

Meghan M Biro: Today's episode is supported by HR Tech Connect. HR Tech Connect Summit is an exclusive chance to connect with other HR leaders and learn about how tech investments can improve every part of the employee journey from recruitment to productivity to wellness and, bonus round, I'm actually going to be their IRL, so find out more about how you can attend as a fully hosted guest. Inquire at hrtechconnectsummit.com.

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 P.M. Eastern, using the [#worktrends](#). We're talking today about a common topic on work trends that always needs more air time. Diversity and inclusion. I spent some time today looking at the Inclusion Index from Diversity Best Practices. Have you seen this?

Meghan M Biro: Diversity Best Practices is a division of the magazine Working Mother, and every year they create an index of the top companies building diverse and inclusive workplaces. I scrolled on through, right? I'm looking at all these big name brand logos that made the list, but I was really hoping for ideas. What do these companies do so well for their people? Here's one take-away from their 2019 index.

Meghan M Biro: Leading organizations have formal mentoring and sponsorship programs. This is so important, I think. We can't leave mentorship to chance. If you want to support the next generation, I think you really need to be intentional about showing them how to succeed. Here's another thing these top companies do. They require diversity in their executive succession planning. Yes. Require. That means they intentionally set up boardrooms that honor diversity. I thought that was pretty powerful stuff. And now, let's turn this over to my guests today.

Meghan M Biro: Today I'm excited to be joined by two guests who have spent a lot of time thinking about culture. Damon Klotz is work culture evangelist at Culture Amp, and we're also joined by Steven Huang, head of diversity and inclusion at Culture Amp. Welcome to Work Trends.

Steven Huang: Thank you. Good to be here.

Damon Klotz: Yeah, thanks for having us.

Meghan M Biro: Steven, let's start with you. I'm dying to know where you are today around the globe because you know we're all working everywhere, right?

Steven Huang: Indeed. I am in sunny San Francisco. It's actually sunny today, so I'm pretty pleased with that.

Meghan M Biro: And Damon, what about you?

Damon Klotz: So my accent would beg to differ, but I am also actually based in San Francisco. I've been living the United States for the past four years, but I'm originally from Australia.

Meghan M Biro: Nice. And you're used to tons of sunshine.

Damon Klotz: I am. So the few days I get it here, it's a nice reminder of home.

Meghan M Biro: Good for you. Well, Steven, you have spent your career studying people at work. You and I have that in common, right? We kind of geek out on culture and talent, right? Why does workplace culture interest you so much?

Steven Huang: Well, my current career is studying workplace culture through the lens of diversity and inclusion today. A very topical product, but like many D&I leaders, my career path actually didn't start there. I didn't even know diversity and inclusion was a career, and some people don't even think of it as a career today. Many D&I leaders start by becoming experts in a different field like engineering or marketing, but then they're drawn to this work of diversity and inclusion. So if you're listening and there's been a whisper in the back of your head that you should be doing D&I work, please listen to it because we need you.

Steven Huang: Meghan, I started my career as a life insurance actuary. My job was to calculate the likelihood of death. Not a very fun career, but I realized we can apply the same statistics to model the likelihood of a person leaving a company, so from there I went into studying workplace culture. What I'm finding is that the most effective way to create a successful business is to optimize your workplace culture in the same way that you would optimize your other business metrics, and on my first day of Culture Amp, I met Damon, and he's been on his journey as well.

Meghan M Biro: Journey's are interesting, huh, Damon?

Damon Klotz: Yeah. Looking back at my career, it's a lot easier to kind of connect the dots and go, it makes a lot of sense that I'm doing what I'm doing now. But at the time it was a lot of leaps of faith and really trusting my gut and my intuition that's actually led me to what I'm doing here today.

Meghan M Biro: How long have each of you been at Culture Amp?

Steven Huang: We started nearly the same day about four and a half years ago. Damon, I think, were you ahead of me or behind me? I can't remember.

Damon Klotz: It was one of those blurry moments where we all kind of joined straight after Culture Amp raised a Series A, and we all thought we were unique butterflies. We were all going to be there to be their next brand-new hire. And then what you realize when you join a startup is they're having conversations with a lot of

people because they're getting ready to scale. So we joined right after the sort of the bootstrapping years.

Damon Klotz: Culture Amp grew to about 15 employees while bootstrapped, and then Steven joined after some time at Facebook and Square. I was doing digital strategy in HR consulting work in Australia for some big private healthcare companies, as well as a lot of my own work. We were both excited about the idea of joining a HR tech startup and really amplifying what people can be capable of being at work. We've both held many different roles here, but we both found ourselves in some very interesting roles right now that, you know, potentially can impact a lot of people.

