends podcast from Talent Culture. I'm your host, Meghan M. Biro. Every week we interview interesting people who are reimagining work. And join us on Twitter every Wednesday 1:30 PM Eastern using the hashtag Work Trends. I am fresh back from Vegas at HR Transform. It was great seeing you KWG. We had such a blast doing Work Trends live and I met some really cool new friends which is really still always my favorite part of live events. I was definitely impressed by the amount of venture capital being poured into women-owned businesses. Very exciting.
Kevin Grossman:	Yeah, you know, I noticed that as well. We heard a lot of that and not just women-owned but women of color, as well. You know it's a big thing all over the place now, right? The adversity of inclusion but it's not just lip service anymore. It really feels like a lot of these organizations like Pinterest, Electronic Arts, and others, they're actually doing something about it at their organizations and the women leaders of HR that were at this event speaking, some of which we got at least an opportunity to meet and a couple we got to interview for the show. That was really exciting actually.
Meghan Biro:	I mean, talk about action, right? I think for so many years we've been giving lip service to it and to your point, seeing brands actually doing something about it just makes me happy. And it just gives me hope that there's a business imperative here. And when there's a business imperative, stuff gets done.
Kevin Grossman:	So, in a time now where incivility seems to be everywhere and politics not just seems to be but is super divisive. You know, there's actually something to it to help facilitate change now and you see private organizations, private ventures really pushing the conversation internally in the workplace. And this was the head of HR from EA, I'm talking with her during the course of this event we were just at. They really, this is not a conversation that was embraced by the workplace, right? But now, now it is. And these leaders are actually doing that more so when we're seeing everything else kind of grind to a halt everywhere else and especially in public sector.
Meghan Biro:	Yeah, no question about it. I mean super divisive is definitely a deal breaker and collaboration is where it's at. And we're seeing more and more of that and people actually doing something about it and moving the needle on diversity and inclusion, that's very exciting.
Kevin Grossman:	Exactly. And the balance between the civility and change making, too. So, that's a lot of what we're gonna talk to our guest about today. So, let me get to the news now and kind of explore this thing a little bit.

Kevin Grossman:	So, I found an interesting NPR article about civility from just a couple of weeks ago actually. And it is something that also I recall was shared online with some Facebook friends, industry friends, etc. And it referenced some polls on how Americans feel about the subject of civility, about, you know, having being civil with one another during this course, right? So, one poll shows that the majority of Americans say incivility is a major problem and NPR, PBS NewsHour, Marist Poll said that the country's civility crisis is deepening and that a majority of Americans feel that it's gonna lead to violence. But you know what Meghan?
Meghan Biro:	Tell me, what's cooking?
Kevin Grossman:	There's another side of this, right? So, you and I both have some of the same circle of industry friends that we've known for a long time and have great, spirited debates sometimes on Facebook and elsewhere. And that provoking things, too. So, I was conferring with this same argument and this article and the NPS article. There's a different perspective that was pointed out by Lynn Itagaki, an associate professor at the University of Missouri who writes on what she calls Civil Racism. And she defines it as maintaining civility at the expense of racial equality and this is a quote that she said, "Civility has been about making sure that the status quo, the hierarchy of the status quo at the moment, which means racial inequality, gender inequality, class inequality, that these all stay permanent." It was caught out to me, even before I even dug deeper into this article for this show and it made me really uncomfortable that, you know what, I think it's them right on the money. Don't you think?
Meghan Biro:	Yeah, and I think being uncomfortable is sort of where change is happening literally. It makes you, Kevin, and others think about things from a different perspective. I mean people want authenticity now, which I get and I like. We just have to find a way to stay open to other people and how they're feeling or thinking and why they're thinking those things.
Kevin Grossman:	Exactly. For me, I don't think we have to exclude civility in the current political by log. Especially, not at the expense of racial and general equality. It's just more about having a discourse that can be uncomfortable for many of us but also that facilitates change, right?
Meghan Biro:	Well, I think the word civility frankly is kind of old school. So, I think some people would look at that and go eye glaze. This is just like, you know, too soft and fuzzy but I think just having a conversation is important and hey, disagreeing is great and that's what Facebook is for, come on.
Kevin Grossman:	That's all that it's for, right?
Meghan Biro:	That's all it's for pretty much. So, there you go.

