



Video transcript

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Adapting to new ways of working

I think, for business leaders thinking about employee experience – firstly, great right? It's the right thing to be worried about. The balance is a tricky one – you've got to care deeply about your customers, they're your life blood. You've got to care deeply about your employees because you need them to deliver to your customers. So the reality is first of all, accepting that we are in a crisis, and just acknowledging that these are really hard times. In some ways, it's a great leveller, because we're all in the same crisis. In other ways, it's a great differentiator because everyone experiences this differently. And I think the challenge here is not to be robotic, and I think the best leaders that I'm seeing right now are tapping into that real empathy, the real vulnerability, the real humility of going "these are humans". And this desire to think that we're all working from home and everyone's productive, it's not real right? We're not working from home, we're at home working. This is a forced situation, there's bizarre constraints in place, and so actually, maybe the bar we're historically had around thriving around having an amazing and awesome culture – maybe the bar is now surviving and we have to have some honest conversations around what that means; to keep people employed, to keep people busy and working and effective, but also to focus on the things that are really important, like family, community, mental health, wellness – all the things that we sometimes take for granted. I think we are going to get challenged in these times, and any leader who can focus on those and do so authentically, I think they'll get outside results for their customers and their employees.

At ATLASSIAN, we consider ourselves extremely fortunate. We were not prepared for a pandemic, but we've been prepared for distributed teams and remote work for a long time. We've had a good percentage of our workforce be remote, we've spread across many offices, and we've collaborated across those offices for years. The interesting thing was that the tooling side of the change was seamless for us. We were so prepared for that, but the bit that's been harder for us where we've had to put some effort are the practices; the human to human connection. So we've always had both the ATLASSIAN tool set with JIRA and CONFLUENCE – great for distributed teams. We're big users of ZOOM and SLACK – Perfect! So you think "Oh cool, we're set up for remote work!" until you flick that switch and realize the behaviours on a human level, of being in a remote situation, are very different. You lose that human interaction, you lose that physical touch, and so we've been focusing on what are the remote practices? The ways of working that help amplify not just out team work, but our team cohesion, and our team connection. So, what are the ways of not finding ways of making people more productive – which is kind of cool, but also more creative, more empathetic. What are the communication channels and the frequency we need to use to keep people aware, and keep that openness and transparency. And then how do we get fund back into the workplace? Because it's still important for people to enjoy what they do.

A few weeks ago, we did a painting class. Twenty of our senior leaders, together on ZOOM – Pino and Picasso, there was wine, there was a competition, there was banter, we're never going to take over any art studios – we're terrible at it, but for two hours, we laughed, we bantered, we got overly competitive, we took the mick out of each other. It was a great reminder that even though we're in hard times, you still need that positivity to lift yourself up. And one of the things that I'm proud of, that we've been doing and I've seen other organizations do that as well, is sharing. We're not perfect in everything that we do, but each time we do



something, we share it out – this thing works, and this thing didn't, we tried this, and here's what happened. And I think one of the level playing fields we're on right now is we're all going through the same struggle, whether it be different scenarios, the same struggle, the more we can share as a community laterally, the better we'll all come out of this. So it's not a time for hoarding IP and being secretive about what works, it's a time for working together and genuinely sharing, and it's what I'm seeing across the economy in businesses of all shapes and sizes.