Meghan M Biro: I can only imagine. And by the way, kudos.

Steven Huang: Interesting roles?

Meghan M Biro: Yeah, right?

Steven Huang: Interesting roles or interesting times, I would say.

Meghan M Biro: Very true. And I would say kudos to each of you for still being friends, because that doesn't always happen four-plus years later, right? At a startup?

Steven Huang: I would say that's true. You know, Culture Amp folks, we stay in touch. I mean some of my friends are like, you're hanging out with your coworkers on the weekend again. And I'm like, yeah.

Meghan M Biro: Yeah, we're actually having fun. Okay Damon, it's your turn. So your job title is "Work Culture Evangelist," for all of you out there ready to play some buzzword bingo with us on job titles. Can you break this down for us? What does that mean exactly?

Damon Klotz: Yeah, so it's definitely not as religious as it might sound. You could say evangelist or futurist or strategist. There's all these different titles out there to describe different types of work. But ultimately, when I think about my career, I've really spent the last 10 years focusing on company culture, trying to create a more innovative HR practice through inspiring stories, through consulting arrangements, through speaking.

Damon Klotz: This has taken me all around the world. I started off in Australia, but then before I knew what I was working in London and Europe and then, now, out in the US but the red thread throughout my time has been storytelling, mainly through presentations or podcasts or opportunities like this to help show people that there's a different way to think, not only about the work that we're doing in the human resource space, but just around what's actually possible in the people and culture space, which ultimately impacts every employee.

Damon Klotz: So I have spent a lot of my time at Culture Amp really building up our community and doing a lot of marketing and go-to-market work, and now we're at this really beautiful place where we're over 400 people. We have thousands of customers. Someone really needs to tell that story about what's actually possible when it comes to people and culture, so role crafting and doing work that is important to you is something that's really important to Culture Amp.

Damon Klotz: I've found myself in this role really down to a conversation with our CEO, Didier Elzinga, and my manager, Brad Lande-Shannon, who runs our marketing practice. They kind of said, how often do you get to spend time in your zone of genius, which is presenting to an audience or speaking, and I found that it wasn't as much time as I wanted, and they said, well what would it look like for you to spend a lot more time doing that? So now I get a chance to ask questions, tell stories, strategize about the future of work and the role that people, companies and technology will play in it. And later this year, I'll also be hosting the Culture First podcast, which I'm really excited about as well.

Meghan M Biro: Cool.

Damon Klotz: So yeah, I'll be spending less time as a guest on podcast and more times asking questions, which is a nice change.

Meghan M Biro: How has what you've been telling stories about changed over the last four years, number one question. Number two question, does it vary by geography?

Speaker 5: Yeah, I think a lot of things vary by geography, and then sometimes, through my travels, I've also seen that it's actually not that different in that people are struggling with similar things or trying to work on similar things.

Speaker 5: Throughout my time I actually ran a series of events called People Geek-ups for our community, and for the year of 2016 I spent most of it on the road traveling throughout Europe, the US, Asia. What I realized is that people are still trying to truly understand how to connect culture to business results, how to have a conversation at the board level around why they should be actually putting culture first, as well as being able to kind of step back from the day-to-day work of HR and actually give themselves and their employees some head space to think about is how we're currently doing things serving us, and is there a greater potential that we can actually be getting out of our employees and our teams?

Speaker 5: These are questions that people will be sitting with for a long time, and I think that these are questions that people should be sitting with always because a lot of the work that we're trying to do when it comes to company culture is foundational. But the other piece of it is that it's alive and it's always changing, so I think what I'm sort of fascinated about is I can tell a story that I've been telling for eight years, and I'll still find someone who's hearing it for the first time. Other times I'm hearing something for the very first time today and I'm like, wow, okay, so how do we actually break this down into a way that's

extractable for a company regardless of their size or location? So, for me, I really feel like I'm both at the beginning of this work, as well as been doing it for a long time.

Meghan M Biro: I feel that because I often wake up feeling the exact same way. I've been doing this for too many years to even remember at this point, and there's still something interesting about talent and culture and how much things are changing and they continue to. So I want to talk today about building a more diverse and inclusive culture. That's top of mind for our audience here, and it's something you both know a whole lot about. So what do you want our listeners to know about starting their D&I journey?

