

- Meghan M. Biro: On this week's episode of WorkTrends, we're talking about social media, and personal branding, and what that means for employers, with author Cynthia Johnson.
- Meghan M. Biro: Welcome to the WorkTrends podcast from TalentCulture. I'm your host, Meghan M. Biro.
- Meghan M. Biro: Every week, we interview interesting people who are reimagining work. Join us on Twitter every [00:00:30] Wednesday, 1:30 PM Eastern, using the #worktrends.
- Meghan M. Biro: I was just sitting in my coworking space, and for those of you at home who are tuning in and know my office situation, I actually have a private office now, because I love gabbing with people so much, that I was like, "Okay, coworking is great, but we need some boundaries here."
- Meghan M. Biro: It's working out really well for me, for those who have checked in and asked, and this is where I'm spending most of my days. I mean, I travel a lot too, as you know, but I was thinking about how our [00:01:00] physical workspace affects how we feel about work. Then I came across this Harvard Business Review article, How Coworking Spaces Affect Employees' Professional Identities.
- Meghan M. Biro: The article argues that as where we work changes, our sense of professional identity is changing too. My takeaway is that coworking spaces give some members a sense of professionalism and credibility that traditional remote working does not. And I can definitely see that in play. But here's something else that's surprising to [00:01:30] me/
- Meghan M. Biro: Workers with company subsidized memberships feel that their employers need to take their needs seriously, regardless of where they're located. Your employees' physical space is something to think about, as we dive deeper into the future of work, where more and more of us are working remotely, right? Now, let's keep talking about employer brand and our personal brands and how those two things overlap with today's guest.
- Meghan M. Biro: Cynthia Johnson [00:02:00] is the founder and CEO of the marketing firm Bell + Ivy, and the author of the new book Platform: The Art and Science of Personal Branding. Welcome to WorkTrends, Cynthia.
- Cynthia Johnson: Thank you so much. It's great to be here.
- Meghan M. Biro: I am so excited to have you here. So your new book is called Platform, which I think is just a great name, by the way. Very 2019, shall we say? Tell us what it's all about.
- Cynthia Johnson: Platform is [00:02:30] what the subtitle says. It's about personal branding. The concept obviously is not new, but the audience is slightly different. So the book
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was written for people who traditionally weren't being sought after, or written for, which are employees. People who have real jobs, who are real experts, who are wondering why they can't make big leaps in their career. Why some people seem to be moving faster, or getting a lot of attention, as an expert in generalized fields [00:03:00] when they're more of an expert.

Cynthia Johnson: A lot of it has to do with just not curating and piecing together their resume online in a way that is benefiting them, and sometimes not doing anything, and it's really hurting them. So the book dives into a lot of why even the average person needs to do this. And then on top of that, some of the best practices of how to do it, and where to find extra resources.

Meghan M. Biro: All right, Cynthia. So you and I know each other, and I am actually surprised to hear you [00:03:30] saying the word resume. Right? But it's true, like, in the resume's becoming more just about you, maybe looking at you in a fuller picture, right?

Cynthia Johnson: Right. I mean, it's really just the idea of the resume is, "Here's everything that I need you to know about me so that you feel safe in making a decision." It allows me to get to the next step. So we used to write it all down, pick out our references.

Cynthia Johnson: We knew ahead of time that these people are going to talk about us. We knew ahead of time [00:04:00] what you were going to see, when you looked at the information, and now, we don't know that. In fact, you can't even get an interview or a phone call, or even a date online, without someone searching for you.

Meghan M. Biro: I like how you just dropped in, "even a date."

Cynthia Johnson: Yeah, that's true.

Meghan M. Biro: Right?

Cynthia Johnson: Right, yeah.

Meghan M. Biro: It's real, though. I mean, this is happening. I have to ask you, by the way, where are you today? Because you're all over the place, girlfriend.

Cynthia Johnson: I'm actually home in Los Angeles today. It's great.

Meghan M. Biro: That's excellent. Well, LA [00:04:30] is quite a place to have this discussion, right? In LA, I feel like everybody has a "platform." So what does it actually mean to have a platform, or give somebody else a platform?

Cynthia Johnson: Yeah, so, to have a platform, it's a space to be heard, right? It's a space where you control the conversation, and so, when you look at it from a personal branding perspective, if you haven't put much thought into being [00:05:00] online, or what it looks like, or what information's out there by you, just the very basic level, then your platform, which still exists, is not really your voice, it's like a jumbled version of yourself.

