

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) On this week's episode of Work Trends, we're talking about how to carve out your own path, and how to help candidates and employees find the right path for them. We're talking to Laura Gassner Otting, a former executive recruiter, who just wrote a new book, *Limitless: How to Ignore Everybody, Carve Your Own Path, and Live Your Best Life*. Do you love that headline? I do.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) Welcome to the Work Trends podcast, from TalentCulture. 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 #WorkTrends. This episode of Work Trends is supported by the CHRO Exchange, an exclusive networking event for HR execs and thought leaders. You can share insights, benchmark strategies, and learn from the heads of HR at Walmart, Verizon, the Atlanta Braves, and more, all at the 11th CHRO Exchange. This is taking place in Austin, Texas, May 19th through the 21st, while they still have them. Reserve your spot, and learn more at chroexchange-us.iqpc.com. I think it's okay to say happy Spring, from Massachusetts. I'm hoping it starts to warm here soon. Almost. Almost.

[Speaker 2:](#) Yeah. Well, speaking of weather and under it, I'm hoping to feel a little bit better soon. Must have been all that Word TransFun we had at HR Transformed, but we did have quite a few interviews that we did on-site there at the event, which we were really excited about, and some great speakers that we interviewed, that were the keynotes as well, so it's worth all of that, right?

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) Well, it's worth it and it's easy to do, because Vegas cooties are real. Right?

[Speaker 2:](#) Ugh, yes.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) I think the truth is, airline travel also contributes. Are you one of those people, by the way, way in with the #worktrends. Are you one of those people that use the Handy Wipes to wipe down your trays, on the plane? I do that once in awhile. True story.

[Speaker 2:](#) My wife would raise her hand right now, because when we travel together as a family, she does that for all of us. I don't, and I probably should, and I do not do that, but although it probably didn't help since we didn't have the mic stationery. We were handing it back and forth. Right? So, I have that ...

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) Oh, wait a minute. I was using your mic.

[Speaker 2:](#) Well see, it doesn't matter whoever we ended up getting it from. Hopefully, you won't get it either. Megan, regardless of how I feel literally, as you are and myself, we're really excited about today's topic. There's some research, from the talent board side that kind of helps to underscore a little bit of this theme, that I'll bring up. For those companies who have the highest positive candidate ratings, the candy winners, as we like to call them, they emphasize career path

opportunities with both external,, and internal candidates 26% more often, than all of their companies. That is potentially at least, a big competitive advantage when it comes to candidates applying again, referring others, and making, and/or influencing purchases when applicable, especially for consumer-based companies. But you know, 26% more often, that's a big deal.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) That's a huge deal, and I'm going to say it, 'cause I have to, there's still a war for talent out there. I know it's so cheesy, but I said it. There is, and it's alive and well, and some of that data actually is telling us this.

[Speaker 2:](#) Well, there is. The fact of the matter is, is that there are companies in any given industry, that are competing for the same talent all the time.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) No question about it.

[Speaker 2:](#) And being in such a tight, still pretty much, even though there are signs the economy is cooling a little bit, they're still pretty competitive marketplace, and you know, candidates are, I think we've talked about this in previous shows too, but they're also more likely to ghost the employers, where historically, we've seen more ghosting on the employer side for the candidates. So candidates, they have a lot more opportunities in choosing the paths that they want.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) They got the power.

[Speaker 2:](#) They do. They got the power. Exactly. Now, the news that I'm going to share ... in fact, let's get to the news now.

[Speaker 2:](#) The news I'm going to share today, is a little bit out of the stream, at least when it comes to knowledge workers in white collar career development, because I just thought I found it. I thought it was timely. It was for a short article from a local Louisiana news outlet, talking about how they're working on getting electrical workers and Future Farmers of America, more involved in recruiting teens, offering them career development opportunities via contests, and even apprenticeships. I think it was refreshing to hear that and see that.

[Speaker 2:](#) We had one of the speakers, Freada Kapor, from HR Transform is working with a lot of other representative women of color, and youth of color as well, and just helping to provide opportunities for them on the stem side, but this article is related more to those trade skills, that can still write, can provide individuals with pretty decent jobs in any market that they go to, as it relates to, again, electrical, and then you get in to plumbing, and a lot of other, of the trade opportunities that are out there, that could be lucrative careers for a big part of the population that we don't talk about a lot. Right?