Steven Huang: A lot of people, particularly leaders, are scared to start their D&I journey, and I can completely understand why. It is a really difficult topic and unfortunately I can't comfort you and tell you that it's going to be easy or simple. It's going to be hard, but the most important thing is that you really start your journey as soon as possible.

Steven Huang: Meghan, I don't know if you know this, but 2019 is the first year in American history that more than 50% of the children born in the US will not be white, which is fascinating. Today we think about black, Asian, [Latinx] as a collective minority group in the United States. But when these children that are born today reach working age, the US will be a majority-minority country. So, which is sometime between 2041 to 2046, depending on immigration pattern. The better and quicker that we can understand diversity and inclusion, the better our competitive advantages will be in the future.

Steven Huang: A perfect example of this is Nike. If you recall, Nike got a lot of flack for throwing their support behind Colin Kaepernick. It was seen as a very political move-to-make, but their marketing team told me that they are selling to the next 30 years of customers, not the past 30 years of customers, which was very telling.

Meghan M Biro: And not surprising. When we look at the data, I've been preparing for this for the last decade, watching these numbers, when you talk about diversity and the future of work and the numbers are staggering. I love the fact that you're saying start it today. Don't wait.

Steven Huang: Yeah. And it's hard. It requires brave conversations. But if you talk to any Gen people entering the workforce today, they're kind of demanding their leaders to create inclusive environments.

Meghan M Biro: No question about it. Damon, what are you thinking?

Damon Klotz: Yeah, well, I've also been on a very enlightening education experience when it comes to learning more and more about this subject. Growing up in Australia, I think one of the reasons why I kept moving to different parts of the world is I

wanted to keep differing my worldview. It's a beautiful country, but very far away from, basically, everything.

Meghan M Biro: Yeah, I was just going to say just about everything.

Damon Klotz: Just about everything. So, New Zealand and Antarctica, so my lived experience was very different growing up there, and moving out to the US, and especially doing the work that we do with Culture Amp and getting to spend time with people like Steven.

Damon Klotz: I've, I've just learned so much, and I think one of the core topics that has really opened my eyes and makes me see the world different is the idea of intersectionality, which is sort of thinking about the effects of multiple forms of discrimination and how they combine and overlap. So rather than just saying what's an initiative or strategy that we can do that's just going to help women in the workplace, it's like who are the groups within the group that you can actually help with, and being really, I guess tactical and laser focused around how you can actually improve the employee experience for all the different groups that are made up within your organization.

Damon Klotz: I think when I analyze the topics that we've been speaking about at conferences for a while, inclusion first and then you know, not just thinking about diversity as sort of being one that is now becoming very popular in common at a range of conferences, but intersectionality is another term and another piece of the puzzle here that I think is really important.

Damon Klotz: So, for me, when I think about what can I do from my position and from what I have access to, I'm thinking about who are the groups within the group that I can actually help? And just being incredibly conscious of, not only my privilege, but also just the access that I have and the position of power that I find myself in. When I think about the impact that we can have on company culture and especially when it comes to topics like diversity and inclusion, we can really tackle this from three different ways.

Damon Klotz: You can tackle it at the individual level, at the team level and at the organizational level. I use this story all the time and I need to come up with a better one but when I always think about who am I as an individual to actually be the change, I always go back to the African proverb, which is if you think you're too small to have an impact on the world, spend a night with a mosquito. We can actually be that, and whether you call it a mosquito or you could call it a firefly, we can be that glimmer of hope and change if we are conscious. So for me, I'm just a lot more conscious about these subjects and I'm a better person because of it, both inside of companies as well as just as an individual who's trying to have a positive impact on the world.

Meghan M Biro: Are you suggesting that we all start at the individual level first, or not necessarily?

Damon Klotz: I would only want to personally align myself with a company that is actually putting things in place at the organizational level when it comes to how they actually want to put culture first and thinking about diversity and inclusion because I think the system and the environment that we find ourselves in is incredibly critical. I will then think about the team and what role can I play as the manager of a team, or is it an individual who's going either stand up for what they believe in or not let certain behaviors take place. And then, thirdly, what can I do as an individual that actually helps create the inclusive culture that I want, and that is conscious of everything that's happening around them. So ultimately they should be supporting each other, but definitely an individual can have a big impact on it.

Meghan M Biro: So you both had mentioned that it's kind of popular to be talking about diversity and inclusion. A lot of companies that talk about diversity are these big Silicon Valley fancy tech companies, but what about the smaller folks? What about smaller companies and completely different environments and cultures? Like say, oh, I don't know, I'll just throw a dart out there onto my map here and say the Midwest, what's your advice for them?