Kevin Grossman:	Disagreeing and discourse. No, I hear you on that, that's why I love this conversation and the guest that we're talking with today. I think it's really important that we're talking about these things now.
Meghan Biro:	Let's continue this discussion with our first guest, Eric Pliner.
Meghan Biro:	Eric Pliner is Managing Director for the Americas at YSC Consulting. He coaches Fortune 500 CEOs and other CSuite leaders. He's a brave guy. He is here today to talk about our highly politicized reality and how leaders can help employees navigate it and, I'm just adding this in right now, cope. You guys with me? Welcome, Eric.
Eric Pliner:	Thanks, Meghan. Thanks for having me.
Meghan Biro:	So, where are you today?
Eric Pliner:	I am in New York City and a place where there are lots of different kinds of opinions about what workplaces should be like and lots of different kinds of workplaces to be.
Meghan Biro:	And lots of different kinds of precedents, too, that are from there.
Eric Pliner:	Indeed, indeed.
Meghan Biro:	I don't think anyone would argue that we're living in a highly politicized time I mean, it's everywhere, you can not wake up in the morning and see it on your feeds, you can't, you know, pick up a Rachel Maddow show or whoever you're listening to, Fox News. What impact is this having on our workplaces right now?
Eric Pliner:	I think because of the intensity and the non-stop nature of our news cycle, whether you're getting in the elevator in the morning or turning on your phone, inevitably, every meter and most people who are working in the world are encountering political context, as you said, from the minute you wake up until the minute you go to bed. And the place that we spend most of our week and time is the workplace. And so it means that a lot of us, leaders included, are thinking about existential questions in ways that perhaps were not as much a part of our day to day existence in the past. We're grappling with what it means to be part of a community or what it means to be part of a society, what it means to be part of a workplace.
Eric Pliner:	And it means that people of all levels of organizations are looking for meaning and purpose in work. And I don't know, who am I? And what is what I do with my time affect who I want to be and how I want to be in the world? And the other thing is that the workplace ends up being a proxy for community for a lot of us because we spend so much of our week and time here, we want to feel connected to other people, we're curious about them, but we're also feeling

protective and defensive of the parts of ourselves that feel under threat at any given time, regardless of where we sit on a political spectrum.

Meghan Biro: I think it's fair to say a lot of us feel under threat right now when you see, you know, for example, Trump on Twitter attacking the McCain family, for example. Or, you know, the endless banter between Kellyanne Conway and her husband, which I find to be really interesting and fascinating, by the way. Very entertaining stuff. It's in front of us, right? So, I mean I hear what you're saying, like we're all internalizing this and needing to feel like almost we need an angle. Do you think that's because we're also social now? When we're talking about things? I mean, where's that coming from exactly?

Eric Pliner: I think people have always talked about things and always have different ways of an engage on whether it's in the workplace or outside or on the stuff that matters to us. But the difference now is the intensity on emotionality of it is higher than perhaps its ever been. And so, one of the things that I've been amazed over the last few years to see that most people have in common is exactly what you described. The emotion of feeling under threat in some way. And that's perhaps not been a common experience for most folks in the past. But nowadays, we hear from different people who feel deeply aligned with the precedent, just as much as we feel as we hear from people who feel marginalized by the precedent, that they are afraid of what will happen if they express their point of view at work. The common experience now is feeling threatened or uncomfortable, whereas before the common experience, might have been just a being a part of the workplace together.

Meghan Biro: So people are looking for meaning and purpose at work. How is that changing our organizations and what it feels like to be in a workplace or something we call culture?

Eric Pliner: It means, for starters, that a paycheck is not enough to inspire people to perform as their highest invest sells. And maybe it wasn't ever, but our understanding, collectively, of what we can and should expect from our work is different now. Yeah and there was a phase where we saw lots of organizations try to do things like introduce a foosball table or have nine kinds of cereal for their employees and again, that stuff doesn't make a difference either. What has to happen, though, is that companies have to have what we call dual impact. They have to be able to say, "Yes, part of our purpose is about return for our shareholders." But another part of it is about the impact we want to have on the world and our employees need to be able to connect what's personally meaningful and purposeful to them to what the purpose, meaning, and impact of the organization are. Absent that, you're gonna find people looking out to the rest of the world to say, "Where can I find something that does good for the owners of our company, but does good for me, my family, my community, and my world, too?" Whatever their definition of good is. It's not just enough to expect the paychecks and perks or the answer? [inaudible 00:11:43] There's got to be purpose, as well.

