

Meghan M. Biro: Lights, camera, jobs! We are seeing more and more tech in every part of the employee experience, and that extends to the candidate experience too. Stay tuned for a conversation about the future of employee branding and hiring with video pro, Elena Valentine. Welcome to the #WorkTrends Podcast [00:00:30] from TalentCulture. I'm your host, Meghan M. Biro. Every week, we interview interesting people who are re-imagining work. Join us on Twitter every Wednesday, 1:30 p.m. Eastern, using the hashtag #WorkTrends. Did everybody have a good Fourth of July? Did you get those fireworks moving and see some family and friends? Summer is here. I'm just trying to take some time and enjoy it, and I hope you are too.

Meghan M. Biro: But, first, let's look at the headlines. [00:01:00] Exciting new tech is one thing, but this is HR, my friends. We always have to keep an eye out for the new regulation that comes along with the tech. Here's a news item that caught my eye. The Illinois Assembly and Senate recently passed the Artificial Intelligence Video Interview Act. It sounds fancy, right? To boil it down, the bill basically requires companies that use AI-powered video interview technology to disclose that to candidates. [00:01:30] Employers will now have to notify each applicant before the interview that AI may be used to analyze their video interview. I want to hear from you on this. I think it's really interesting. If you're using video in your hiring process, what are you learning? Tell us by using the hashtag #WorkTrends. Tweet with us. Let us know.

Meghan M. Biro: Now let's get to today's guest. Elena Valentine [00:02:00] is a filmmaker who helps HR leaders use video to attract and retain employees. How cool is that? Welcome to #WorkTrends, Elena.

Elena Valentine: Yeah, I'm happy to be here. Let's get this podcast party started.

Meghan M. Biro: It's Friday. Why not? Friday, and I'm back from Vegas, so in one piece. SHRM was amazing, and so glad we connected. Where are you today?

Elena Valentine: I am currently in Salt Lake City, about [00:02:30] to prep for my sister's wedding. I am a bridesmaid.

Meghan M. Biro: Oh, fun.

Elena Valentine: Yeah. So it's going to be that kind of day.

Meghan M. Biro: It's going to be that kind of sister day. Well, good for you. That sounds like a blast.

Elena Valentine: Yeah.

Meghan M. Biro: So first of all, I have to know something. How did you go from being a filmmaker to being in our crazy world of HR. Tell us.

Elena Valentine: Yeah, didn't expect that one. So I am actually a sound engineer by trade, so I apologize, [Marty 00:03:00]. [00:03:00] Clearly, that didn't show before this podcast with all of our issues. But I got into this world because I was actually a design researcher at an innovation design firm in Chicago, and I was basically [inaudible 00:03:13] initially really ugly, bad research video, and making it into something that was more like documentary films to the C-suite of the Fortune 500 companies. One of those projects was in the world of workforce development, aimed [00:03:30] to connect 6 million young people to more meaningful pathways to employment. It was through that that we started really diving into not just workforce organizations, but really diving into the needs and successes and challenges of companies.

Elena Valentine: As a result of that, we interviewed and went through a lot of companies. A lot of what we saw was job descriptions don't show what a job is like. What we started to do [00:04:00] is just connect with HR teams to bring jobs on video, initially, to see if this was something that would resonate with young people, and it did. So that is initially how I got into the world of HR. It was very accidental, not something that I expected, and now my colleagues and I have made it our careers and life missions.

Meghan M. Biro: Well, so that story will resonate with probably at least half of our audience, because a lot of us who have landed in HR did not [00:04:30] even end up being here, so there you go, right?

Elena Valentine: Yes.

Meghan M. Biro: So, Elena, where are you from originally?

Elena Valentine: Born, raised in Chicago, and that is also where our company is based.

Meghan M. Biro: Nice, and it's Skill Scout, right?

Elena Valentine: Yeah.

Meghan M. Biro: I like that name.

Elena Valentine: We've definitely pivoted over the years. I mean, we were a very different company with a bit of a different intent when we first started, which was both how might we bring jobs and candidates to life through video in more engaging ways. So this is actually really interesting that we're [00:05:00] talking about this, but now we really are just a full-fledged media production company for the

world of HR, offering solutions and ways that companies can really tell more video stories more often.

Meghan M. Biro: We need more of you, because there is so much bad video out there, by the way, and just so much schlocky ... people trying to put it together without that finesse that I think all generations, particularly [00:05:30] Gen Z that's about to graduate from college, they're going to be wanting. I mean, they're creating their own videos. We all are now. We're all filmmakers, in a sense, in that way, right?