Steven Huang: That's a great question, and I love getting out of my headset bubble.

Meghan M Biro: Yeah, I was just going to say... I was just going to go there. You went there.

Steven Huang: If you're only doing D&I work in a liberal bubble, you're not doing it right. You really have to... I've learned so much in my trips to Idaho and Arkansas and Minneapolis, and the analogy that I like to think about is don't compare yourself to others.

Steven Huang: Like, social media is a big problem for me. That's why I'm not on Twitter. I don't like comparing myself to random strangers on the internet. Like, when I'm on Instagram, I'm like, oh, I wish I got to travel those places or I wish I looked like that. And even when I'm on LinkedIn, I'm like, oh, I wish I could have that person's career trajectory. What I'm trying to say is, you know, don't compare yourself to strangers, and that same advice goes for, let's say, a small company in the Midwest. Don't compare yourself to anybody else but you. Just be the best version of yourself.

Steven Huang: One of the tools that we build at Culture Amp is a diversity and inclusion survey. It gives all of your employees a chance to answer questions about how they're feeling about the state of D&I in your organization, and then it equips you with actions to improve. It's been used by hundreds of companies, so we started giving it away for free, actually. If you want to understand diversity, really look inwards, I mean, if you're comparing yourself to New York, like, oh wow, this company has, you know, 20% people of color. You might not even have that level of racial diversity in the communities that you serve, so it's not really a fair comparison.

Meghan M Biro: True that. I like it. It's all about getting out of the bubble. Everyone, you hear that? Damon, do you have anything to add?

Damon Klotz: Yeah, I think one of the points that Steven mentioned that we actually talk about a lot both in the D&I space, but as well as just like looking at your own employee feedback and measuring your people and culture is the idea of benchmarks are great, but you should also be bench pressing against what you actually, where you're at and where you sort of want to get to. We need a better analogy than weights, but I think, for now, a lot of people can get really caught up in the idea of, well, compared to the benchmark, here's where we're at and we haven't done enough work versus actually what are the changes you can make inside of your company that are actually going to improve the experience that you're giving to your employees every single day?

Damon Klotz: So benchmarks are great, but when we think about what does a company in the Midwest look like, then make sure that you're actually contextualizing it for the world that you operate in, as well as then contextualizing it for the uniqueness of your company culture and what you're trying to do. So definitely think about how can we improve and where are we at and what are we looking to take action on, versus actually, you know, compared to this benchmark, we've got so much to go and so much work to do, which I think will always be true when it comes to actually trying to improve things that are really tough to improve.

Meghan M Biro: So I want to hear what both of you have learned on your journey as culture leaders.

Damon Klotz: Yeah, I can start. Even just hearing that terminology, I still don't know if I'd call myself a workplace culture leader, but thinking back about this role and the work that I've done over the past 10 years, I realize that I have actually been talking, working, or consulting in the sort of human resource space for over a decade. I think one of the things that has really stayed with me that I think can actually unlock a lot of untapped potential inside of a company is the way that we actually work across departments that would actually help us more effectively communicate.

Damon Klotz: So hear me out. There's this quote that I like by George Bernard Shaw and it says, "the single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." When I think about that, I actually think about how much is sitting in our heads that we think all of our employees have access to versus whether that information is readily available and accessible to them to actually improve what they're doing at work.

Damon Klotz: So case in point, when you're trying to improve your company culture, if you're trying to improve diversity and inclusion and you're rolling out a new initiative, how you actually roll that out in the communication that takes place around that is just as important as the actual work that you're doing.

Damon Klotz: So, for me one of, I guess the stories that I've been telling to anyone who's been listening to me for the past 10 years is form a really strong connection between the human resource department, the communication department, and the marketing department. I feel like so many of our initiatives when it comes to improving the employee experience and improving company culture could actually be significantly improved if we actually took a stronger marketing lens to how we communicate why these things are important to our employees. Like, I love the idea of running internal campaigns and branding them and actually thinking about this in the same way that you go to market with your products or you'll go to market with the services that you offer.

Damon Klotz: So, for me, you know, this is something that I've been talking about for a long time, but I can still have this conversation with someone and they were like, I would have never have thought to actually try to align my human resource practices with the marketing practices. One, to ensure that we're actually having the same conversation to the market that we're having to our employees and two, to actually measure the success of whether these initiatives are actually reaching our employees. It's one that's a little bit left field, but I do spend a lot of time thinking about.