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) I think we need to bring sexy back to plumbing. That's what I think.

- [Speaker 2:](#) I was going to say, I was going to give you the Chicka Bow Wow music, for the 70's adult theater, but that wouldn't be quite appropriate. It's funny that you say that. I would agree. In another world, I think about, wow, what would we be something that that would be totally in demand, in any market that I go to, and it would be plumbing, and it would be electrical, and the list goes on of things that are very much in demand, and harder to find. Even utilities, a struggle to find, and power companies, individuals, oil rig workers that had just finding even kind of adjacent skills, that can be applied for that. They're struggling in that. There's some pretty lucrative careers out there.
- [Meghan M. Biro:](#) That's why we're excited to bring on Laura Gassner Otting next, to talk about career paths for all of us.
- [Meghan M. Biro:](#) Laura Gassner Otting is here today, to talk about how we can all find a career path that works for us. Welcome to Work Trends, Laura.
- [Laura O. :](#) Hey, I'm so glad to be here.
- [Meghan M. Biro:](#) Where are you today?
- [Laura O. :](#) I'm in Boston.
- [Meghan M. Biro:](#) So am I, but I'm actually across the river in Cambridge.
- [Laura O. :](#) Well, we'll still like you anyway.
- [Meghan M. Biro:](#) Okay, all right.
- [Laura O. :](#) I'm really in Newton, so not quite in Boston.
- [Meghan M. Biro:](#) That's cool. Well, we'll have to get together IRL, one of these hours.
- [Laura O. :](#) I'd love that.
- [Meghan M. Biro:](#) Wouldn't that be fun?
- [Laura O. :](#) Yes.
- [Meghan M. Biro:](#) So, first thing's first, Laura, I love to nerd out with fellow former recruiters, because I'm one too, and you spent 20 years doing executive search. What did you learn from that work?
- [Laura O. :](#) Well, I learned a lot of things. First and foremost, that people's stories are super fascinating. I always felt incredibly blessed, that I not only got to hear what

people accomplished, or how they accomplished it, but why they accomplished it.

[Laura O. :](#)

I got to hear the drivers behind what they did, and when you hear those things, and then you listen to people talk to you about success, and where they are when they've gone to the top of their game, but they're still kind of unhappy. Right? The top of what? I realized that success didn't always equal happiness, and I was fascinated by this question, that if success doesn't equal happiness, then what actually does? And what I found, were that they were the people who were in consonance, when what they did matched who they were, and were able to define success for themselves, and went after that. Those are the ones who actually had both success and happiness.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#)

Wait a minute. What? What emergent? What C word, did you just use?

[Laura O. :](#)

Consonance. It's funny, because as I'm getting on stage speaking, I've learned to be exceptionally articulate, because of the word consonance, if you don't say it right, sounds like a lot of other words, but consonance is this idea of harmony, of flow, of alignment, of everything sort of matching, and being in this frictionless sense of belonging. When we see candidates, we see people who are applying for jobs, and they've come and they interview in front of us, and they are so like almost like a light comes from inside of them about the job. You know that it's something that they care about deep in their bones, and that's going to be the thing that sets that candidate, apart from every other candidate who's like, okay, it's a paycheck. I'll do the job. Fine.

[Laura O. :](#)

It's people who have carved their own path, who have figured out, this is the thing that I really want to do. Those are the ones who are really going to be the ones who show up for the job, and allow us as recruiters, and HR managers, to really be able to shine.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#)

So, it wasn't about the money, the moolah?

[Laura O. :](#)

I always thought that it was. When I was recruiting early on in my career, I was like the vice president of smile and dial, right? I went to pick up the phone, and I would call all of those candidates, and there were people who didn't even know this job existed before I [inaudible 00:09:59] phone, and I called them. I would come to them with this checklist of things, like the mission of the organization, the inspiration of the leadership, the new skills that they might acquire, the value or the prestige of the brand, the scope of impact, how this job is going to impact their career. Of course, I would talk about geography, and flexibility, and benefits, and all sorts of personal things, and money. I knew that if I got somebody's interest, and I heard piqued interest in two or three of these things, I was like, yeah, we're going to have another conversation. If I got piqued interest in four or five, I thought, all right, this person's, check, their good.