Meghan Biro:	And the leaders out there, if you're listening in, do us a favor. Don't just give it lip service. Spend a month, two months, go away to Antarctica, Africa, wherever you need to go and get this fixed, because you just putting it in a mission-vision value statement ain't enough. News flash over here, you know? You know what I'm saying, Eric? Like, how many people are feeling that pressure, though, and it's like okay, well, we'll have the marketing and PR team take care of that. It'll be good. I mean, there is that going on. Let's just get real.
Eric Pliner:	Absolutely. The messaging is important, Meghan, but it's not enough. It's got to be underpinned by something real or people see through it really quickly. It's not enough to put your values on the wall, you have to live them in how you interact every day, in how you work with your customers and clients, in what you ask your people about, and in what you show really matters to the organization in substantive ways. Making a great brochure is a starting point for communicating something. But what you don't say communicates just as much as what you do say and your employees are gonna be looking at that.
Meghan Biro:	Or if you're saying something that's the absolute antithesis of what it's really like to be there. Something we call employee experience, right? So, lots to discuss, clearly. You know, on the good news front, companies out there are getting creative and they're finding ways to engage workers. What are you seeing on this front? Like who's doing it well?
Eric Pliner:	I think the companies that are explicitly stating their purpose but then connecting it to what matters to their employees are the ones who are doing it really well. You've got organizations that might be known for their presence in retail or in healthcare or in biotech or in fintech saying, "This is what we're trying to do." But the part about the money that they're trying to make is always there. That's implicit. But they're saying, "This is what we're trying to do in the world" and then they're asking their employees, "Hey, what matters to you and how are you going to find that here? For starters, and two, how are you gonna build that here?" So, they're doing things like saying, "You're job is not just a job. It's about who you are in the world and you're a part of a system that's much larger than you that can multiply that impact really fast."
Eric Pliner:	We've seen research recently that has shown that up to 90 percent of employees are willing to take a pay cut if they can find more meaning in their work. And so, the organizations that are able to connect their overall purpose to individual employees' sense of meaning are going to be the ones that are successful and the ones that sustain their relationship with their employees. There's another piece to that, though, which is, again it's fine to state it on a big organizational level, but unless individual leaders and line managers throughout the entire system have that language, have that skill, have that capability, it doesn't matter what you put on the wall.

Meghan Biro:	I feel like managers tend to get left behind in this discussion and they're the ones who are directly leading these teams. What can they do to help people see purpose in their work? What are some examples?
Eric Pliner:	The first thing you have to do is get to know your people personally. I'm not suggesting that that means that suddenly you need to be going out after work or need to be hanging out on the weekends. I'm not conflating your personal relationships with understanding who they are as people. But the stuff that for so long we've talked about is being soft skills, how do you engage people in ways that are meaningful to them? How do you understand their purpose? How do you talk about their lives? That stuff is essential and it's not soft. It's hard, it's really hard. And it's the kind of thing that is no longer a nice to have for a leader at any level, from a first line manager all the way up through the Csuite. It is a baseline expectation of being able to inspire, engage, and motivate a workforce.
Eric Pliner:	So, you gotta get to know people, you gotta understand what makes them tick, you've gotta know what they're priorities are in their total lives, and you have to be able to talk about it with fluidity, with confidence, and with authenticity. That's a tall order, but you gotta start by getting to know yourself, being able to talk about yourself, and then being able to shut up and listen to other people, ask them questions about what matters to them with that same degree of fluidity.
Meghan Biro:	I have to be honest, that 90 percent number of employees willing to take a pay cut actually surprises me.
Eric Pliner:	Well, it doesn't say they're willing to take a 50 percent pay cut.
Meghan Biro:	Okay, okay.
Eric Pliner:	So, there is a limit to it, but I think the thing to know is that if people don't feel like they're getting value out of their experience at work, that value has a price tag attached to it and it's one that they are willing to boot if they think that they can get it somewhere else. Now, the implication again isn't that you can just pay people nothing or pay them so little that they'll be able to feed themselves, their families, and clothe each other with meaning and purpose. But, what we do know is that people are willing to sacrifice some aspect of comp if it means that they get more out of every day. We're realizing, again and this is a function of our politicized environment, that the number of days that we all have here is limited and what we get out of those matters as much as what we bring home from those.
Meghan Biro:	What do you mean by "it's limited"?
Eric Pliner:	Well, none of us are gonna live forever. And so, our understanding of what we want to do while we're here is different. I think that's what I mean when I talk about the kind of existential questions that leaders are facing on a more regular

basis. People are thinking about, "Who do I want to be while I'm here? What do I want to do? What gets me out of bed every morning?" That is more complex than it may have seemed in the past. Perhaps, again, perhaps it's always been this way, but people are thinking about it and talking about it more when they're confronted with the news of what's going on each day around us.