Elena Valentine: Yeah. I mean, it's so interesting. I always think about, but anyone can cook, right? It's true these days. Anyone can film. Anyone has a smartphone. In some ways, I will argue that, because anyone has a smartphone, everyone has the capacity to tell stories. So I certainly do believe that, when it comes to finesse, there's a little bit of a [00:06:00] fine line, because, at the same time, glossiness in corporate video and that level of ... There's a level of finesse where people see it as not being trustworthy. They see glossy as being fake. So there's this fine line, especially with Gen Z, around how might we make authentic video that resonates, that feels like, for example, that it's coming from employees, that this is their real story. That's a lot of what we've been working with these past couple of years, to really [00:06:30] achieve that kind of balance to have both a level of polish, but one that still feels like these are real human stories trying to connect with real candidates.

Meghan M. Biro: So before you founded your video company, Skill Scout, you spent four years as a researcher. As many of you know out there as my audience, I also, early on in my career, was a researcher. So look at that. See? So everybody wants to be something when they grow up. Then we try on all these different hats. [00:07:00] I want to hear more about your research. What was that about?

Elena Valentine: So it was really interesting. When I came in to this firm, I came in somewhat as what you might call a visual researcher. So I was the one going in filming and capturing these interviews, going in to the 32-year-old mother of two who shops at Target, and understanding her shopping experiences. So it was very ethnographic. It was very qualitative. So, literally, in my time there, I did everything [00:07:30] from learning way more than I needed about diapers and wipes to app usage on the iPhone 4. That was actually one of my first projects. But as I continued to develop there, I got really lucky, well, really blessed in the sense that I spent a lot of time working with foundations, doing a lot of research around impact, so things like teacher feedback, patient-centered care, and, inevitably, what would start Skill Scout, which was around [00:08:00] youth unemployment and the world of hiring and hiring connections. So that was really the span of all of that. Really, it's because of that research, it's because of what we did that inspired what we do today.

Meghan M. Biro: Well, there's no question that job descriptions just don't do a good job of showing what it's really like to work there. It's something that I've been talking about, writing about, speaking about for many, many years as a former recruiter in this space. [00:08:30] So talk to us about how we can be better. How are you seeing companies using video in a really compelling way now?

Elena Valentine: There's a multitude of ways that you have companies now that are using video. So, first, just to showcase the spectrum of how we're using video, so certainly we know that there are companies who are now leveraging video for candidate video interviews. So we're seeing the world of HireVue and others who are using candidate video to expedite the interview process. We also have [00:09:00] now a distributed workforce, where we're now leveraging Zoom and conference video to have meetings. On the other hand, now we're also seeing companies leverage video more and more to showcase their jobs, showcase their company culture, showcase their leadership. That's a lot of the world that we play in, is how are we helping companies discover and capture their stories in a way where they can engage current employees and where they can engage candidates? There's [00:09:30] certainly a lot of science for using video.

Elena Valentine: I think we vehemently believe that media is the literacy of the 21st century. So, Meghan, you were talking about Gen Z. This is what they consume. They are going to YouTube every day to learn how to braid hair, to get tours of the White House. They're also going there for jobs. So we're really just tapping into a growing trend, into how people are learning, into how people are discovering. So when we started Skill Scout five years ago, [00:10:00] we saw that this was only going to be a trend that was going to continue. We saw that there was just an opportunity for the world of HR to go alongside with it.

Meghan M. Biro: Well, and one thing I want to share is my experience with Gen Z, and I'm starting to do more research here as well. Their BS detectors are through the roof, so there's no getting around not being transparent or genuine with this generation. I mean, I think that's fair to say for [00:10:30] all of us at this point, but this generation, in particular, is very sensitive to that, just growing up with phones and screens.

Elena Valentine: Yeah, especially. As we were just recently talking about, they can smell BS from a mile away, especially when it comes to video and stories. They're very easily detectable in terms of, okay, is this something that the company put out because they're trying to impress us, or is this someone who is really sharing what the challenges [00:11:00] are all about? That's a lot of the things that we're dealing with. This is also a generation ... Given the fact that they basically were raised on social media, where they're used to sharing the things that suck, and that that feels human. That's very uncomfortable for companies. A lot of companies, of course, they want to lead with their best foot forward, and that this is sunshine and rainbows, but we know that our companies and our roles are not always going to be sunshine and rainbows.

Elena Valentine: So there's certainly been a shift for companies to have [00:11:30] to think differently about how they are marketing their employer brand, their talent brand, and how that's a lot different than their business brand. You cannot put lipstick on a pig. People would rather see the pig and say, look, rain, sunshine or snow, airports don't shut down, and neither are you. If you can't handle the weather, if you can't lift 50 pounds, then working for an airline may not be your jam.

