

Meghan: [00:00](#) Two letters. AI Automation, the hottest talent market in decades with massive skill shortages and record low unemployment. Could HR get any crazier? This week's guest, Brent Colescott, says it all. He's going to break it all down for us on today's episode of Work Trends. This episode is sponsored by Sum Total.

Meghan: [00:31](#) Welcome to the Work Trends podcast from Talent Culture. I'm your host, Meghan M. Biro. Every week we interview interesting people who are re-imagining work and join us on Twitter every Wednesday, 1:30 p.M. eastern using the hashtag work trends.

Meghan: [00:48](#) I was just reading in bizjournals.com that kind of an interesting article that talked about employers having to get even more creative to address their skills gaps. Amazon recently announced that it had planned to invest more than 700 million buckaroos to upskill 100,000 US employees for in demand jobs by 2025. They're calling this initiative upskilling 2025 and they're offering employees with technical backgrounds and opportunity to develop machine learning skills via onsite training programs. Pretty cool stuff and we're going to be unpacking this much more with today's guest, Brent Colescott.

Meghan: [01:36](#) Very few people know more about reskilling and upskilling than my friend Brent Colescott. He's the senior director of Business Strategy and Transformation for Sum Total. He has more than 20 years of experience in learning and talent. He's here to get real with us today about the trends that are about to converge and rock HR's world. So welcome to Work Trends, Brent.

Brent Colescott: [02:04](#) Thanks Meghan. It's great to be back.

Meghan: [02:06](#) Where are you today?

Brent Colescott: [02:07](#) I'm actually here in Houston, Texas again this week.

Meghan: [02:10](#) Nice. Well you and I were chatting a couple of days ago and I know you're just fresh off a trip from India.

Brent Colescott: [02:17](#) Yes. Went to HR or Tech HR India, spent two days traveling there, two days there and about a day long day coming back. Took me a couple days to get back onto the right time zone, but I think it's happened and it was a great, great trip.

Meghan: [02:36](#) I was just checking out Brentcolescott.com. I mean it's got everything from India to Disney World. I love it.

Brent Colescott: [02:40](#) I got to put some barbecue in between because that's my other passion in life.

Meghan: [02:44](#) Okay, so for those of my listeners who don't know you yet, tell us your story.

Brent Colescott: [02:49](#) Well, I'm just a guy lucky enough to be able to love what I do, which has been 20 years in HR and HR technology learning management systems, and went from being the practitioner for about 20 years to now on the vendor side. What I get to do now is basically advise customers and clients of ours about their strategy for HR technology based on my experience, and then also based on what I've been able to view with our other customers. Everyone's at different stages, so it's really interesting to be able to take best practices, curate them, and share them, and then help those that need to kind of move up the level of maturity in their spectrum.

Meghan: [03:28](#) I want to give a shout out to your team over at Sum Total because if I put on my talent lens, pretty challenging stuff. You've been real happy there, right?

Brent Colescott: [03:40](#) Oh absolutely, and I'll pay you later.

Meghan: [03:43](#) Hey, no pressure.

Brent Colescott: [03:43](#) I'll pay you later for that comment, but it's just been a lot of fun to be able to bring my experience and share what our product can do to help solve the HR tech problems that are out there, particularly in this current environment. I think this is the best time for the HR technology market that I've seen in my 20 plus years.

Meghan: [04:03](#) I'm going to weigh in and just say yes, it really is. I know you've been writing and thinking a lot lately about the perfect storm that's coming in HR. What do you mean by that?

Brent Colescott: [04:15](#) It's the time where what HR has been doing traditionally for the last 50-60 years, I mean since HR was born in the 1940s post World War II. That's all been pretty standard, but what's happened now is that things have changed and added to what the burden is that HR needs to do.

Brent Colescott: [04:35](#) When you think about the standard HR department role, now things have changed and where talent is coming in very different than it used to come in. We're seeing more need for, for lack of a better terminology, and I had this with some

CHROs, adulting skills. We're seeing challenges in finding talent that's out there that doesn't need those adulting skills, are ready to go. Technology, the expectations of the employee for what they're using and doing in the office. It's all changing.

Brent Colescott: [05:05](#) The problem is is that if HR doesn't offload those things that are kind of rote processes, manual processes to technology to be automated, they're not going to have enough bandwidth and time to deal with all the new problems that are coming in. When you look at all these challenges, whether it's the generations in the workforce, the lack of talent that's available now because the low unemployment, the automation, it's just all converging at the same time. That's really the HR perfect storm that I look at. They've got to figure a way out. If they don't start looking at how to really apply technology in a smart manner and change some of their processes, they're just going to get overwhelmed.

Meghan: [05:49](#) You and I are friends. The world, if you've listened to us in the past, people know that right, and to those that are just us today, we're BFFs. We tend to kind of riff on topics that are top of mind for each of us. One of the things that you and I are particularly passionate about is this whole multi-generational idea. All of us converging and working and collaborating together and how that's going. Adulting, you got to unpack this with us today because I just find it really fascinating. Talk to us about this whole idea that people out there right now are having difficulty doing this.