Meghan Biro: So, Eric, I have to know, how did you get interested in this topic? Like what's your story? Either from a personal or professional perspective.

Eric Pliner: I started my career in government, so I worked in the public sector for most of my career before going into the private sector and joining YSC Consulting about ten years ago. And what I saw in government was people who didn't always agree with everything that they were tasked with carrying out, but who were invested in making sure that they were doing things that contributed positively to communities. Sometimes, it's hard to remember that, our stereotypes of government workers don't align with what my experience was in the government, but I understood that people really wanted to feel like they mattered, like they were making contribution, and adding value to their communities, to their world, in a way that was positive.

Eric Pliner: And as I moved into the business world, what I saw was, I expected that motivation to be really, really different and in fact, it wasn't at all. The scale, the scope, the focus might've been different but people still wanted to have positive impact on the world and care about their contribution in a meaningful way. And so, you know, when you combine that with the notion of finding ways to be yourself at work, I worked with young people at various points in my early career and saw that one of the things that mattered the most to them, as they were beginning to enter the workforce, was finding places that they could be themselves. I think what I've seen and what I've lived is the experience of wanting to be myself, wanting to support others in being themselves, but doing it in a way that was skillful. Being authentic doesn't mean being messy, being unfettered in how you interact, but being able to be skillfully authentic. Be yourself in a way that furthers your personal sense of purpose and the workplace's sense of purpose and meaning, is a thing that affords a lot of opportunity in people.

Meghan Biro: Skillfully authentic. Now that's a new one for me. Break it down for us. What does that mean exactly?

Eric Pliner: I think people get nervous about the idea of authenticity because they think it means that everyone can just say what they want or do what they want or dress how they want and everybody just has to live with it. And I don't think that's what authenticity is about in the workplace. I think what we're talking about when I say, "skillful authenticity," is the notion that I need to be true to my own experience, to my own identities and ways of living in the world, and that what I say and what I do is going to affect other people. That other people will have an experience of me that affects them, that affects our workplace more generally,

and it affects the way that we interact, and so I have to be skilled in how I demonstrate my authenticity.

Eric Pliner: It doesn't mean don't be yourself, it means be thoughtful about how you bring your full self into the workplace. And when we talk about how politicized workplaces are, that's even more important. How can I share what I really think or how I truly feel in a way that feels psychologically safe, that feels meaningful, that helps me to feel part of a community in my workplace, but also is not at the expense of other people being able to do those things when they come from a different point on the political spectrum?8

Meghan Biro: So, what would you say to people who basically just want to vent about, well, let's just say Trump, for example? At work? Like everything's so politically correct now, that I can't really be myself. What if they're saying that? Or how do I actually do this at work? I mean, there's so many people out there that are still playing it safe. But they don't really want to be.

Eric Pliner: Yeah, and well that's partly the intensity of the emotion that people feel is, I want to be able to talk about this, again, this is where I spend most of my waking hours, I need to be able to say what I think and process it with other people and to do so with other folks who are experiencing and are thinking about it, too. And, I'm terrified that if I say the wrong thing, I'll get in trouble or I will cause a problem in my workplace and that's where I say, "Skillful authenticity is the absolute priority." The idea is we don't want to create workplaces that are hostile to unpopular opinions and we have to remind folks that these discussions have personal elements to them, but that the way that we engage in them at work can not be personal.

Eric Pliner: So, it means not about tamping down what you think or who you are or what matters to you, but again, remembering the impact that you're gonna have on other people. You can express an unpopular opinion, but do it in a way that expressing that opinion may have an impact on someone else. What we have to do is take out of those highly political, intense, emotional discussions the fact that they have to be personally undermining in order to make a point.

Eric Pliner: So, talk about what matters to you, talk about how you feel, but spend just as much time, if not more, listening and asking questions as you do sharing what you think and you'll find that the reaction from people around you will be much more respectful, even if your point of view is different.

Meghan Biro: I just find it sad that the President of the U.S. sits on Twitter and demeans, doesn't think about what he's saying, etc. Boy, do we have a role model there for good communication, right? Like let's all take this into our own hands, right? Cause I mean you can't be looking to Twitter 50 percent of the time for people to actually behaving in the way that you're talking about right now, for example.