Meghan M Biro: I actually am totally with you on that, and I feel like I've been thinking about the same things, and I think many of our audience members are as well because the reality is we're not there yet. HR and marketing are still not always talking to each other. And to your point, if we're not, how are we anticipating and expecting our employees to be aligned with our culture in any way? There's just a huge wall there, so I think that's something we can definitely improve upon.

Damon Klotz: Exactly. Yeah. One of our sayings is, brand is a promise to the customer. Culture is, hey, deliver on that promise, and unless there's like synergy between those two then, one, you're not allowing your employees to actually live out the employee experience that they should, could, or have the potential to actually have at your company, nor are you actually able to actually make sure that the brand promise that you're making to the market ends up happening.

Meghan M Biro: Steven, what say you?

Damon Klotz: I kind of agree that the job is not done, particularly in the diversity and inclusion space. We are not making as much progress as we'd like, or certainly not as fast as we'd like. I don't think anyone's going to fight me on that. Progress is not linear. It's one thing to keep in mind, but it used to definitely keep me up at night. When I talk to a lot of my D&I friends, it's like how can you grapple with all of this inequality in the world and unconscious bias? We all have it. It's a bit unsettling.

Damon Klotz: But on my journey as a culture leader, I've come to sit with this duality and the... Damon talking about intersectionality and the complexity of this work. There are these two competing ideas. The first is I completely accept the reality of the

world that I live in, in all of its unfairness and inequality. And second, I work tirelessly to change it. It almost doesn't make sense to sit with both, maybe not at face value, but I accept that for me it's true. You know, it's how I sleep at night and it's how I wake up in the morning.

Meghan M Biro: Yeah, I think it's so true. And if you're out there listening, using the #worktrends, we want to hear from you because I think it's important to get real on this topic and know that we're not perfect. I think the world is broken, but I still think it's beautiful. I think people are entirely complex and this is not a linear progression. This is not a linear conversation by any stretch.

Meghan M Biro: All right, so listen, it is crystal ball time. How do each of you hope to change this conversation about workplace culture in the next few years?

Steven Huang: There are a few ways that I hope to change how we have this conversation about workplace culture, and through the lens of diversity and inclusion I want to commit to telling the truth in public, even when it's slightly uncomfortable. You know, the truth can be ugly sometimes, but as a culture and a workplace leader, I think it's important to really lean into that discomfort and to sit with that complexity and to be able to speak truth to power and always speak the truth in public even when somebody doesn't want to hear it. I think that's what we need to create this future that we want.

Meghan M Biro: Damon?

Damon Klotz: The way I'm personally going to try to impact this is I want to have conversations that connect people who I know need to be connected and need that inspiration around how they can actually be putting culture first at their organization and start sharing stories. One thing that I've had the pleasure of doing is just connecting with all these different companies out there, and I'm like, oh, you need to talk to you, and right now that's a very one-to-one thing.

Damon Klotz: I'm trying to reach 100 million people through storytelling about how to actually put culture first and how to commit to amplifying what people are actually capable of being and achieving at work. So for me, my big how is whether you're the CEO of the company, the head of HR or just a line manager or employee who's conscious about the workplace and the culture that you're trying to create is that you literally have to understand that culture comes first, whether you're conscious of it or not.

Damon Klotz: I think one thing that I've realized is even if you're at a company that doesn't focus on culture, you can be positively or negatively impacted by the environment that has been created, whether that environment was intentional or not. I think back to my time as a 14-year-old working in a fast food restaurant all the way through to my time doing the work that I do now. So for me, I really want to tell a story that inspires people to actually focus on the how of what we're doing, not just the what of what we're doing.

Damon Klotz: To me, that's actually one of the ways that we can impact the culture the most is all the little moments, whether it's how we communicate, how we give and receive feedback, how we run our team meetings or how we actually go to market. They're the stories that I'm looking at having and I'm really inspired about my next 10 years in the world of work and sharing these stories with the world.

Meghan M Biro: Well, so are we, and I thank you both for stopping by and being intentional. That's the word that comes to mind as I close today's podcast.

Steven Huang: Thank you, Meghan.

Damon Klotz: Thanks, Meghan.

Meghan M Biro: Let's keep this conversation moving. Join us for our Work Trends Twitter chat. We are going to be on the Twitter's with Damon Klotz and Steven Huang on Wednesday, August 21st, at 1:30 P.M. Eastern, 10:30 A.M. Pacific, or wherever you're hanging out around this big bad globe. Join us to talk about your journey towards a more diverse and inclusive culture. If you'd like to get our Twitter chat questions in advance, sign up for our newsletter at talentculture.com.

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