

Meghan: Hey, how's work going? Where is your career going next? If you have no idea how to answer that question, stay tuned. We're talking to executive coach, Dethra Giles, about how to take control of your career.

Meghan: Welcome to the WorkTrends 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 hashtag #WorkTrends. I've run the TalentCulture website and community since 2010. We have seen a lot of changes about work in the past nine years. We have published ... Get this ... almost 3000 blog posts and for years there's one post that has consistently been the most popular.

Meghan: Can anybody guess what it is? It's not about AI. It's not about tech, and it's not about the gig economy. It's about how to change careers when you're in your 30s. Can you believe it? You know what that tells me? Even the most knowledgeable HR people among us feel a little confused when it comes to our own careers. So today, we're going to talk about career paths, how to get on the right path, how to change paths and learn about what you need to know to become successful for the long haul.

Meghan: Today's guest is Dethra Giles. She's an author and executive coach, and the CEO of the performance management firm, ExecuPrep. She's joining us today for a conversation about taking control of your career. Welcome to WorkTrends, Dethra.

Dethra: Well, thank you. Thank you. Happy to be here.

Meghan: I am so excited to talk to you today. First of all, can you tell us a little bit about your own career path and how you got to where you are today?

Dethra: So what's interesting about my career path is it really took off for me when I call what I had a breakdown. I actually talked about it in my first TEDx Talk. I realized that there were people out there who were actually happy in their career and I thought they were either crazy or on drugs, and I realized-

Meghan: Hey, you know what? You're not alone.

Dethra: Right. I realized exactly what you just said, I wasn't alone, and there was a way to navigate your career that I just didn't know about. And so I figured it out. I mastered it and I began to teach it, and that's how I ended up where I am today.

Meghan: Talk about special sauce. We want to find out all about this. There are droves and droves of people out there that are sitting in their desk at an office or maybe at a home office or some virtual coffee shop wondering the same thing. So if you're out there listening to us on the WorkTrends hashtag or wherever you are, we'd love to hear from you, too. I know this is top of mind for everybody. So Dethra, tell us a little bit more about where you're calling in from today and where you're from.

Dethra: I am calling in from Atlanta, Georgia. It's called Hotlanta for a reason, because we've been at about 90 plus degrees since the end of March. And actually, I just got back from Paris and London, and in London I was speaking at the largest recruiter festival in the world called Rec Fest, and I was talking about this very topic.

Meghan: Good for you. Look at you, world traveler. We love that.

Dethra: Absolutely.

Meghan: So Dethra, I want to hear about your book, *Employeepreneur: 10 Entrepreneurs Strategies to Manage Your Career Like a Business*. What was that inspirational moment when you said, "I have to write a book"?

Dethra: The inspirational moment was when I was working with a client. As you know from my business, we get to work with top executives and that can sometimes be costly. And one of my clients said, "Dethra, how do people get to you and get this knowledge that really can't afford to pay for a full on coaching engagement or their employee won't pay for it?" They said, "You need to write a book about this stuff," and I thought, "Who wants to do that? But I guess I will." And I did.

Meghan: Well-stated, Dethra. I think I've often said the same thing, like, "Really? This is going to be a year project."

Dethra: It is. But what was great about it is when you write something that's about your passion, it flows. And that's what I talk about in *Employeepreneur*, finding your passion and doing it. It makes life so much easier.

Meghan: How much right now are you doing travel, by the way? For those who were thinking about maybe going out and writing a book or becoming a public speaker like yourself, talk to us about that. What's that like?

Dethra: It's a lovely career. One of my passions is travel. I call myself a world citizen. And so I've designed this where I travel a great deal. It doesn't have to be that way. It's just my way.

Meghan: Okay, and how much is that? If you had a pie chart, how much are you on the airplane or at a hotel or an Airbnb?

Dethra: I tell people I actually live in Hartsfield Jackson airport. That's my true residence. Every place else is just a place I pay mortgage for. But I would say about right now 50% of my schedule is travel, and I'm looking to reduce that a little bit.

Meghan: Yeah, no, thanks for that. I know I've been having conversations and as many of you may know about me, I'm starting to do more speaking engagements as well, and it just really comes down to that question of how much time do I want to spend away from home? And that's a very real question I think we have to ask ourselves when we want to put

ourselves out there as a speaker. We'd love to hear from you using the hashtag #WorkTrends, who out there is making that leap to become a public speaker or a writer or an author, right? Because this is the reality of this career path.

Dethra: Also, especially when you have a family.

Meghan: Well, there you go. You're balancing, right?

Dethra: Yeah. It's a balancing act.

Meghan: Yeah. So I read somewhere that you see your job as helping people optimize performance and eliminate distractions. Don't we all want to do that? What are some of the distractions that are really holding people back?