[Laura O. :](#) If my client's interested, I know that I can bring them in, and have them interview, and if I had interest in six, or seven and eight, the fish was already in the boat. It was easy. I didn't have to worry about them at all. I was really good at building these robust pools of candidates. Then I started to notice as the searches, retained executive search can go two, three, four months, and I started to notice as the searches were going on and on, my candidates, my once robust candidate pools, would start dwindling away. These candidates would ghost me. They were just gone, and it was that I really was able to come with them. I wanted to bring them meaning, and matter, and purpose, and all I had was a checklist, because I was looking at things like money, and we all look at money really differently.

[Laura O. :](#) So, if you have graduated from college with a ton of debt, you look at money differently, than if you graduated from college with no debt whatsoever. If you're somebody who likes to go on fancy vacations, to really beautiful cosmopolitan European cities, that are easy to get to but costs a lot of money, you're going to care more about money, than if you're somebody who wants to go, deep in to the woods, and sleep next to streams. It doesn't cost you any money, but takes a lot of time. So, money versus time off, and things like that.

[Laura O. :](#) It wasn't until I understood the difference between the value of the job, versus the value of the job to that candidate, that I could understand the difference between their want to make number, and their need to make number.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) And there my friends, as you've been listening to me over the years talk about seeing people in 3D. This is what I've been talking about. It's go and D. It's understanding what makes that person's mission unique, and why. I love that word why, Laura. If we don't know why, we know nothing.

[Laura O. :](#) It's so true. I spend a lot of time as a recruiter, and then even when I founded my own recruiting business, and ran that for 15 years, thinking that the way that I keep employees happy, is to just throw more money at them. You have the squeaky sales person, who has a great quarter, and they want a lot of money, and of course you're like, well I feel like I should reward them, but then they have a next good quarter, and the next good quarter, and there's only so much you can pay that person. Frankly, they're happy when you'd give them the bonus, and then two, three weeks later, it's like, well what if you've done for me lately?

[Laura O. :](#) When I was running my company, I would hire people first on culture fit, and second on skills, 'cause I figure I could teach anybody skills, but culture fit was pretty tough. But in order for me to understand culture fit, I had to understand their why. What I came to understand, was that actually my squeaky a salesperson, she wanted more money, but she actually more wanted to be involved in the decisions that we made, about what teams were assigned to her, and which clients she got, and how much opportunity she had to, hustle and

whether or not that hustle would, would give her back her own reward. She wanted more control, than anything else.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) All right, so money isn't everything, and we all have to plug in to what really matters to us, but I'm wondering what this means for managers. What should we all know about keeping people motivated at work, especially managers?

[Laura O. :](#) Well, I think that question of why is a pretty important question. I think what a lot of times we do, is we hire somebody and we say, okay, I know Joe. I know what inspires him. I know what he cares about. I know what's interesting. Then Joe works for us for two, or three, or four years, and it turns out that Joe changes, because over that time, maybe he got married, maybe he got divorced, maybe he had children, maybe he went back to school, maybe his parents died, maybe things in his life changed, and his drivers, will have also changed.

[Laura O. :](#) People change, and at every age, and at every life stage, they're going to be incentivized. They're going to be motivated by different things. I think it's constantly checking in with our team, with our staff members and understanding. There was a Gallup study, that was done a few years ago, that said the only one third of U.S. workers are engaged in their work. I travel about 150,000 miles a year, and every time I get on a plane, I looked to the right to find my seat of course, and then I kind of peeked to the left, and I look at the pilots and I think to myself, gee, I sure hope those pilots were part of the one third of the U.S Workforce, that's engaged in their work today. If not, this is a problem. Now, imagine our departments, our divisions, our companies, if those pilots, the people that are working for us, are not engaged. We're all going down in a fiery ball of flames.

