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Paul Thies: American tycoon John Rockefeller is reputed to have said, "Good management consists in showing average people how to do the work of superior people," but perhaps we can look at it another way. Rather than divide people into classes such as average and superior, we might see that superior effort is latent within our people, and it's the manager's job to help draw out what was already there.

Successful businesses are finding that good management consists in creating cultures where people want to do their best because they feel encouraged to be their best. Hello, I'm your host, Paul Thies. On this episode of *If/When*, we discuss talent enablement with Shannon Miller, Jacobs' executive vice president and the president of the company's Divergent Solutions operating unit.

During her almost 25-year career at Jacobs, Shannon has had a rich and varied journey, starting as a process engineer and evolving into project management, sales, operations, and human resources leadership, spanning multiple industries including technology, resources, infrastructure, pharmaceutical, and consumer products with assignments in the US, Europe, Australia, and Canada.

Most recently, prior to her appointment as EVP and president of Divergent Solutions, Shannon was Jacobs' chief growth officer and lead for enterprise risk management. In the discussion that follows, Shannon shares some of the best practices she has witnessed throughout her career, and the importance of trust in creating an effective company culture.

Shannon, thank you so much for joining me today. I'm looking forward to talking with you about talent enablement, something that you know quite a bit about. Actually, you've had a number of roles at Jacobs, leadership roles, but then also in our sales organization and in human resources, so you've got a very interesting and expansive viewpoint to be able to comment on this. Really looking forward to unpacking some of these questions with you.

Shannon Miller: Me too, Paul. Thanks for having me on today.

Paul: Absolutely. We'll dive right in. A lot of organizations, I think, this first question would be relevant for them. They want to be able to get the most out of their employees, not just from a utilitarian aspect, but also to just really win the hearts and minds of the populace and have people put their best effort forward. This first question is, what do you think are the most pressing obstacles for organizations to successfully enable their employee talent pool?

Shannon: I guess I'll talk maybe a little bit about obstacles, but then also maybe what good looks like when we think about enabling the talent pool. I think the biggest thing right now is just time. We are in a world that's moving faster every day and staying in front of, certainly, challenges that our customers are trying to solve, staying in front of dynamics around what employees are looking for as far as overall employee experience and different career paths. I've been in the professional world for nearly 25 years now, and I can tell you the pace every year quickens in our own personal lives.

I think that's probably the biggest obstacle, staying in front of the rate of change that we're experiencing, whether that's in our consumer lives or professional lives. I guess with that as a backdrop or a foundation, I think what companies need to do to really successfully enable the talent pool, like you talked about, it's not just about grinding it out and your job is this and go produce. We've really moved on from that. It really gets to being clear on what the purpose and mission of an organization is, and how you can help align our workforce, our employee talent pool around that.

I think when you can connect, and there's a ton of research around this, when you can connect and be very clear on the purpose and vision of your organization, and that's really what problems we're trying to solve, like the business of what we do, is really critical. We've seen organizations that state a very lofty purpose and vision, but it has nothing to do with the work that they actually do. I think that's really critical.

Then when our people can see how they align to that, it provides almost a timelessness around what we're trying to accomplish together. Then when you layer on, change around digital technologies or skills and capabilities that you need to have, you can keep up with that pace of change because you have this aligned purpose and foundation that you're working from. I think that's really critical.

Along with that- it's just this fact that career paths are changing all the time. If we focus too much on what made us successful yesterday, and you can do that from a business model perspective, you can do that from a role perspective, you can do that from a skills and capabilities perspective, that helps you inform decisions that you're going to make going forward, but it doesn't predict future success. That's like a used analogy all the time. I think that's really important when we think about staying in front of employee talent pools.

The second thing I think is really important is just this active listening and engagement with our people. I think there's an obstacle there. Companies are getting bigger. They're moving faster. They're changing their business models. If you get out of sync with really active listening and empathetic listening of your people, I think you can become out of balance and that becomes an obstacle for you. It can be a key to success as well, is just really being connected.

With that, I think it requires leaders to just be even more focused on helping see their people be successful versus just necessarily focusing on the numbers and operating purely from a financial point of view.

Paul: I know. I think that's beautifully said. I think you really hit it in terms of time being the great friction point because these engagement efforts and things like that, if you really want to cultivate authenticity where employees are really bought in and they don't think you're just trotting out platitudes but you really mean what you say, it takes time to cultivate that trust and that empathy, and like you said, that active listening and it takes a lot of discipline.

That can be hard when quarter numbers are coming due or whatever, and there's all these kinds of pressures we have, that any company has, in terms of performance. Management really has to invest in time. Again, I think that takes a lot of discipline.

outcomes that we saw out of it." Being able to, I always use the term, dial the volume

wonderful Shannon or are we going to get the she's not in a good mood and now I have to temper or adjust how I operate?"

the effectiveness of the team because you're focused on the wrong things. Instead of focused on, "Let's all win together and who cares who gets the credit" kind of thing.

Shannon: Yes, totally.

hypothesis? I want to try this, I think this is going to be the outcome, let's give it a go, let's reflect on it from a continuous improvement perspective and say, "That worked, that didn't work. Okay, great. Now let's try this and move forward."

That constant feedback and feed-forward loop is critical in people. It's easier said than done to be agile, especially when you get my age where it's like I've been there or done that, this is what was successful in the past. It's really critical that you use your past experience to inform or help you with future success but also be completely open-minded that maybe you need to look at it from a very different vantage point.

I think the last part, when we think about digital, going back to the beginning of this conversation around time being the great resource or lack thereof, it's just important to be nimble and agile. I think also, with that, is inclusivity. Really, leveraging the collective wisdom of a group and a team and recognizing that you're not the only person that can solve the problem, I think that that means you need to be humble as an individual and learn from others.

Constantly learning, being inclusive from a mindset perspective, cognitive diversity in your teams is really critical to think about how we solve problems in new and unique ways.

Paul: I love that. Honestly, it comes back to what we were talking about with trust and authenticity too. Team members have to feel, say, safe that they don't have to know everything or be like **[unintelligible 00:25:33]** capable in all disciplines, that they can raise their hands, say, "Well, this isn't a strong suit," or 'I need some help here," or this or that. That the team will rally around that.

Otherwise, you get into those situations where people are trying to fake it till they make it instead of being honest about shortcomings or whatever because there's a lack of trust. There's a fear that I've got to present in a certain way as opposed to saying, "You know what? There might be a better way for us to tackle this problem." I'm not sure what it is. I'm open to ideas.

Shannon: Yes, I think that's absolutely right.

Paul: Our other question from the audience is from Ms. Chloe Arnette Binks, of London. She writes, "What benefits can be realized by an organization that focuses on talent enablement, and what are the benefits to an employee who works for such an organization that focuses on talent enablement?"

Shannon: If we just think about the skills we just talked about, our people are at the cold phase of solving problems for our customers and they are where great ideas are born, incubated, and scaled. When an organization thinks about how you activate the collective wisdom of an ente-3(en)5(846(86846(61 0.024 2070 g0 Wgyi5(n)3(g)3(8(o)5tom b1366(

really think about how we move at a faster pace because they're the ones that are solving problems again for our customers right at the forefront of any challenges.

I think what makes that exciting for people, and we've seen it, is we've started to shine a light on the ideas and capabilities across our organization and then how do we funnel and drive that for exponential organic growth. That's an exhilarating place to be, I think, because you feel valued in what you're doing, you feel heard, and it also opens up opportunities.

It is very much like, when our people can help us grow as an enterprise, it provides