Meghan M. Biro: Well, what's wrong with that? [00:12:00] We're doing people a service, right? We're heading off a disaster or a bad fit within, hopefully, the first 90 days, or even before then, because it really is a two-way street in terms of hiring and recruiting. Candidates want to be informed. It's in everybody's best interest to do this immediately.

Elena Valentine: I'm glad you really brought that up, because a lot of what we see videos helping to do is not just about attracted candidates to that organization. Sometimes it's about letting candidates [00:12:30] screen out and say, oh, nope, not for me, and that is a very okay path.

Meghan M. Biro: It's a gift. I'm going to go even a step further. It's a gift you give yourself as a job seeker, and you're also giving a gift to companies right now who are really struggling to retain talent. We're going to continue to see this trend.

Elena Valentine: Yes.

Meghan M. Biro: So if we think about it in that way, we open up our eyes and our creativity [00:13:00] to doing this right. There's no question about it. So what about people who say I don't have a budget for video? We know you're out there, and you're saying that, right? So how can companies get started without breaking the bank?

Elena Valentine: Love this question. It's the cameras in our pockets. Similar to what I just said, ratatouille anyone can cook. The truth is, anyone has the capacity to film. We have the level of access to be able to capture video, and it doesn't need to be a [00:13:30] full-scale, highly produced production team. So, literally, doing things like simply just taking photos with some captions with your smartphone, you can literally do that today, start putting that on a job post, start putting that on your career site [crosstalk 00:13:48]

Meghan M. Biro: Is everyone out there listening? We are over thinking this half the time, right?

Elena Valentine: Oh, very much are. I would say the second from that is take a video, and, for 15 seconds, [00:14:00] capture a task that that employee is doing. Maybe show the pace, to maybe show the weather, to maybe show the environment. Again, put that on social media. Put that on your job post with a caption. There's things that you can do in one take that don't even necessarily require editing or

anything else but literally keeping your hand steady, pressing record, and capturing what candidates are really asking about, so even before this. So if you don't have budget for video, it's really asking, as a recruiter ... And [00:14:30] we all know this. We are responding, often, to the same questions every day. We're repeating ourselves. So the one advice I would give is, okay, what are those top three to five things that we're constantly repeating about when it comes to this role? What can we do to either collect an employee's story or to showcase the environment in a way that will immediately answer that question? Great. Now you have your shot list. Now you go out with your phone and capture that on photos or on video in one take [00:15:00] and start sharing it. That literally is my I have no budget for video.

Meghan M. Biro: Hey, it works. I just works, and everybody out there has this power to do so, so glad you're bringing this up. How do you think the conversation about employer branding has changed?

Elena Valentine: It has gone from a nice to have to essential, really, in a nutshell. In fact, what we see is many companies who are now just not starting to differentiate and delineate between their employer brand and their business [00:15:30] brand, that when it comes to doing business by doing good or seeing that, we have generations, more and more, who are joining organizations because their values align. They don't see a difference, and they're not splitting their budgets or anything based on that. There actually is a movement. There's a conference, for example, called the Cult Brand Forum, where you have companies like Patagonia and North Face, all these leaders who are coming together to say there is no difference between [00:16:00] our employer brand and our marketing brand. These are the stories that both we know is attracting our consumers, who are also attracting our employees, and, in fact, oftentimes, our consumers become our employees.

Meghan M. Biro: There you go.

Elena Valentine: In that case, that's where I've seen employer brand change. It's no longer nice to have, and the business brand and the employer brand are becoming one in the same for companies, and it's working.

Meghan M. Biro: Let's remember something. [00:16:30] A quality content does equal a quality lead. When you start talking about budgets for companies, that's ultimately what we're looking for is consumers, employees, leads for sales. It's really kind of this full circle happening, so it's no surprise that people are like, there's no difference between employer branding and regular old business and marketing branding. It's all coming together.

Elena Valentine: That's right.

Meghan M. Biro: So, listen, I saw this interesting [00:17:00] video you posted about the impact it could have on the blindness community. That was moving and powerful. So let's talk about video and access.

Elena Valentine: I actually just want to share it with a story. So a couple of weeks ago, I was presenting the power of video in recruitment to an audience where there were members of the blindness community there. They approached me after the session [00:17:30] saying how amazing this could be for them, that it typically is never something that people think about for them. But similar to any other community, they are also just bombarded with your same boring text job posts, and they would love to be able to understand what that environment is like. I remember that one of the videos I shared was just music. It was a visual day in the life. When I was talking to this gentleman, Maurice, [00:18:00] he had no idea what was on that screen. It was all music.

Elena Valentine: This is where he [inaudible 00:18:05] me to the world of descriptive audio. We pulled up Netflix, and we pull up Daredevil, and he's like, "Look up descriptive audio," and there I saw it. He's like, "Look, yeah, I watch Netflix all the time," because, literally, it's being narrated as a book along with the dialogue. I said, wow, this could be so powerful. It's not something that we'd ever thought about, that I'd ever thought about. I was so naïve.