Brent Colescott: [06:27](#) It came out of a CHRO panel that I moderated at a conference end of last year. We were just talking, the CHROs all around the table, about the challenges that they're dealing with in their respective organizations. The one thing that they kept saying over and over again, and I had to finally kind of curate it down to is that this term adulting was that talent that's coming in, and these can be college graduates that are coming into the workforce, are having to ask HR to help them set up a bank account, to have them understand conflict management, dealing with challenging viewpoints in the office or even how to run a meeting, basic meeting functionality skills. These were kind of some of the top three that kind of came out in the discussion among others.

Brent Colescott: [07:18](#) I literally looked at him and I said, "So are you basically saying adulting skills is what's lacking?" And they're all like, "Yeah, it's a challenge."

- Brent Colescott: [07:26](#) What used to be HR's role to function, which was leadership development programs, cohort programs for these kinds of things, they're now having to still do that, but now they're having to, "Okay, let's, let's help this person with the bank account or let's teach these rudimentary skills," that they used to be part and parcel of the new employee. They came in fully equipped. That's again, when you think about the HR perfect storm, that's a challenge that HR never had to deal with it, well, not necessarily, never had to deal with, but didn't have to deal with it in the volume that they're having to deal with it now.
- Meghan: [08:00](#) You've always been really passionate about education. What's the biggest issue that you're seeing?
- Brent Colescott: [08:05](#) The biggest issue I'm seeing is that the relevancy of the higher education model at this point. When you look at the challenges, just like we talked about, the new employees coming into the workforce not fully being prepared. That's a challenge. It's putting a mark on the fact that the college degree is no longer that Good Housekeeping seal of approval it used to be. Daily you're seeing more and more organizations that are removing the college degree as a requirement for application to their jobs. When you couple that with the idea of the student debt problem that's out there, that's a model that I see is going to have to change drastically for its own relevance.
- Brent Colescott: [08:45](#) Even on my of my trip to India, on my way back, I was sitting next to an engineer with a PhD and we had this similar conversation. I said, "It's not necessarily in the sense of the engineering, doctor, lawyer kind of sense of college, but anything else relative to business. It's just not working." It's evident in what we're seeing with the attitudes.
- Brent Colescott: [09:08](#) The frequency articles that we just saw today. There was two, one in the Wall Street Journal and one in Marketplace, which I think is still a Wall Street Journal organization, but gen Z is questioning the relevancy of college degrees when they're looking at the millennial debt that's there and they're looking at whether or not schools are preparing them for the jobs that they have.
- Brent Colescott: [09:27](#) When you have these relevancy questions from the market place, the gen Z saying whether or not this is relevant, when you have businesses, and we're not talking random businesses, we're talking Google, Facebook, Apple, saying that a college degree is not necessary, those are two forces now converging on the middle, which is where the colleges are. If we don't see some drastic changes in the model and how they're providing it,

how the costs are, it's going to implode in some aspects. It's a bubble. I liken it to the tech and housing bubble. It will still be around, but it's going to be in a very different model than it has been in the last 20, 30, 40 years.

Meghan: [10:10](#) What do you think HR leaders are saying about this? Is this even on their minds right now from, I know you've been traveling quite a bit. What are some of these conversations that are unfolding there?

Brent Colescott: [10:22](#) I mean, you've got some HR departments in some organizations that are flipping the script on the idea of the 401k that they know that to get some of these employees that they want to have to attract them, their biggest concern is the student debt. So instead of a 401k putting towards your retirement, they're helping pay down the student debt. So you've got that aspect.

Brent Colescott: [10:42](#) But then you also look at the fact that there are probably a ton of positions that are open right now that there are not qualified people. If that's the case, they're having to look at how businesses will always solve a problem. Nothing is going to get in the way of a business making profit revenue. And so what they're going to do is they're going to find a way. When you see the up-skilling that's happening, it's not just employees that are in place, it's hiring high schoolers that have aptitude instead of having to unlearn things. They're giving them the ideas straight off the bat. This is our way of doing things. Hiring has taken on a different role and the education that's happening in organizations is changing drastically too.

Meghan: [11:32](#) The next question is where does HR tech fit in here?

Brent Colescott: [11:33](#) HR tech has to be able to suddenly take off the plate of HR everything that was done in an Excel sheet or a process. When you think about succession planning, a lot of it is based on gathering people in a room after you've kind of created that spreadsheet and put all that information together and then you spend an inordinate amount of time discussing people and all the rest.

Brent Colescott: [11:55](#) AI is going to start positioning information in a manner that is now a dashboard that gets done very quickly because it's gathering all the data in the backend. As you look at HR, the idea is H stands for human. Well, it's going to have to get back to that. The HR aspect is going to have to suddenly rely on the technology to do a lot of these things. There's probably HR business analysts out there that spend 90% of their time in an Excel sheet or in a database in some manner plugging in

information. You've got to get that person off of that and get them back in front of the employee. That's where HR technology is going to finally start paying out in the dividends and expectations that people been looking for for the last 15-20 years.

