

- Meghan M. Biro: [00:00](#) Talent development, learning, training. Those are all nice to have, right? Wrong. This week's guest, Brent Colescott says, "Talent development is absolutely crucial to building a successful organization that will thrive in the future." He's going to break it all down for us on today's episode of WorkTrends. This episode is sponsored by SumTotal.
- Meghan M. Biro: [00:32](#) 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. I was struck by a recent Wall Street Journal article that highlighted a missing link for many of us right now, re-training and re-skilling current employees in the face of this tight talent market. Why are we always so quick to want to make a fresh hire, a quick hire, your next best thing when often we have the right talent right in front of us. Sometimes all it takes is the willingness to change your mindset. Let's get to our first guest today and we'll unfold this.
- Meghan M. Biro: [01:22](#) I am so excited to have a friend and colleague here with me today, Brent Colescott is the senior director of business strategy and transformation for SumTotal. And did you hear that word Trends community? He actually has transformation in his title. He has more than 20 years of experience in the learning and talent fields and he's here to get real about innovation and transformation. Welcome to WorkTrends, Brent.
- Brent Colescott: [01:52](#) Thanks so much Meghan, it's a thrill to be talking to you, this has been a long time in the coming.
- Meghan M. Biro: [01:58](#) I know, right?
- Brent Colescott: [01:59](#) Awesome.
- Meghan M. Biro: [02:00](#) Hey, where are you today?
- Brent Colescott: [02:02](#) I am in beautiful Houston, Texas where we've got some showers pending, but in general, this is the best part of the year where we have cooler temps than our normal baking you to death in the heat of the summer.
- Meghan M. Biro: [02:15](#) And that finds me jealous, because we're about high forties here, like stuck in that soupy, muddy thing of Boston, Cambridge. So, jealous.

- Brent Colescott: [02:22](#) Oh, we've been there, done that, four years in New Hampshire.
- Meghan M. Biro: [02:25](#) I know your dad. So I was really fascinated with this recent Wall Street Journal article about up-skilling. Brent, what were your big takeaways with this?
- Brent Colescott: [02:35](#) Oh, it was a great article. I think it really pegged the current state of what's happening right now. When you think about just today they announced 3.6% unemployment. That number has significant impact because it means there's literally no talent out there that you can acquire just sitting around and the article about the up-skilling really talked about major points that I thought were interesting. One is that there's got to be a change in the executive/board mindset. The idea of buying talent, not building the talent has been a challenge. When you look at mergers and acquisitions, the layoffs that happen, they think they can just go ahead and buy in that talent, bring it in, change it out. But the article really hit on the fact that you have to keep development opportunities open. You're losing a lot of knowledge in your organization when you lay off those people versus if you invest in them. The engagement factor that happens.
- Brent Colescott: [03:33](#) So it's really interesting from a mindset change perspective that they're talking about. The other thing that I thought was interesting was there was a quote with basically said, we need ways for your career, ways being the mapping program app on your phone. And I thought that was really interesting too.
- Meghan M. Biro: [03:49](#) Oh that's super cool. I love kind of drawing that correlation because it's true number one, we have a retention issue across the board up small, growing companies, mid size enterprise, you name it. You nailed it on that one. We have definitely got to keep unfolding this. All right, so you tend to have a lot of interesting theories. One in particular that caught my attention was yours about 2020, let's hear it.
- Brent Colescott: [04:19](#) So I've been lucky enough to be able to travel around the world, meeting with companies, seeing and hearing different things. But last year was kind of an interesting moment. I was in Amsterdam at an HR, CHRO event and there was all this presentation about talent and learning and development opportunities and things, and all of a sudden it was like it got real for the executives in the room. That they realized that they can't just kind of give this lip service anymore, or say things like we're a development company and just making catalogs of

content available. They realized the impact of what talent development from a broader sense means for their organizations. The systems that they have aren't supporting that, the expectations from the employees aren't being met.

Brent Colescott: [05:08](#) And it was, it was a real palpable tension in the room and I kind of glean from that, that this year 2019 is the year that if they're not focused on changing their processes, their platforms, really to this employee experience kind of idea along the lines of development, if they're not doing that in 2019, 2020 is going to be a very difficult year. And I really feel that this is now the point of the inflection point of change that's going to start happening.

Meghan M. Biro: [05:40](#) Oh, I completely concur with you. I have a question. What was that moment in the room where you were like, "Oh boy, this is going down?" Like, was there something about facial expressions, gestures? I'm just really curious.

Brent Colescott: [05:52](#) It was towards the end of the event and I think it was the culmination of all the information. It was a two day event and it was kind of in a closing summary and you could just feel that there was this awareness that suddenly happened, that the next year, next two years is not going to be like the last two. And that was where I, it's just one of those things I felt in the room and you know, it was like one of those, Oh, you know, what moments and that really came to fruition.