Elena Valentine: Then we just [00:18:30] tried it. We said, okay, we're going to turn this visual day in the life of a driver, and we're going to add a descriptive audio track to it. Then I presented that to the National Industries for the Blind and their HR leaders. The comments that I received from blind HR leaders saying, wow, I'm legally blind, so I can still see some of the visual movements. But the fact that I have this descriptive audio was just so powerful. I could truly feel like I was there. I understood [inaudible 00:19:00] there. It [00:19:00] just showed that video can transcend and could include other communities that we hadn't thought about, just with a little extra bit of shoe leather, and with a little bit be it a descriptive audio track or something else. That is something that I'm certainly committed to doing, especially if you see that it is going to grow the impact of how, for example, the blindness community can get exposed to more careers and jobs.

Meghan M. Biro: I have been hearing a lot about your Humans At Work documentary. Tell me more about what [00:19:30] you're working on.

Elena Valentine: So what we've started to create is kind of an episodic documentary series that is trailing people who are reflecting on the meaning of their work or their ikigai, which is a Japanese concept for their reason for being. I'm sure you've heard it, Meghan, where it's the congruence of what you're passionate about with what the world needs with what you get paid for. There really is this privileged few who have been able to find all of that. That is what we want to capture.

Elena Valentine: The reason why we even started this was for two reasons. One was seeing [00:20:00] that some of the most meaningful experiences that we've ever had as filmmakers is when we're interviewing someone who just lights up. You see that person. They were just meant to be engineers. They were meant to be machinists. They were meant to be doctors. They have these stories of being three years old. They could just already tell that this was the direction that they were going in.

Elena Valentine: But the other side, and, Meghan, you've talked about this, there's not enough positive stories in the workplace. We were really inspired by this quote from a former diversity inclusion officer who says, "Positive stories have the power [00:20:30] to shift bias and counterbalance our brains in more informative ways." That's something that we wanted to give to the community. We're bombarded so often with such negative news of the workplace.

Meghan M. Biro: Tell me about it, just negative news in general, around the world.

Elena Valentine: Yeah, negative news in general.

Meghan M. Biro: Don't get me started on that. I want to just clarify something. From my point of view, it's not so much that we don't have enough positive work stories. We don't have enough real stories from real [00:21:00] people. I think there's this whole PR thing that's alive and well still. I think it's great, and that's always positive. But I think what you're really saying is there's not enough transparent stories.

Elena Valentine: Yes, absolutely, yeah. I mean, so that's why we started it. What we call this ... It's our love letter to work. It's meta for us, because we've been able to build a company, build a career on trailing people who are sharing what they do. We just wanted to take [00:21:30] it a step further, that this is something that could be for a much broader audience, because all of us work. All of us often struggle to find meaning in what they do. So for us to utilize real human stories to inspire others to think about their work, to think about the meaning in their work, is really the goal for this series.

Meghan M. Biro: It's crystal ball time. We're wrapping it up here soon. When you look at how work and HR will change in the next 5 to 10 years, [00:22:00] what are your best predictions?

Elena Valentine: I'm already seeing the trend already. We went from this time of how are we trying to figure out how we deal with mass quantity, which is from the ... How do we filter? How do we use technology to narrow everything down? We lost the human side of all of this. So when I see the latest HR tech trends, when I see what everyone really wants to do, they want to get back, again, the meaning of why human resources became in the first [00:22:30] place, not to necessarily be highly regulatory or to be protective of bad leadership, but to be that source of



humanness, that source of growth for people in their organizations. I see more and more leaders in HR who are going to demand that, who are going to select their suppliers based on that, who are going to select their tech solutions based on that. What are we going to do to take out the tedious tasks so that, be it, my recruiters, my learning and development folks can [00:23:00] really have more one-on-one, human-to-human connections with the employees in our workplace.

Meghan M. Biro: Can I get an amen?

Elena Valentine: Amen!

Meghan M. Biro: Thanks for stopping by.

Elena Valentine: Thanks so much, Meghan, for having me.

Meghan M. Biro: Rolling, rolling, rolling, keep the ... Okay, forget it. Hey, by the way. Let's keep the conversation rolling, shall we? Join us for our #WorkTrends Twitter chat. We are going to be on the Twitters with Elena Valentine [00:23:30] on Wednesday, July 10th, at 1:30 p.m. Eastern, 10:30 a.m. Pacific, or wherever you're hanging out around that globe. Join us. We're going to talk about the future of employee branding and video. If you'd like to get our Twitter chat questions in advance, sign up for our newsletter at TalentCulture.com.

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