Cynthia Johnson: Whereas, if you build the platform yourself, then you know where you're standing on. You know who, what people are going to hear, when they look for you. Then, once you have that, and now, you get to figure out what to do with it, and how to use it. And ignoring that it exists [00:05:30] is, in my opinion, almost like ignoring a phone, or any other piece of technology.

Cynthia Johnson: It's a communication tool that is necessary today, and when you build one for someone else, that's where that sort of reference idea comes from. It's the same concept. It's building someone else up, partnering with someone else, being an advocate for someone, but everything and everyone that you've connected with, whether it's a connection on LinkedIn, or an article or a podcast interview, or [00:06:00] a company worked for, all of those pieces connect online.

Cynthia Johnson: And so, they all represent who you are, and you are connected to other stories. It sounds complex, but it's really just basic human communication skill, right? It's, who's you show up to the party with matters. It's the same thing with putting online. You're helping to build someone's platform by being connected to it at all.

Meghan M. Biro: What's the deal with all these reality stars running companies, by the way? And too much of the same people telling [00:06:30] stories? What's your POV on that?

Cynthia Johnson: Drives me crazy. I really view it as the problem being, and I call it being pridefully humble, is that we've encouraged people to put their heads down and do their jobs, and then the people that are having access to really be heard are the first that come to our mind, right?

Cynthia Johnson: For instance, if you don't know much about science, which, I don't, on a, at a scientific level, anyway. Then Bill Nye the Science Guy is pretty easily the first person [00:07:00] that you think of. Or Elon Musk is the first person you think of. Which, a scientist is going to tell you, "Well, that's ridiculous, there's so many different types of science."

Cynthia Johnson: That's the problem that I think we are, we're really faced with, is people don't know what they don't know, and if we don't start having some of these experts at least having an existence online, or a presence on a problem that really boosts their voices a little bit more, then we're going to get a lot of generalized information.

Meghan M. Biro: [00:07:30] Which, that's where we are, especially with the Kardashians, right? I don't know about anybody out there in WorkTrends, we want to hear from you, but is anyone else tired of them? I am. I'll just throw my hat in the ring, like, "I am done." To me, it's just way, way too much at this point, very like, two, three years ago. I'm actually amazed it continues, right? And you're right there in it, in LA. You see it all the time.

Cynthia Johnson: You know, when you talk about building the Kardashians, what they've been able to do is, they do things that are [00:08:00] so out of character, that if they're interested again... Kim Kardashian wants to go, or is going to law school. It's this whole, right, big move for her. Because now, she's shifting the conversation. The things that they do are very strategic.

Meghan M. Biro: Oh, I know.

Cynthia Johnson: So-

Meghan M. Biro: Oh, I know. Believe me.

Cynthia Johnson: [crosstalk 00:08:19], yeah.

Meghan M. Biro: No. Yeah, they're very strategic, but I feel like the audience not, is not so much. Like the audience is under some sort of a spell, where it's like, "Don't you see through some of this?" To me, it's way too strategic, [00:08:30] that's my point.

Cynthia Johnson: Yes. Well, and sometimes, I think people do see through to it, but at the end of the day, they're just like, "Oh, I'm tired." You know what I mean? I think, because-

Meghan M. Biro: Yeah. "Yeah, I'm just going to sort through these stories," and it's kind of interesting, you know. But to your point, I think there's too many of the same people telling their stories in this way. So good, good info here.

Meghan M. Biro: So, listen, you and I were reminiscing before this interview about the early days of social media at work. When most managers were trying to block people from doing so, right? I mean, boy has [00:09:00] that conversation changed. So tell me, how do you think the way we use social media for work has changed?

Cynthia Johnson: Well, yeah, so actually, I worked in the platform. [inaudible 00:09:10] of a live streaming company, back when live streaming was not cool. It was one of my first jobs, and even they didn't want you on social media, and our entire job was social media. It was just a different mindset. It was a distraction, it was... I remember people telling you to get off your phone. I don't know if you ever had that experience. That doesn't happen anymore.

Meghan M. Biro: Yeah, just like, get my off phone, where am I [00:09:30] going to go?

Cynthia Johnson: Yeah.

Meghan M. Biro: There's nowhere to go.

Cynthia Johnson: But what happened is that everything became a marketing channel, and everything became marketing, and even, Larry Page, he did this interview eight years ago, where he said, "The Internet will be everywhere. It will be almost everywhere. It will be everything, and we won't even notice that's what it is."

Cynthia Johnson: That's exactly kind of what's happening, and so, companies are faced with two options. They either try to stop the use of it, [00:10:00] and they will lose the ability to control it, and they lose the ability to really get those extra, I guess, influencers. There's a couple of facts where they say, if your employee shares information about you online, there's a nearly 600% increase in engagement, than if an influencer would have. So they're losing out on those marketing dollars.