Meghan M. Biro: [06:23](#) I'm so happy to hear it. I've been thinking about this for, oh, maybe a decade. This is really about mindset, culture, change at an extraordinary level right now. We are talking about a transformation that's happening around the world. This is not small stuff and-

Brent Colescott: [06:40](#) No, and globally is right.

Meghan M. Biro: [06:41](#) Yeah. I mean, and if you're not tuned in now, you're absolutely right Brent, like we got problems. Like its go time and if you have not thought about this yet, get yourself to an event, do what you got to do to sort of get to that next level, because I think there's so many people out there still struggling.

Brent Colescott: [06:58](#) I agree. And you know, the moment that I realized that I was onto something happened a couple of weeks back, but I think I even shared with you the example just this week I saw a job

posting and it was for an SVP of people experience. Did you, you saw that job description.

Meghan M. Biro: [07:16](#) I did.

Brent Colescott: [07:16](#) That if anything says all we need to know. I mean, it was a job posting for a company that had SVP of people experience talking about a world class experience for their employees, talking about the whole life cycle, that they want to be able to have the management view and access the talent pipeline for their needs of their business. I mean this, this rights out of most HCM catalogs are marketing materials and this is a job description. So this is where I think my theory is now finally coming to fruition.

Meghan M. Biro: [07:47](#) And at the same time I opened up your email and then what I found myself doing was sending out a tweet about this as well. And lo and behold, somebody actually said to me on Twitter, "This sounds like a job description." So there you go, we're full circle. You know?

Brent Colescott: [08:01](#) Absolutely.

Meghan M. Biro: [08:02](#) So, if you're out there and you're listening on WorkTrends on the Twitters or you're following this conversation, please weigh in, Brent and I want to hear from you and look forward to it. So thanks for tuning in. So listen, Brent, I am really interested in your maturity model for organizations. It sounds kind of fancy everybody, but we're going to break it down for you. So there's these different stages that you're thinking about, where do you think organizations get stuck and just walk us through that model.

Brent Colescott: [08:29](#) Sure. It's a model that we've had at Skillsoft since, you know, 2000 or so that started as a learning growth model. It transformed about four years ago into learning and talent. We kind of started weaving in talent components into it and then the last two years we've created, turned it into what was basically an organizational maturity index. We added some workforce components, so we've got lots of different pieces into this model, but it's five stages that starts with siloed, moves to targeted, transforming and then on to continuous and optimize. Those are the five stages that we see an organization going through as they mature their processes. And then we have nine areas that we measure success based on those five stages. And what we've done is we've got nine areas, it's people

centric culture, HR role and strategy, organizational alignment and curation, user experience, technology, infrastructure, elective participation, governance, funding and reporting.

Brent Colescott: [09:30](#) Those are the nine that we've mapped. And so we have a diagnostic that's out there, and we've had tons of people take this diagnostic, and it's given us a lot of data. And what we found is that most organizations are thoroughly sitting right in the targeted space. They're at a stage two, our data shows the average is 1.9, so I'm just going to say 2. So most organizations and in a targeted sense means that they're looking at how they're learning, talent and workforce processes can come together for a better use in the organization. Siloed being stage one. That's where it's hire them, fire them, HR processes are separate from talent acquisition. There's a lot of turnover in the organization. There's not much viewed in terms of strategic. Stage two that targeted, it's where we see the connections happening. It usually has like a champion from a VP that comes into an organization was an example I have of one customer that, he came in new to the organ, he said, "We're going to be a training top 125 best place to work-"

Meghan M. Biro: [10:31](#) Oh, boy.

Brent Colescott: [10:31](#) And that best place to work marker is there.

Meghan M. Biro: [10:33](#) By the way everyone who else out there is scared by that? Like that's just scary to me, because it just screams of buzzword bingo.

Brent Colescott: [10:41](#) Oh it does, but they're looking at how they can change processes and sometimes it takes that executive, hopefully one that reads the view of the people in the organization, not just by edict, but when you get the executive suite to start understanding the connections that have to happen. That's when the target is suddenly moves into that, that transformation stage. And that's where I think going back to my theory, 2019 is we're seeing the data says they're in a targeted phase. They're seeing the connections. 2019 is where you dry dock your processes, you buy the new platforms, you bring in the people that can help you do what you need to do.

Brent Colescott: [11:20](#) You put in the process programs, whatever it is in 2019 to ensure that you're focused on talent development, talent re-skilling and being agile with who you have. So that in 2020 when it continues to grow and build on all this competition,

innovation in the marketplace, you're acting, you're not playing catch up. And that's really where I see the transition happening in 2019 to 2020, and that aligns with our model that shows most organizations are targeted, but 2020 is that transformational year.