Eric Pliner:	It's true, and I think one of the things to remember is that most social media platforms while they allow for something that approximates dialogue aren't actually about two-way communication. They're about communicating something one way and then choosing to respond, but that is not the same as meaningful dialogue and in the workplace, you don't get to do that, you don't get to hang your point of view on the wall and then come back later to see who's written their response to you. And so, we have to remind ourselves that workplaces are not social media platforms.
Eric Pliner:	Even when we had social media platforms, internal to our workplaces, we have to remember to use them in a way that says, "Hey, I got to ensure respect for other people around me." We have a shared goal by being together, which is to meet the purpose of this company, meet the goals of its shareholders, meet the impact that we need for our clients and customers, and be able to create a workplace that is positive and meaningful for all of us. It doesn't mean making everybody happy all the time, either, but it means being respectful of the fact that our differences can not get in the way of our need to be innovative, to collaborate, to work with people who may have a really different world viewer experience from me, but are part of a shared purpose in our organization.
Meghan Biro:	I have to ask you about this. You invented this really cool card game called, "How do you know?" For leaders. Tell us about that.
Eric Pliner:	Yeah, it's probably a stretch to say that I invented it because I think, even though I do say that, people have understood the importance of asking provocative and personal questions in respectful ways as a driver of coaching, as a driver of supervision, as a driver of dialogue for a long time. But we thought, as an organization, that to put some of those questions down into a deck of cards and to treat it as something that doesn't have to feel so heavy or so emotionally laden can still enable people to open up about things about themselves that they might not share in the workplace. And so, you can use them as an icebreaker for a meeting, as a prompt for coaching conversation, as an interaction, or just for people who are new to the workplace to get to know each other.
Eric Pliner:	And we ask about things like what do other people get wrong about you? Where have you made a mistake that you wish you could do over again? You know, things that get people to open up about personal experiences and help folks to get to know each other really well without having to spend tons of time together and without having to divulge things that feel private, but still be able to divulge things that feel personal.
Meghan Biro:	Good stuff, and it's fun.
Eric Pliner:	And it's fun.
Meghan Biro:	A game the whole team can play, you know?

Eric Pliner:	Yeah, it's a game we're gonna play whether we want to or not, so we might as well do it
Meghan Biro:	Might as well do it.
Eric Pliner:	in an organized, respectful way.
Meghan Biro:	There you go.
Eric Pliner:	Yeah.
Meghan Biro:	So, it's crystal ball time, Eric, here on the show, and we like to look into the future here at Work Trends. Let's do that together. Question for you, do you think our hyper politicized culture is here to stay?
Eric Pliner:	I do. I think once we, once we've opened Pandora's Box, once people feel like they can be open about how they see the world, we can't really go back. And that's a good thing. You know, the opportunity for people to bring more of themselves into the workplace is a really positive one, but it means that if we're gonna survive in the long-term and frankly, probably in the short-term, too, we have to get better at how we do it. We have to figure out, how do I engage with people who may feel differently from me, who may be more emotional then I feel about it, and do that in a way that feels respectful, that allows people to bring their points of view, and that does so in a way that enhances our relationships, rather than destroying them. That's a big shift. It used to be that, you could just say, as a leader, you know, I don't talk about any of this kind of stuff.
Meghan Biro:	Yeah.
Eric Pliner:	And you can get away with that.
Meghan Biro:	I know.
Eric Pliner:	But that's not gonna be the case anymore. We're gonna say, "To be a successful leader, you've got to be really good at navigating this stuff because we've all seen the headlines about what happens when people can't do it."
Meghan Biro:	We have indeed opened Pandora's Box and I'm with you, I don't think we're ever, ever looking back. So, and I think it's good, I agree. It forces the question of what does it mean to be authentic in the workplace for everybody? I think that's kind of cool.
Eric Pliner:	It's exciting. It means that more of ourselves, means more creativity, it means more innovation, it means more partnership, and ultimately, that's great for business because it means more productivity and it means better results.