I'm a firm believer that there's actually an advantage for small to medium businesses right now. They might not feel it in a lot of sectors, and the advantage is nimbleness. They are small, and so they've got this ability to course correct and switch – many large organizations can't. The challenge there is when you look at customer experience, a lot of those industries have had a lot of static customers. Your job was understand that customer and then just serve them, serve them, serve them. The reality is, right now, the certainty of that has gone. The new currency for those people, I believe, is confidence, because that customer they've been serving? They've had a change of circumstance. So you have to take a step back – which could be hard in these times when you're just trying to survive and put meals on the table, take a deep breath and go "Ok... What skills have we got? What capabilities have we got? What sort of people do we have? What brand, what identity and strength do we have? And what are the new needs that are coming about that we can surface, that we can serve, that we can delight." Because the nimbleness is going to be the people that are more aware of the changes that are happening in the market, and adapt to them. That muscle of adaptability, I think small and medium businesses can grow. The ones that have been around a while have probably got that muscle already, they just need to hone it. But if they can, I think that muscle will survive them for the next 4, 5, 10, 15, 20, 30 years. Because the power of adaption is going to be the skill that businesses need to stay in business in the future.

The first thing to realize about remote work is it's not a technology solution. A lot of people go "You've got a wifi, you've got a webcam video, you're good." And that is one component. There are three other components that I think are important for getting a congruent working home environment.

One is the people – their mindset. How you are you helping them? Most people have grown and worked and thrived in peacetime, and right now we're in what feels like wartime, and that's a different skillset. So how are we helping equip them to be good people who work from home? It's not a natural skillset for everyone.

The second one is practices that we've already alerted to how do you get the mechanisms in place. If you copy, cut and paste your work environment into a work from home environment, it's probably going to fail – it's going to feel a bit clunky. So what are the things you add, what are the things you drop, and what do you change?

The third component, which is really important, is the physical environment – how do you help them have a space, whether it be at home, co-working space, it could be a spare bedroom or a home office (that most people haven't got the luxury to have). But how do you get the right ergonomics, the right desk, the right internet, the right connectivity, so they can actually be free to focus their bandwidth, their mental load on doing their work, rather than worrying about the internet dropping out, having a monitor or having an arched back if they're sat at the dining table. We've invested in all of those things across this crisis. First of all to get a foundational base line, to get it okay, and then the sharing and the hacks that enable you to find ways of making it a little bit better. Because I think the first few weeks of any crisis are about survival, and then once you realize it might last a bit longer, how do we get this so it's actually and effective way of us working?

I think there's a great humility in the fact that we're all in this. It's not a subset of the population, it's kind of impacting everyone. And I think virtually everyone I know, knows someone who's impacted by this in some



way; a loss of job, suffering from the illness, a difficulty in work – everyone’s got a story to tell. And that’s where this openness, this willingness to share becomes this superpower that we have as humans. For years, we’ve been trying to compete with robots in the workspace, and we’ve finally realized we have this unique skillset; compassion, creativity, curiosity, we care for each other – these are very humanistic skillsets that we should really embrace and use as superpowers. And the more I see people sharing them, and the more I see the gratitude being shared, people standing up, the more I see vulnerability and honest stories of people...

I just had a conversation with somebody the other day, and I just turned around and said “I’m struggling. I live by myself in an apartment, and this model of being on calls all day and then just shutting off and watching TV at night – it doesn’t suit my skillset, my personality, my style.” And we had a very vulnerable conversation about it, and you he said “But you seemed so happy?” and I said “Don’t confuse a smile from the fact that I’m lonely.” And I think these are the conversations we need to be having when we surface them. I’ve already seen a whole lot of things that were once considered big topics suddenly become normal topics. People talk about loneliness and mental health, and cognitive load, and family, and people saying “Hey I can’t make that call, the kids or my partner needs to work” or “I’ve got an elderly parent”, and you’re like “Okay”. Because life matters, and I think “This is weird, because life always mattered- but we just compartmentalised it as, there’s this ‘work bit’ and there’s this ‘life bit’. And the thing that we’ve realized now is that it’s kind of more fluid than that.” There’s so much we could learn from this.

I’m seeing empathy lift, and the one side effect that I am nervous about is there’s something about this work from home and the distribution is creating a lot more broadcast. So the empathy is kind of increasing more vulnerability, but it’s still broadcast. And true empathy needs that right to reply. And so some of the best leaders I’m working with at ATLASSIAN, I’m seeing them open themselves up to open forums to more conversation, because broadcast empathy is going to lift the general expectation, but it doesn’t necessarily solve the problem because you’ve not heard the other person. So we’re trying to find ways of getting that open communication in there as well.