Dethra: Our biggest distraction are our ourselves. It's the ideas that we grew up believing that are actually not true. You'd be amazed at how many executives I work with, top level executives, that won't apply for the job because what if I can't do it, when there is nothing in their history of career or work performance that says they're going to fail. I look at them and think, "You have absolutely no evidence to tell you that you won't do this job well, yet you've made up this idea in your head and it's presenting this huge obstacle for you." So the biggest obstacle we have in our lives, typically around our career, is our messed up way of thinking about ourselves.

Meghan: Amen. Can we get an alleluia, too? I mean, you know what I'm saying? You're right. Why do we do that? Why are we our own worst enemies when it comes to taking that leap?

Dethra: You know what? I tell people it's because many of us are guilty of first degree murder. We have killed that little kid in us who believed we could do anything. I remember being a kid and climbing to the top of a mango tree in Miami, Florida ... I'm originally from Miami, Florida ... and convincing myself, "You know what? I can jump out of this tree and be okay." As an adult, I look back and think, "That has to be the dumbest thing anyone could think." As a kid, not only did I think it, I did it and I was fine.

Meghan: There you go. Thank you for that. And let's not do that anymore. If you're out there, today is the day that you're going to turn that around and climb up whatever kind of tree you want to climb up, and let's stop holding ourselves back. And I'm speaking out loud for myself as well by the way, Dethra, because I've been there, and literally on a weekly basis, I'm asking myself these questions. And I bet you a lot of other people are too, if we're getting real, right?

Dethra: Absolutely. I did this thing called The Rejection Project where I had a group of people with me, and we just went out and did exposure, what I call exposure rejection therapy, where we just asked for things that we knew the answer would be no to just so we could get used to it, because we act like if someone tells us no, we're going to die. If I ask for the contract and they say no, I'm going to die. No. We have to start going out

there and putting ourselves out there and letting that kid who believed we could do and get anything actually survive.

Meghan: I love this saying. I don't have a problem with you being a want to be. I have a problem with you saying a want to be. What does this mean to you?

Dethra: So I remember growing up and it used to kill me to be called a wannabe. You want to be this, and to me it meant that you were inferior and that you lacked something. But what I realized is we all want to be something, and that's great to want to be, but if you stay a wannabe, that that's detrimental. That means you aren't achieving things. That means you aren't being successful. That means you aren't going after your goals. And I don't want you stuck in a place of dead ends. I want you going down a highway that leads to your destination. And so not staying a wannabe for me means going down that highway and taking the journey to your destination.

Meghan: Actually getting somewhere.

Dethra: Actually getting somewhere.

Meghan: Speaking of getting somewhere, let's talk about the elephant in the room. Let's talk about leadership for a minute, because a lot of our listeners are managing teams, and I think being a good manager is so hard because we really don't teach it. What are the ways we can all become better leaders and managers?

Dethra: You know what? I think we actually do teach it. I think we don't hold people accountable for being it. I get to go into organizations all the time. I work with the NSA, National Security Agency, Kaiser Permanente, and they bring us in to teach these lessons, and what I tell them is, "If you won't allow us to implement an accountability strategy, then we're not the company you want to work with," because people learn this stuff. We're not the first people to teach it. But the question is, why aren't people doing it? Our organization's creating an environment where managers are held accountable for living these things. We've learned these things since kindergarten. This isn't new stuff to us. We just are made to do it.

Meghan: What's the difference in your mind between a manager and, say, a C-level executive? And talk to us a little bit more about the kinds of companies and the sizes of the companies you're working with?.

Dethra: So I work with very large organizations all the way from, like I said, a Kaiser Permanente or the National Security Agency, to small businesses like a 4.0 Air, which is a small HVAC company in Miami, Florida. And we handle everything in between. And for me, the difference between that C-suite executive and a manager is the manager's focused on the task at hand. They are making sure if we're supposed to produce 500 widgets, when the day is over, we have 500 widgets. The C-suite professional is thinking, "10 years down the road, we have to be in existence. What does that take? Who do we need?

What are the resources required? How do we get 10 years from now from today?"
That's the C-suite thought. They're strategic. The manager's thinking tactical.

Meghan: I'm always thinking managers need more love and attention from us. Do you feel that way too? I feel like it's always the C-suite that's getting the coaching. Is that just my perception or is there some reality here?

Dethra: That is the horrible reality, and I see it daily. So I have a team of people, and typically, they are working with the training and going in and doing the training and do some of that as well. But I coach the top level. These are the CFOs, CEOs, COOs, and when I coach them, I am often majorly surprised at how we're discussing rudimentary topics, simple things like how do you talk to people. I mean, just very simple things, like being held accountable and integrity, because we promote people to their level of incompetence and we lead them there or we promote them higher until they become a problem.

Meghan: And again, it's the managers who are walking side by side with the employees half the time. Why are we leaving them out? And if there's a program that you would put together for, say, HR managers as an example, which is a lot of our audience here, or talent management professionals, what would that look like? And have you worked with these types of professionals? Talk to us a little bit more about that.