Meghan Biro:	Keep up the great work, Eric. Thanks for stopping by.
Eric Pliner:	Thanks for having me, Meghan. I really appreciate it.
Kevin Grossman:	Terrific perspective, Meghan, on how our workplace cultures are changing from Eric. That was a great conversation. Now, for another perspective on politics at work, I talked with Steve Paskoff. Steve's a former investigator and trial attorney for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and his leadership training helps reduce harassment in the workplace. He's also the author of numerous books, including Civility Rules, A New Business Approach to Boosting Results and Teaching Big Shots to Behave. I love that title.
Kevin Grossman:	Steve, thank you so much for being on Work Trends. You offer what's called, "Civility Training." So, can you tell us what that means? And why there's such a need for it these days?
Steve Paskoff:	Kevin, we have a core program that's actually called, "Civil Treatment," that we've been teaching and assets evolved almost 30 years now. And it's our take on the meaning, significance, and application of civility in the workplace. And I want to explain why we're focusing on that right now. There are all sorts of different applications of civility. What we say when we worship, in a house of worship, differs from what we say at a sporting event. Or it differs from what happens when we go to a movie or at the airport. We have a specific focus of civility in the workplace that we've called, "Civil Treatment." It's designed to focus behavior on ways that help organizations. Recruit and keep the best talent to help them work individually and in teams at their highest level of excellence and to feel comfortable bringing up new ideas and also raising issues of concern before they become big problems. And that equation that I just mentioned is what we all treat in the workplace and it's focus is on getting people to work with levels of behavior that help generate the best results.
Kevin Grossman:	I can tell you, earlier this week, I was at my local city council meeting where I live in Santa Cruz, California, and it was very, very contentious meeting and we could definitely have used your training at this meeting. But that said, so this is more about better communication, right? Within the organization and when you're saying that, is that correct?
Steve Paskoff:	Yes, and by communication, the principle that we have is that behavior helps drive results. Behavior, when you talk about communication, is the content of what people say, how they say it, it also is communication that's body language, tone of voice, eye contact, and like forms of expression on social media. But all of it can help either bring people together or, in a workplace just as in your city council meeting, it can be, from what you said, rancorous, divisive, and it minimizes positive results.
Kevin Grossman:	So, it's then about, when it comes to how we engage with each other, inside the workplace, there's, of course, there is blatant people who are hurting each

other verbally inside an organization, and it's body language, behavior, but we're also talking about the more insidious, subtle forms of relational aggression, too, right?

Steve Paskoff: Yes.

Kevin Grossman: In an organization. So, now all those things, Steve, you're at the end of the day, you are a lawyer, right?

Steve Paskoff: Yes.

Kevin Grossman: Yes, and so there is a compliance perspective here, too, which does make sense for organizations, right? We have a lot of great ideas as human beings, but we're all so very messy when it comes to life and interaction and communication, so the idea of treating each other well at work is a lot more than obviously staying compliant and not having employment litigation going on, so what is the bigger picture here, then?

Steve Paskoff: The bigger picture, Kevin, and this is a great question, is to think of behavior in the way we envision it. Bad behavior, you're talking about that, almost like a triangle, in fact, that's what we use. There are a range of behaviors and I'll explain how they're united in a moment, but if you think of that triangle, at the very apex, their illegal behaviors, that can be race, discrimination, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, you can say and do things through your conduct that are discriminatory or harassment creating legal risk. On that triangle, going down, you also can have abusive, bullying behavior, another level you could call dismissive and unwelcoming, and then rude and unprofessional.

Steve Paskoff: I had an inspiring or eye-opening experience I can tell you about, but it taught me to really look at those behaviors through this common lamp. None of them helped build teamwork. All of them detract from performance, create risk, and as recent as the New York Times this week, there was a study talking about the fact, something that we've known and said for years that no one has shown with any study, that that type of behavior leads to positive results. To the contrary, it causes just the opposite.

Steve Paskoff: So, the experience I had, let me just take a moment and just briefly explain it. In about 2005, I was asked to work with a healthcare unit of cardiac surgeons. I never say the name of the institution, it's not in California, but I know you've heard of it. It's not mentioned in my writings. Top-notch surgeons, highest risk cases, but two of the seven had really bad behavior and the client said, "We'd like to have you talk about harassment." I met with members of the team, all of the seven surgeons. I met with anesthesiologists and allied health professionals. With a colleague, interviewed people over several days.