Cynthia Johnson: The other option is to embrace it, and create what someone that I spoke with, at Walmart, actually, they called it an intrapreneur. [00:10:30] Where these people become advocates, because you've given them autonomy, freedom to... and not only that, but also guidelines on how to use these tools in a safe way.

Cynthia Johnson: And so, they're benefiting, and too, particularly because of this employee advocacy, on one hand, and you have marketing dollars being saved on the other, because they're doing so much of the work for you, especially if you have a large company like, say, a Walmart or Starbucks. And so, those are the really two options. And if you choose to limit the use of it, people get upset, one, and two, you [00:11:00] really have no control over the conversation online, and that's a whole other issue, which we see on Glassdoor a lot.

Meghan M. Biro: Yeah, I mean, what I'm hearing from you is, there's really no good way to block social media, at this point. And the other thing that I'm experiencing, Cynthia, is all these HR tech platforms or technology, specifically, that says, "Hey, we'll have our internal social media scene, where people can just go in there and engage."

Meghan M. Biro: But, yeah, it's been a tough sell for a lot of people, because [00:11:30] we want to use things that feel natural, and sometimes, going into another... I'll say, platform, or an application, is probably a better word for it, feels not so natural.

Cynthia Johnson: Well, it feels like, it feels forced. Because it is. And all people want is to be trusted, to have autonomy, to be able to make decisions. And, to be honest, when you're forcing people to use these other additional platforms, they're not going to be using them the way that they're using other social media. And they're not going to be not using social media.

Cynthia Johnson: Now you've just reduced [00:12:00] their work hours, because they're going to be feeling like they have to go in, and spend time on this additional place, and on top of it, you should trust the people you hire. That's why you hired them, so doing your due diligence, know who you hired, and just let them be them, and deal with the problems as they come up. Stop prevent them before they happen.

Meghan M. Biro: Okay, so I'm really curious, because you and I share something in common. We've been talking and writing and speaking about personal branding, probably since it started getting bantered around [00:12:30] years and years ago, right? What does that mean to you know? How have things changed around that term?

Cynthia Johnson: It's an unfortunate that it's personal branding, because it's really just, as you said before, when you talk about the resume, it is, it's an evolution of your resume. That's really what it is. It's a communication credit. It's your credit. Whereas, people, like you say, brands want to be people. They want to get in your head, and in your life, and they want to sell things to you that way. And so, they get really creative.

Cynthia Johnson: They have faces of brands, and they [00:13:00] put your name on Coke cans, and they do all of these things, to make themselves more human. Whereas humans are already human, so the branding part is pretty much done.

Meghan M. Biro: Just show up!

Cynthia Johnson: Just this [crosstalk 00:13:14].

Meghan M. Biro: Just wake up.

Cynthia Johnson: Yes. Yes, exactly, and not, it seems as if you look at it, as if it were a credit score. Don't be afraid of it, just understand what it is, and do your best to keep it at a place where it benefits you.

Meghan M. Biro: Okay, here's another one. What does it mean to be a thought [00:13:30] leader? What kinds of reactions do you hear from people when you use that word?

Cynthia Johnson: Yeah, so thought leaders are, I think, a little bit more of a traditional way of explaining some of these influencers, right? So they are people that have a specific, they live in a specific world, they know a specific thing. Bill Nye would be, the Science Guy, is a thought leader.

Cynthia Johnson: He's not an expert in everything science, but he is a thought leader, because he does have access to more science than most people. His thoughts on [00:14:00] it do matter, and you trust, or we trust, that not only will he produce content that is knowledgeable and correct, but that he will have opinions on other types

of science. And so, instead of having to figure out where to go, it's almost like a publisher. We can just go to him.

Cynthia Johnson: That's a thought leader, someone who understands the space completely, even though they're not an expert in every element of it.

Meghan M. Biro: Okay, Cynthia, so you told me that you've been talking to a lot of employers about personal branding. What advice do you give [00:14:30] them about their employees in building their brands online?

Cynthia Johnson: I tell them first and foremost is, "Give guidelines, not rules." So explain the limitations, and then let everything else be what it's going to be.

Cynthia Johnson: Because, one is, if people are afraid to use it, and this happens, it's like, generational gaps, right? So you have the older generation, who's afraid to use it, because it was so forcefully pushed away. Then you have this younger generation who has no idea how to use it, even though they're [00:15:00] considered the experts. But they don't know how to use it in a way that's appropriate all the time.