Dethra: Funny you mentioned that. That population is my heart. My background is HR. Prior to starting my company, ExecuPrep, I was the head of HR for a major university here in Atlanta, Georgia. So HR is my population. And when I was over HR for a large organization, I actually implemented more training for managers, training and coaching. Why? Because what happened was I found we were investing more money and those leaders that did not have the training or the management level than we would have had to invest had we done that training earlier.

Meghan: Interesting.

Dethra: Yeah. If we got them early, we didn't have to fix as many problems. I'm that crazy HR person that loves numbers. So I ran the numbers, and those managers that were trained early on, we got less discrimination complaints, less sexual harassment complaints, and less employee relations complaints, which typically ended up going to an external organization attorney, IE attorney, which means even if we won the case, we still had to waste money in litigating. If we trained them earlier, we saved that money.

Meghan: Nice. I like that. Hear that out there? Looking at your bottom line? We have solutions. You don't have to suffer. It's all about the bottom line. You don't have to suffer everybody. Okay, so Dethra, you are known for really pushing people to have hard conversations. What are some of the tough conversations we need to be all having right now?

- Dethra: We need to really be having tough conversations, and I talked about this in my TEDx Talk, about race, religion and politics. It's funny to me because one of my degrees, I have a master's in conflict management, and so I'm very comfortable with addressing tough topics, but we've always been taught it's just not polite to discuss these topics in the workplace.
- Meghan: It's ridiculous. I mean really, we're not helping ourselves here.
- Dethra: Not at all. And it's crazy to me because every major organization, even smaller organizations, have a diversity initiative. So let me get this right. You have an initiative to bring in more diverse people. You've invested dollars, real bottom line dollars in this, but you don't want us to talk about it? That is the most backwards things ever.
- Meghan: And when we talk about it, it feels better. I mean, I always like to say communication is love, even the hard conversations, even the most transparent tough places to be. You got to have these conversations. It's okay to be uncomfortable.
- Dethra: Exactly. And then the hard thing about it is what we don't realize is when we don't have these conversations, we're making judgments and taking action based on what we think, which could be totally wrong. And most oftentimes it is. We're ill-informed.
- Meghan: We're ill-informed. And not having the conversation is only going to make it worse. I mean, that stuff bubbles, it may not bubble in 24 hours. It's going to bubble two months later. So just deal with it. Deal with it upfront. I mean, if more of us were like that and just said what was on our mind in a way that's respectful and constructive, I don't think we'd be having the kind of struggles we have right now with all this unhappiness in the workplace, because it's still with us. The engagement crisis continues. We talk. We give a lot of lip service to transparency, but we got to get real and we got to figure out a way to get there that's transformative for people.
- Dethra: You know, the reality is, we don't want to address our incompetence and our fear. And we are incompetent when it comes to handling tough conversations. I mean, you see it even outside of race, religion and politics. How many managers do we have or leaders do we have that keep an employee on for years that are underperforming because they don't want to sit down and have a conversation and say, "Hey, you have a job to do. Here is what it is. If you don't do it, there are consequences"?
- Meghan: Yeah, that's still going on.
- Dethra: It's still going on. So we don't teach people how to have real conversations and civil discourse. We don't know how to disagree and still be agreeable when it's over.
- Meghan: We need some help, Dethra. We got a ways to go here, but I'm glad we're talking about it, right?

Dethra: Right, right.

Meghan: Okay, Dethra. On this show, we always like to have a little crystal ball time. As you look ahead at the next, say, 5 or 10 years, I know to all of you out there that might feel like ions, what's coming next and how can we prepare?

Dethra: You know what I think is coming next? I think an awakening for what talent really looks like is coming. I saw you once talked about the gig economy and that is really our future. But what I think is going to surprise people is we're going to find people that we thought were leaving the workforce becoming an integral part of this gig economy. Retirement is not what it used to be and so we have 65 year olds who are full of vitality, full of knowledge, who are retiring and thinking, "How many times can I travel the world? I don't want to keep my grandkids. I need to do something," and we're going to start seeing this population which was once discriminated against because of their age, we're now going to start seeing that we might want to rely on these people as a part of this gig economy because they don't want to be full-time employees. They still have a lot of knowledge and time to give.

Meghan: Makes a lot of sense. Any other thoughts on the future?

Dethra: I think in the future, if we let the kids do what they do, I think they're going to get this whole thing right with human relations. I look at my children. They are not bothered by the same things that my generation was bothered by. And if we don't douse them out and we let them be who they are and don't help them kill the children in them, I think they'll fix this thing.

Meghan: Nice. Well listen, thanks for stopping by, Dethra.

Dethra: It was a pleasure. It was a pleasure and an honor to be here.

Meghan: Let's keep the conversation moving. Join us for our WorkTrends Twitter chat. We are going to be there on the Twitters with Dethra Giles on Wednesday, July 31st at 1:30 PM Eastern, 10:30 AM Pacific. And you know wherever you are around the globe. I hear from you often. Join us to talk about how you think about your own career path, and if you'd like to get our Twitter chat questions in advance, head on over to TalentCulture.com and sign up for our newsletter.

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