Steve Paskoff:	What I found was that there was not bad behavior at the very top, but there were people, two of them in particular, who were dismissive, surgeons that is. They would scream at people, insult them, not listen to them, ignore them, and demean them. There were nurses who would not work with these surgeons, even though these nurses had top skills. One nurse told me that she would rather be stationed in a rock, and this was 2005, then work for one of these surgeons and she meant it. Another said that she did work for these two surgeons and it was like reliving the worst day of her life every day.
Steve Paskoff:	I spoke with anesthesiologists, two of them sat right next to each other, same race, gender, basic background in education, and they said that there were times in high-risk surgery when they would see a vital sign change and they wouldn't speak up because they thought if they did so, the surgeon would erupt and it would be more damaging to the overall teamwork of the group then if the surgeon found the problem by himself, even though it might have taken precious time to do so.
Steve Paskoff:	I then went to the Senior VP of HR. I had a 25 page report. I had direct quotes laying out those examples and others. He looked at it and what he said is, "It's not race, it's not sex, it's not religious." Discrimination is not any of those compliance events he was saying. "I guess we're okay." And I said to myself, "No, you are not."
Steve Paskoff:	And that was an epiphany for me to change my whole life. And, Kevin, what I did when I read about healthcare and it's true in other industries, but healthcare is a very personal example that we can relate to. That there are tens of thousands of complications and fatalities, and that includes what occurs in surgery and other processes, it occurred from bad communication, which includes the forums of incivility, the absence of what we call, "Civil Treatment." And I focused my work, since then particularly, in addressing all of those behaviors linked by what should be the consistent application of organizational values that, virtually, every organization has. Let's say the kinds of behavior I mentioned, should never happen.
Kevin Grossman:	So, I can assume that that organization never took you up on your civility training services then. Right?
Steve Paskoff:	Your assumption would be correct.
Kevin Grossman:	Do you know what's so disheartening about that? I mean, I've heard of that and I know, unfortunately, in certain work cultures where there are very few individuals that are the allstar, whatever you want to call them, that brain prestiged???[inaudible 00:37:11] to the organization, as well as, supposedly are the best at what they do and again, cross industries and yet, are so extremely toxic when it comes to working with other individuals. I'm sure if they were to actually put a picture together, besides the report that you brought, they're

probably bleeding talent and were bleeding talent at that time and over time, and that impacts their ability to recruit others, as well, to actually fill those slots.

Kevin Grossman: I do a lot of research on Canada and employee experience, and that research organization about that, so it's not surprising at all, probably, if we were to look back, then to now, what's transpired in that organization, but it's so disheartening that it's overlooked. This should be an issue because I mean, again, finally I think, Steve, we brought to the light of day, when it comes to the workplace itself and bullying and toxic behavior and poor communication and all these things can impact not only our ability to get the job done or whether we actually want to stay, and I've been there myself, right, in that kind of an organization. Then, what I'm curious about is that, probably most of the time I would think that organizations are actually reaching out to you in crisis, right?

Steve Paskoff: Quite often, they are.

Kevin Grossman: Yeah.

Steve Paskoff: And it's unfortunate when that happens because they have already suffered the damage that you referred to. And if I may, I just want to say you are absolutely right because this institution, I remember this clearly, there were top flight, and I mean top flight surgical candidates who were advised by word of mouth, do not go there. There were others who left and went to other places rather than stay because they didn't want to be subjective to that and your point, Kevin, is right on the mark.

Kevin Grossman: I have to imagine, though, I mean, besides being depressing and unfortunately what we're talking about, and the fact that companies are in crisis a lot of the time when they reach out to an organization like yours. But, how are you then proactively, I guess you'll say market, for lack of a better word, your services, in order for companies to be more proactive about these situations before they get to the point of having, even litigation, internally right, but as well as losing the individuals that they want to retain at the organizations? How are you out there today going to HR and business leaders and saying, "The time to look at this is now"?

Steve Paskoff: I've been writing about this for and doing this now for more than 30 years and I can tell you that part of the way we are brought into organizations is when they have a crisis and when they've heard about it. We were, got a wonderful comment by the EOC, noting that we helped in federal government, eliminate bad behavior in the workplace. And they issued a report in 2016 on harassment and that brought us a lot of work in the federal sector. We've also been working in some of the landmark cases and bad behavior can include, not just abusive, but at the top of the triangle, race and sex and religion, so we've been involved with settlements after the fact for some of the biggest cases in the country.