[Laura O. :](#) If we know that only one third of U.S. workers are engaged, and we also know that engaged workers are 22% more effective for the companies they work for, then it's imperative that managers take time, and actually stop seeing their employees as these monolithic groups. Millennials are lazy, and Gen Xers are checked out, and boomers can't wait to retire. We have all of these stereotypes that we put on these generations, but it's until we sit down, and we get to know our individual staff members, at their individual ages, at their individual life stages, the things that they care about individually, that we can get them engaged in their work.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) Okay, so let's dive in to the nitty gritty here. How do you actually figure out what would make someone engaged?

[Laura O. :](#) So in the book, I talk about this framework of consonance being made up of four things, and they all very conveniently start with C. The first is, calling some thing that's bigger than you. Some overarching ideas, some kind of gravitational force, if you will, that gets you up in the morning. It can be a company you want to build. It can be a bottom line that you want to drive. It can be a course, or a

degree that you want to finish. It can be a company that you want to start. It can be a family that you want to raise. It can be a societal ill that you want to solve, but it is something that you care about, that drives you. We all have that thing, that thing that we go, oh, that's the thing I really want. That's the first.

[Laura O. :](#) The second is connection. Connection is really the answer to the question of, why do I matter? Why does my work matter? If I called in sick to work tomorrow, would anybody care? It's looking at your box in the organizational chart, in your company, and understanding why that box, and why you in that box matters.

[Laura O. :](#) The third is contribution. While connection is all about the work, contribution is really about you, individually. How do you want this work to contribute to the community that you want to build, the lifestyle that you want to live, the values you want to manifest in the world, or the velocity and trajectory of the career, that you're creating. Lastly, is control. How much control do you have and need, over the amount of connection that your work has, towards getting you to fulfill that calling, and the contribution that it has, that the way that you want the work to impact your life?

[Laura O. :](#) For each one of us, that's going to be very different, and when managers understand what it takes for people to feel content within their own four C's of calling, connection, contribution, and control, they can understand what incentivizes them. Frankly, that's really the great role of the people in HR, is to help them to give them that framework, to allow them to understand how to have that conversation in the first place.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) Well, I'm really excited, because I heard a rumor that Work Trends listeners are going to get to take an assessment.

[Laura O. :](#) Yes.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) Is that right?

[Laura O. :](#) That is right. I created limitlessassessment.com/worktrends and I'll say that again. Limitlessassessment.com/worktrends, and what it is, is it takes about 10 or 15 minutes. There are about 60 questions, and they're pretty catalyzing questions, that help individuals think about ... really on one of those Likert scales, agree, strongly disagree, etc. So, it's a pretty easy quiz to take, but it really gets you thinking about what work means to you, the productive time that you spend in your life, whether you would do more of it, if the work mattered more, whether it's allowing you to manifest your values on a daily basis, whether it's helping you achieve this overarching goal. Those kinds of questions that we don't know how to answer, because we just haven't heard the questions given to us in a way, that gives us this framework.

[Laura O. :](#) At the end of this quiz, the listeners will get, or the respondents rather, we'll get a radar chart, and there's two charts that come in. The first one gives you each of the four C's, of calling, connection, contribution and control, in the amount that you'd want to actually have them in your life. Then a second one, which shows you the math, that you actually do currently have them in your life, and you can really see when they overlap, where you're in consonance, and where you're not.

[Laura O. :](#) In the areas where you're not in consonance, I actually give some tips about some immediate steps people can take, in order to get more of whichever of the C's that they want to have.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) Nice. Well, thank you. We're excited about that.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) Okay. So, we've dived in, and talked a bit about individual managers, but I'm wondering what is the role of HR in this conversation about engagement?

[Laura O. :](#) I think HR managers are the bomb. I mean HR managers are the individuals in an organization, that actually make it work, 'cause they're the ones who see the people who work there, the whole person who works there, and they're usually the ones that get to have conversations outside of the, did you finish this project? Did you get the budget done? Did you finish the presentation? But they actually get to have conversations with employees, about what they actually care about, in ways that the bosses don't necessarily always get to see, or want to see sometimes.