- Meghan: [12:44](#) Amen. If you're out there listening on work trends or you're out on the Twitters or social media weight in. We want to hear from you. What's your best advice to an HR practitioner or leader who just simply feels overwhelmed by the choices in the market right now, because this is real?
- Brent Colescott: [13:03](#) It is real and you can get overwhelmed by all the different technologies that are out there. You look at HR tech that I was just at in India and the number of vendors in the expo was just amazing. I mean it was jam packed with people and they've got every different type of solution in technology possible. You can go into this and just get overwhelmed.
- Brent Colescott: [13:29](#) But what you have to think about is what is your strategy? You've got to set the strategy first. The technology enables that. If you don't think in terms of that, you're going to get lost in buying technology that probably won't end up yielding the results that you wanted.
- Brent Colescott: [13:45](#) I always argue the fact that the strategy has to be there first. What is it you're trying to do? Where is it that you want to go? Where do you want to be a year from now? How are you going to get there? What can you use that's good data? What maybe is data that you should be able to gather very quickly? These are the things that you need to start considering. What are processes that you have in place that maybe it's a process that's out of date?
- Brent Colescott: [14:08](#) There's a lot of HR disruption just in the fact that there are HR processes that were done because one person did one thing wrong at one time or one vice president decided he or she wanted something done this way, in this report format and they're gone. You have to look at what are those processes first that need to be changed or completely eliminated and then what do you want to try and provide your employees, whether it's a more efficient way to do their time, their time off, how to gather your data, how to provide that succession planning? Is it development that is crucial that employees are hungering for that you want to give them a quick, easy way to get in? Or is it that you need to start thinking about how you can do this just in a mobile first? There's lots of different ways to go about this, but what has to be done is you first have to align your team and

what the goal is that you're trying to achieve. What is it that you want to do? Then start talking and the technology.

Meghan: [15:04](#) All right, it's crystal ball time for all of you wondering what's next. I'm going to take it out right now and I'm looking at it as changing colors. It's doing all this crazy stuff. How do you think Brent, our conversation about HR will change in the next five years or so?

Brent Colescott: [15:22](#) The technology's going to continue to get better and better and better. The mobile is going to continue to provide that opportunity. But you also to much of what we talked about, the educational model and even business models, they're all going to be changing so rapidly. And then you throw in the generational aspect. Five years from now, let's just hope that most of the boomers have retired. That's a challenge in the marketplace right now is that the boomers are working longer than any generation before them. When you consider leadership styles, management styles, leveraging the technology, the expectations of the newer employees coming in, this is all that HR storm converging.

Brent Colescott: [16:03](#) But in five years, I almost see a lot of it settling because we'll have gone through a lot of the hard work of changing the technology platforms and really now suddenly getting into more of an understanding of agile leadership and ability to respond quickly. So five years from now, who knows what's going to happen with the educational system. It's going to all be very different. That's really the one thing I can say is it's probably going to be more efficient.

Brent Colescott: [16:31](#) But in some aspects, I almost see it going back to the way it was in the early days of the industrial revolution. If we talk about, just like we talked about with the educational programs where employers are hiring people and training them, you probably will see longer tenure of employees with those organizations as they grow and then they have that expertise and understanding and engagement in their culture of their organization that way.

Brent Colescott: [16:56](#) It's almost like it's a cycle. Just like I had a German teacher in high school that he was always out of fashion because he had clothes that were 20 years old. He said, "Just wait. These clothes will be back in style." When I think about that, I think about what he said. I think about the way business is going to be going. I think it's all in a cycle and we're going to go back to the days of old in some aspects characteristic-wise and how employees and employers work together.

Meghan: [17:22](#) I'm about to go into my drawer over here and pull out my pink parachute pants.

Brent Colescott: [17:27](#) There you go.

Meghan: [17:28](#) So there you go. We've come full circle Brent.

Brent Colescott: [17:30](#) We have.

Meghan: [17:31](#) Thanks for stopping by.

Brent Colescott: [17:32](#) My pleasure. It's always great to talk to you, Meghan.

Meghan: [17:40](#) Let's keep this conversation up, moving. Join us for our Work Trends Twitter chat. We are going to be there on the Twitter's with Brent Colescott on Wednesday, September 18th at 1:30 pm. eastern, 10:30 a.m. pacific or wherever you're hanging out around this globe. Join us to talk about how technology is disrupting everything we think we know about talent. You may be surprised on this one. If you'd like to get our Twitter chat questions in advance, sign up for our newsletter at [talentculture.com](http://talentculture.com).

Meghan: [18:18](#) Thanks to listening to Work Trends from Talent Culture. Join us every Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. eastern for a live Twitter chat with our podcast guest. To learn more about guests featured on today's show, visit the show notes for this episode of [talentculture.com](http://talentculture.com) and help us spread the word. Subscribe to Work Trends wherever you listen to podcasts, leave us a rating, review and iTunes, share Work Trends with your coworkers, your friends. Look forward to it. See you next time.