I try and stray away from my predictions in crystal balls, mainly because instead, I like to talk about hopes and beliefs at best. I have the hope that we learn from this experience and experiment, and if we do, we will genuinely get to build a better future for ourselves, so that’s a real positive hope. In doing that, my belief is that we end up in a hybrid world – it’s not this binary; the whole world’s going to be remote and it’s not going to be this binary ‘everyone’s going to return to work, and it’ll all be the same as old normal’. Too many people in this experiment have gone “I like this” and just as many people have gone “I really don’t like this”, and you’re like “Cool – you’re both right.” The idea that we build one solution that works for everyone, takes everything about diversity and inclusion and flushes it down the toilet. So why would we do that? Let’s embrace the fact that we have a diverse workforce and build something that’s inclusive for all of them. So, I believe we’ll have an approach where some people are holding them out, some are wholly based in the office, but I believe the majority of people are in the middle. They’ll work a little bit from home when it suits them, to do deep work to get those tasks and activities done, for personal reasons -whether it be child care, parents, personal injury. There can be people that just don’t have access to working 9 – 5 Monday to Friday. If we can access that talent, and they’ve got a diversity of ideas, that’s valuable. That’s where the innovation comes from. Take away the constraint of 9 to 5, take away the constraint of Monday to Friday, and so that hybrid means it will be working both at home and in the office. And therefore, the challenge is now how do we create a flexible environment?

Flexibility has been the hot topic of mine for ages. People instead talk about innovation, creativity, remote work – and I’m like “No, the thing you’re solving for is flexibility as humans.” We are naturally flexible, businesses haven’t been historically been flexible. One of the things I’ve enjoyed the most in my seven years at



ATLASSIAN – we change and evolve every day, so we have to be flexible by design. We are flexible because our world changes, our customers, our suppliers, their technology, our people, the locations we're in, our products – every day, something changes, and if we can embrace flexibility. We take that currency from certainty and plans, and “we'll deliver this in three years, here's the exact number in the exact day, to confidence”, and instead saying “You know what, I'm going to start today, I'm probably 20% confident these are the questions I need to ask, and when I get the answers I'll be 40% confident. Then I'll ask some more questions, I'll get to 60 and I'll get to 80, and accept that you'll never get to 100% confidence.” Because I believe the world we move into will have a constant rate of change, not as high a rate of change as we've experienced hopefully, but there will still be a constant rate of change of evolution. Some of that will be artificial intelligence, machine learning – a whole lot of businesses will go “You know what? What I learned from COVID was humans are unreliable, but every machine I employed carried on working during COVID”, so I think we'll see an acceleration of technology. We hopefully will see an acceleration of leaders going “There's a unique skill set my people have around compassion and creativity and curiosity, I want them to do more of that.” And so, I think we can find this balance of how humans work, and augment with robotics and technology, how we challenge the work day, but also how we accept this constant rate of evolution and change. I think again, any small, medium business or big business can do this. Actually, harder for larger organizations, it's harder to steer those ships, but for small and medium businesses, I think we embrace the thing that looks like volatility and negativity, we embrace this ambiguity and opportunity, and when you do that, you smile instead and you're like “Bring it on”. And I think that challenge is going to be there for us for a long time. As humans, if we can find a way of being uniquely human and adapting to that which we have, that skill set naturally, I think we'll build a very bright future and we'll continue to learn from every experience.

My deep hope is that we do the right reflection and genuinely look at what are the things we want to keep, and what are the things we want to stop, and when this crazy experiment is finished, what are the things we want to start? And if we do that reflection, I believe we'll build a better new normal. The danger is we just try and copy, paste from the past and we don't take the opportunity to learn.