Meghan M. Biro: [11:54](#) Okay. So our listeners are now at the edge of their seats and they want to know how do they make this 2020 happen.

Brent Colescott: [12:02](#) It's all about the employee experience. If you're not sitting and looking at that as your first step, assessing what the employees are experiencing from their interactions with the platform, from talent seeking, finding who is managing them, are they supporting their talent? You know, that's one of the litmus test I always put up there is saying that if I'm in an office or a cubicle or wherever I am during the workday, it's middle of the afternoon and I've got all my stuff taken care of and I feel like I want to take a course that my management has told me is available. If I'm taking that course and my boss or a supervisor walks by, do I downsize it or do I live it up proudly? If my first instinct is to downsize it and have my email up and look like I'm, you know, "Working" that I'm not in a development organization. If it means, if I have to live it up, that means I have supported my management, I feel like I'm in a development organization.

Brent Colescott: [13:00](#) If companies and organizations are not in that second state with their employees, their employees will start looking elsewhere. They hunger for that seamless experience, that consumer style experience and they want to be able to develop. Skills are hot, everybody wants new skills and you have to be able to acquire them. And the management idea that, that's for after hours isn't going to cut it.

Meghan M. Biro: [13:24](#) No, it's ridiculous. I actually think it's funny at this point.

Brent Colescott: [13:27](#) It is.

Meghan M. Biro: [13:28](#) Like who out there decides to leave your whole self at home when you enter the office? Like hello, very like last century from my perspective. And I'm sure if you're a gen Z right now and you're listening in and you're about to get into the job market, you're hearing me and I bet you're on Snapchat or on the Insta's, let us know. We want to hear from you because I know you think it's ridiculous. So there, all right? We said it.

- Brent Colescott: [13:54](#) Absolutely.
- Meghan M. Biro: [13:55](#) So let's talk about building a development culture. What is that, number one and number two, how do we do something like that? Because it sounds kind of cool.
- Brent Colescott: [14:05](#) So development culture is one that it's going to feed the employee from all aspects, whether it's the ability to see where they're going to have an opportunity to grow in the organization. It's the ability to acquire skills that they feel that they're being invested in. The opportunity for development stretch assignments is really what I see is the bigger challenge, but it's also opening up opportunities for people within organizations to stay. And that's the most important part, is when you have that engagement and they stay, it doesn't matter what's happening outside the company, it allows them to focus and feel that they're part of something bigger.
- Meghan M. Biro: [14:45](#) Maybe even they're going to stay two or three or four years now, as opposed to five to 10. I mean, we really have to manage our expectations when we look at the future of work and people coming into the workforce, expectations have changed dramatically. So the more we can do to get real about who we are, who we want to attract, and then as Brent is saying, how are we retaining? Why is retention? It seems like it's always left out of this equation and it's absolutely critical. So, so glad you're bringing this to light. You know, Brent, I'm hearing that people are thirsty for skills and development. If you are an HR or a talent leader right now, how can you deliver that development that people are actually craving?
- Brent Colescott: [15:29](#) Well, first we have to help people identify where they are and where they want to move into and the roles that they can see and that's part of it. And the training and performance management needs to be linked. You know, the systems that, I had a system where I was on the LMS and there was a performance system, the two are not connected. The goals, the expectations people have. If you take something here, it feeds this system here. It's got to be connected. They need to be able to see where they are. And that's the idea, is if I complete a course in the learning section, it just show up as part of my goals that I've achieved and we have this attention to the idea of our, you know, I've got an Apple watch on, so it's telling me how many steps I have, or haven't taken.

- Brent Colescott: [16:12](#) If I go to my 401k I can see how much money I have or haven't saved or made this year with graphics and everything else. We're inundated with all of these and we're trying to make sure that the expectations are met. And so, the systems that we put in place, the approach that we take to our talent needs to align with the expectations that they're having from everywhere else in the world.
- Meghan M. Biro: [16:32](#) You have a pretty interesting career path that you've shared with me in previous conversations. I'm curious how this whole conversation has changed over the course.
- Brent Colescott: [16:44](#) It's been interesting because I've had the opportunity to work in different industries and so the ability to see where talent is appreciated or not appreciated, is very interesting. And from the technology perspective, I always look back towards how can the technology solve a business problem, not the technologies to hear all end. Also, what I look at is look continuously at the way that the business problems can be solved through that technology. And I'm very much the type of person that I like a strategic view. I like to be able to say, "All right, how are we responding to this? Is this meeting the need?" Not, this is what I have. I have a hammer and everything's got to be a nail.
- Meghan M. Biro: [17:26](#) Smart. And if you're listening out there, that's how you have career longevity. Do what Brent's doing, because he's doing a pretty good job at that. You know what I'm saying?
- Brent Colescott: [17:36](#) I appreciate that.
- Meghan M. Biro: [17:37](#) No prob. So I feel like taking out my crystal ball, you know?
- Brent Colescott: [17:42](#) Yeah?
- Meghan M. Biro: [17:42](#) Do you want to do that, are you up for that?
- Brent Colescott: [17:44](#) Sure. Let's look at it.
- Meghan M. Biro: [17:45](#) All right, let's look at it. So when you look at how work in HR is going to change in the next, say, I don't know, five, 10 years out, what are some of your juiciest predictions?
- Brent Colescott: [17:55](#) So my juiciest is prediction will be that data absolutely gets better, because as we look more and more at the employee experience, the consolidation of these systems into more