[Laura O. :](#) HR managers can really be the ambassadors of this framework. They can be the ones who shape the conversations. They can help the managers, really get to know who the people are. For example, you have somebody who is coming in late on a Friday. They've already told you they're not going to be in the office until 10:00 AM, and they're not in the office till 10:00 AM, because they actually had to go to their kid's PTA meeting at their school, but at that PTA meeting at the school, a great idea was raised in a way where that employee finally made a connection about the problem that they're trying to solve at work, that they have been stymied about, they haven't been able to solve, and just like the framework or the way that they can actually solve that problem.

[Laura O. :](#) If they walk in to the bosses office and they can't say, well actually I figured it out at the PTA meeting this morning, because it's really important to me, that this job allows me to have flexibility to be able to do that, then you're not getting the holistic version of that employee. You're only getting half of that person.

[Laura O. :](#) HR managers are able to have the framework of the conversation where they can say, actually, all the things you do outside of the office, the communities in which you volunteer, the places of worship, where you spend your time, the

families that you're raising, the hobbies that you have, all of these things, actually give you arrows in your quiver, that you bring in to the office every single day, and we want those too.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) Very cool. I think that vision really elevates the role of HR. It makes HR's role really noble, really important, which we all know it is, but sometimes we forget. What advice do you have for HR people, to really step in to that role, and really feel like they're making a difference that, and yes, I'm going to say this everybody, they have a seat at the table. I did it. I went there. Right?

[Laura O. :](#) Yeah. I think that HR managers, they not only have a seat at the table, they had to sit on that airplane. I think going in to the boss, the CEO and saying, do you want the pilot who's engaged, or you want the other two thirds of the pilots?

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) Right.

[Laura O. :](#) I think that we all want the pilot who was engaged, and I think going in, being armed with studies that say, that engage workers are 22% more effective for their companies, translates to workers who are more profitable as well. If we all want to be limitless, if we all want to feel the sense of frictionless belonging, that the very best version of who we are is, being brought out in us every single day, and putting towards the things that we want to do, then we want that for our staff as well, because we have less turnover. We have more profits. We have happier workforce.

[Laura O. :](#) It's easier to recruit people to where we work, because people are talking about their work, outside of work as well. We all know you can place every ad in the paper that you want, but it's like the best employees, the best recruitment, comes from word of mouth, and the people who work for you, they are the ones who are your greatest ambassadors. You're really turning everybody, in to recruiters for your company, if we have a place where people can be who they are all the time.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) If you're out there, and you're putting ads in the paper, give me a call, 'cause we got to talk.

[Laura O. :](#) Oh, yeah.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#) Laura and I can talk to you about other ways in which we can connect, but really. Laura, let's do something that's kind of fun, and I do this with every guest. Let's look in to the crystal ball right now. Let's look at the future. How do you think employee experience is going to change, in the next 10 years?

[Laura O. :](#) Well, I think we're going to move away from these monolithic definitions. We're no longer going to say, all in Millennials are this, and all Gen Xers are that. Millennials are already taking over the workforce. They are 75% of the

workforce by 2025, so we better stop defining them all as one giant monolith. I think that number one, we're going to start understanding that there's nuance among individuals, and the only way to do that, is if we can start seeing them as individuals. I think that the conversations that are happening about purpose right now in the workforce, are really forcing us to see these Millennials as whole people. I think that's super useful. I think that's going to drive much more diversity throughout the workforce, in terms of not just the color of skin, but in terms of, sexual preference and male, female, but just in terms of where people come from, and the kinds of skills that we value.

[Laura O. :](#)

I think having more diversity in the types of individuals that are hired in different jobs in the nonprofit sector, They're looking for people coming from the corporate arena, and the corporate arena are looking for people coming from the nonprofit sector, and we're going to stop seeing the differences between nonprofit, corporate and public, as having giant concrete walls, but really just see them as nothing more than they are, which is a tax association.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#)

Not to mention, I think bringing diversity of thoughts, and the way people see things, and feel things, and think about things just makes you more interesting. So Laura, thank you so much for stopping in. This has been awesome.

[Laura O. :](#)

Thank you so much for having me.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#)

I want to keep this conversation moving. Join us, and tell us how you have found your best career path today, and if you'd like to get our Twitter chat questions in advance, sign up for our newsletter at talentculture.com.

[Meghan M. Biro:](#)

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[Meghan M. Biro:](#)

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