Steve Paskoff:	The one involving Coca-Cola, that you might've read about, for example, and that helps us, too. And we've taught 10,000 or more instructors how to deliver our civil treatment program and they're the ones who are ambassadors who quite often talk about us and bring us in. And then I speak, and my colleagues speak, and we write, and I've written two books, one that you referenced by subject called, "Teaching Big Shots to Behave," and the other called, "Civility Rules," and that also generates opportunities for us, too.
Kevin Grossman:	Yeah, I just can't say enough, besides again, the legal ramifications for organizations when they let these things spiral out of control. Just from the human toll that can occur, my wife works for an organization, a non-profit organization, called, "Kidpower." And they do a lot of work with kids, teams, and adults, how to deal with bullying, how to deal with relational aggression, and all the way to self defense, but what to do about all those things before that, managing emotions. And I'm telling you, all these things together, and especially what you're offering organizations are just so important today because, sadly, regardless of where you sit out there in the world right now, it's pretty ugly discourse that's out there today. Publicly, across the board.
Kevin Grossman:	So, what do you recommend then when it comes to, I mean, everything that we've shared today, Steve, especially when it comes to business leaders and HR, and in speaking, if you could say something right now to those who are going to listen to the show, what are like three things that they need to think about today? Especially, if they do have situations that are starting to brew and/or balloon for that matter.
Steve Paskoff:	Well, first, and please, let me know if I go off track, but number one, this is got to be seen as a business issue, Kevin.
Kevin Grossman:	Yeah.
Steve Paskoff:	Managing behavior to avoid unnecessary costs, risks, distraction, catastrophes, and that's what that behavior causes, an addition to individual and personal burnout in the like must be seen as a business necessity, not as a business nicety. When you have seen your leaders recognizing this, then they make a commitment to what already exists, their values, and they then have to say, "We are going to set standards of behavior that don't diminish from our standards of excellence and accountability, but rather help us maximize those kinds of results. That's step one, that commitment.
Steve Paskoff:	Senior leaders have got to talk about this regularly, like sales and safety and competitive position and marketing and the like.
Steve Paskoff:	Three, yes, content, policies, value statements that are written, training in the like, that's critical. But it's an element that's necessary, but not sufficient. You must commit to consequences. If you see behavior that violates your standards, the sooner you talk about it, it's a lower level of intervention, the more likely

you are to get quick results that minimize disruption, harm, and damage. You also need to have continuity. And continuity means, this is an initiative that is not something that you do once as I've said to organizations. Let's say that 2018 was your best sales year ever. Then, didn't start 2019 saying, "No goals, no standards for 2019, we're done." You keep going and this is the same thing.

Steve Paskoff: So, those five C's are the organizational elements that you absolutely have to focus on what this is really, ultimately about, which is an enduring culture.

Steve Paskoff: Last thing that I've said to organizational leaders is this. So, how much does money, how much do you need to budget to talk about your values, to model them in your behavior, to make sure your policies are understood and applied, to have those things in place? How much does that cost? And the answer's well nothing. Then, why don't you do it? And when you do that, it minimizes consequences and then keeping that alive makes business sense.

Steve Paskoff: One thing, if I may, I know we have a human resource audience that listens and getting human resource leaders to really get their colleagues to understand this is a business issue, like any other business issue, is a key role in the leadership they can provide that adds tremendous value and results to their role.

Kevin Grossman: Agreed. You know, I don't know why we think, in the world of work and business, that the business ramifications of what you're referring to and the fluffy human, let's play nice, cultural side of a lot of the HR recruiting conversations that I have on a regular basis. I think a lot of the individuals that I work with that are on the front lines of HR and recruiting, they do know the reality. This does impact their business on how, that knowing the people that they're trying to recruit and those individuals they're trying to retain, that these things happen and get out.

Kevin Grossman: We know we've seen, especially when they're big brands, how that can completely blow up and impact their ability, not just to sell their products and services, even whatever duration of time that is, but also to recruit and be able to attract folks like, well I don't want to go work for them because of X, Y, and Z and it's not about that because, again, the reacting of let's have a sexual harassment training because we just had an issue that was very public and that's the only one that we do, as you said, and then we start a new year and we're not doing anything on a regular basis. So, I think what you're sharing, Steve, is very much companies should be paying attention to because it is a business imperative in reality when it comes to the messy world of humans. I mean, really, right?

Steve Paskoff: At the end of the day.

Kevin Grossman: Great. Well, Steve, thanks so much for being on Work Trends. It was a great conversation and I look forward to meeting you in person someday.

Steve Paskoff: I hope so, too. Thanks so much for giving me the opportunity to speak to your audience and work with you, Kevin.

Meghan Biro: Let's keep this conversation moving. Join us for our Work Trends Twitter chat to talk about how you view politics and tough conversations at work. We'll be on the Twitters on Wednesday, April 3rd at 1:30 PM Eastern, 10:30 PM Pacific, or wherever you're hanging out around the globe. Join us. If you'd like to get our Twitter chat questions in advance, sign up for our newsletter at TalentCulture.com.

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