sweeps, HR is going to get the data that they've been looking, begging for because it's not going to be in their hands, it's going to be in the employees hands to do this. And I'm going to go out on a limb and say, and I was talking about this the other day and I absolutely love this quote, which is my own, which is HR data is literally going to change the trajectory of a business if they don't take care of it, and that's going to be for the better or for the worse. And so I think when we look at how HR is going to be dealing with things in the next five to 10 years, we're going to start treating our employees like athletes.

Brent Colescott: [18:43](#) We're going to start leveraging data like stats, percentage of shots, you know, at the back board or you know, right field, left field, home runs, what have you. We're going to start measuring our employees in how they support our organization in the same manner. And so what you're going to have is we're seeing already teams are the most important part of an organization. It's no longer hierarchical. So if you treat your business and your employees like teams and athletes, you're going to continue to move and focus on where they need to be to meet most innovative and to help drive your organization to successful outcomes.

Meghan M. Biro: [19:21](#) Should we be a little frightened, is anyone else kind of shaking in their boots a little bit? I mean, if you're feeling, well, lazy, you better start getting active, right? Because there is a fear factor, I think, is what I'm getting to Brent of people saying, "Am I going to be out of a job? Like, am I going to be out skilled by robots, by AI." I mean, talk to us and this audience here, for those who are a little bit worried perhaps about the future. And what this looks like and how to skill up and how to empower people to not be afraid as much, but take real strategic steps is what I'm hearing.

Brent Colescott: [19:58](#) That's a great, great point. Automation does scare people, but the reality is, is that we've been going through this cycle with every industrial revolution for the last hundred years or more. And so what I see is that while things get automated, it actually frees us up to do different things. So when you look at right now, the jobs that are going unfilled are a lot of data scientist jobs. You know, there is a hunger in the marketplace right now for all this big data, but nobody's there. So we're seeing a skilling happening in that regard. You know, you think about okay, jobs being lost. Well, you can go to a McDonald's right now and there are probably about five or six, 46 inch flat screen panels where you're ordering your food yourself and there's

less people at McDonald's. But those people may end up moving into another type of career opportunity.

Brent Colescott: [20:52](#) So again, efficiencies come, but new creation of jobs and types of jobs happen based on that. So we're just changing our focus. So there shouldn't be a fear, there should be an excitement around the fact that there's a new opportunity for something that maybe you didn't even think of that now aligns with your skills or your interest to be able to grow into something new and different.

Meghan M. Biro: [21:14](#) Because let's face it, culture is still a human activity.

Brent Colescott: [21:19](#) Absolutely.

Meghan M. Biro: [21:19](#) We are the only ones-

Brent Colescott: [21:20](#) Empathy.

Meghan M. Biro: [21:20](#) Right, empathy, culture, strategy and actually implementing stuff, we'll just say, to get real fancy on everybody. But don't forget, it's us humans that are going to empower the culture. So remember that if you're out there and you're feeling, I know I've been talking to people on Twitter this week about this very topic, so stay human because that's really the most important piece of this. Brent Colescott, thank you for stopping by and look forward to seeing you in Houston.

Brent Colescott: [21:48](#) Absolutely. Meghan, you're welcome. Anytime you want a warm up, we would love to have you down here. Plus, we've got some amazing food down here in Texas too.

Meghan M. Biro: [21:56](#) Sign me up. Let's keep the conversation moving. Join us for WorkTrends on Twitter. We are going to be there with Brent Colescott from Skillsoft on Wednesday, May 15th at 1:30 PM Eastern, 10:30 AM Pacific or wherever you're hanging out around the globe. Join us to talk about how you are going to make 2020 your transformational year. If you'd like to get our Twitter chat questions in advance, sign up for our news letter at [talentculture.com](http://talentculture.com).

Meghan M. Biro: [22:37](#) Thanks for listening to WorkTrends from Talent Culture. Join us every Wednesday at 1:30 PM Eastern for a live Twitter chat with our podcast guest. To learn more about guests featured on today's show, visit the show notes for this episode [talentculture.com](http://talentculture.com) and help us spread the word. Subscribe to

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