Cynthia Johnson: And so, creating guidelines and encouraging people to do things that are in a positive way, and otherwise, just kind of letting go of it, is what's valuable. Explaining how to represent the brand, and what is acceptable or not acceptable, but at the end of the day, you can't, cannot stop it. And if you aren't giving resources or tools or the guidelines on how to do it, well, then, that's when you're going to absolutely lose control.

Cynthia Johnson: [00:15:30] The other thing is to look for people that other people are really invested in, because there are influencers within your organization. They already exist. They're somewhere. A lot of people in your company follow them.

Cynthia Johnson: Those people can be really amazing resources and advocates, and really have some amazing feedback about who your employees are, and what they care about, if you take the time to look for them. And I promise you, if you have a company of over 150 people, as they say, that's, I think, [00:16:00] a benchmark. Those people exist, and I've met some of them myself, just looking for the influencers at those companies.

Meghan M. Biro: All right. Speaking of advocate, I'm playing devil's advocate with you. What about the managers who say, "Why would I want to help my employees build their brand online? If they do it, they're just leaving. It's just going to happen." What do you say to these people?

Cynthia Johnson: I say to those people that, if you that is what you believe, truly, and that is how you feel, in an honest way, [00:16:30] then I would say, your employees should leave now. Because if you're not investing in your employees, if you're not

investing in their growth, then you're already failing. So they should move on, quickly, before they fall behind.

Meghan M. Biro: I love it, just, let's cut to the chase, everyone. You hear that? If you're out there listening, we want to hear from you. Weigh in with WorkTrends, because I think you're right. Let's stop playing games with all this. It is black and white, actually. Just leave.

Cynthia Johnson: It is. There are options. There are other [00:17:00] companies to work for, and in any sense, it's important that a company care enough to understand what is happening now, what their employees are going to need to get another job, if something happens in the company, or they leave. If you're not allowing them to be online, this is a huge problem.

Cynthia Johnson: There is layoffs, and now, you have someone who's been in the same career 30 years, is not, does not exist online, and cannot find a job. Because they don't exist.

Meghan M. Biro: This is actually happening, so you're absolutely right. I'm seeing [00:17:30] this unfold more and more, where it's like, you've become invisible, and that's scary.

Meghan M. Biro: That's a really scary place to be, especially if you're looking for a job. Or you're a career seeker. So, listen, if somebody is interested in working on their personal brand, but they feel so busy... I know that's the, that's what I hear from people, "I'm just busy. I'm already doing my every day job." What's your best advice to them?

Cynthia Johnson: Start small. Search yourself, figure out what needs to get, needs to be removed. Because I know you're busy, but go into [00:18:00] your phone, go into Settings, and look at how much screen time you spend on your time. I bet you, it's easily over five hours, easily. For anyone.

Cynthia Johnson: If you can just take half an hour of those five hours that you spend, doing whatever you're doing on your phone, we all do lots of different things, and just use it to clean up, right? So take down old photos that shouldn't be there. Put a nice photo up, put your job title somewhere, just those small steps.

Cynthia Johnson: Then, when you get to a place [00:18:30] where you feel like, "Oh, man, if people are looking for me, this is a really great amount of information for them to find," right? Consider it, like you said, updating your resume. And then, if you're really wanting to expand upon that, pick one place, and become really good at it with this small amount of time.

Cynthia Johnson: Over time, with consistency and learning, you'll see benefits from being in, whether it's just LinkedIn, or it's just Instagram, whichever you're more comfortable with. But if you don't, at the very least, set it up and check in



periodically, to make sure [00:19:00] that it's, people are still finding the best version of you that is out there, and put your best foot forward.

Cynthia Johnson: Yeah, I know, the greatest way to prove that people have time is to definitely look at how much time they have.

Meghan M. Biro: I love it. Cynthia Johnson, happy to have you here today, my friend. And I hope to come visit you in LA some time soon.

Cynthia Johnson: Oh, that'd be great. I'd love to have you.

Meghan M. Biro: Let's keep the conversation moving. [00:19:30] Join us for our WorkTrends Twitter chat. We are going to be on the Twitters with Cynthia Johnson, Wednesday, July 24th, at 1:30 p.m. Eastern, 10:30 a.m. Pacific.

Meghan M. Biro: Join us to talk about social media. Yes, I'm using these two words together, personal branding, and how it's all changing.

Meghan M. Biro: If you'd like to get our Twitter chat questions in advance, sign up for newsletter at [talentculture.com](http://talentculture.com).

Meghan M. Biro: [00:20:00] Thanks for listening to WorkTrends from TalentCulture. Join us every Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. Eastern, for a live Twitter chat with our podcast guest.

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