

# One Knight in Product - E185 - Duena Blomstrom

📅 Thu, Aug 10, 2023 4:57PM ⌚ 42:57

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

team, people, companies, realised, psychological safety, human, debt, question, tech, hr, behaviour, product, technology, started, move, organisation, change, platform, talk, happening

## SPEAKERS

Duena Blomstrom, Jason Knight

---



Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight. And on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate people in and around the wonderful world of Product Management. If that sounds like your cup of tea, why not put the kettle on and join me and some of the finest thought leaders and practitioners in the world on [oneknightinproduct.com](https://oneknightinproduct.com), where you can check the back catalogue, sign up to the newsletter, subscribe on your favourite podcast app or follow the podcast on social media and guarantee you'll never miss another episode again. On tonight's episode, we speak all about psychological safety, and we get our organisational credit cards out and talk all about paying off our human debt and how quickly we need to make those payments. We talk about some of the barriers to maintaining a good work culture, or what you might do if you find yourself working somewhere tricky. We also considered the eternal difficulties of measuring any of this stuff and how you might prove that any of your efforts to change it or doing anything to change it at all. For all this and much more please join us.



Jason Knight 01:05

So my guest tonight is Duena Blomstrom. Duena's a speaker, author, FinTech influencer and company founder who claims to have come up with the concept of emotional banking. Although given some of the conversations I used to have with my bank manager, I think that might be a close run thing. Duena started out studying psychology before moving into tech and wondering why it seemed everyone was lying, and no one was pointing out the emperor's new clothes have superficial employee engagement initiatives. She has since written two books with another one the way and is here tonight to talk about psychological safety, human debt and how the schism between tech and business is one of the biggest problems we face at work. Hi Duena, how are you tonight?



Duena Blomstrom 01:38

Hello, I am in awe of your intro. humbled and terrified because we would never we start with

Oh, hello, everyone. Let us continue the communication conversation. Congratulations, you sound amazing.



Jason Knight 01:53

Thank you very much. That's the first time that I've been told that by anyone but also I will say that was one of the time ones I could have dug out a lot more background info about you if I want to do and just count some fun facts. But you know, I thought I'd keep it respectful for for a woman of your stature.



Duena Blomstrom 02:09

I take some shade about the stature conversation. I hope that not there is no way that anything that you could have said or dug out on the internet hasn't been dug out previously. And I am certain more will show up in time. I'm not. I'm not horribly afraid of anything.



Jason Knight 02:29

Well, watch this space. But, first things first, you are the founder and CEO of People not Tech. So I'm already anticipating you don't have any computers at all. And you do it all on paper pads, like in the good old days. But what specific problem are you solving for the world with People not Tech?



Duena Blomstrom 02:44

Well, it's the product way of solving the same problem that I'm solving with my speaking with my writing, with my breathing with my relationships at work, which is the fact that people in the workplace today in the knowledge space, in particular in technology, in particular, have doing the wrong type of work, they have the wrong type of skills, and they are doing the wrong type of work. The work has to change from operational and from technical only to become human emotional behaviour to become cultural work. And that work has to be for everyone I call it the human warble you can call it whatever you like. It's the bits we are doing today, all the other stuff. And I am passionate about doing that. And the product company of we've mentioned people not tech is an ironic name. Because what it does is actually gives the people the space to be doing this in the product in a regular fashion that keeps that team doing the human work. That's all it does. And in the process, it tightens psychological safety tightens all kinds of behaviours you need to have in a team. But in short, it changes the behaviour of the team in a way that makes that team a cultural asset. What I do all day, every day by talking to you, for instance, is tell people, please, please, please make people's lives better by letting them work on themselves.



Jason Knight 04:13

Now, I agree with all of that. And I'm hoping to at least contribute in some small way. But I'm gonna have to try and pin you down a little bit now and ask how specifically your platform does that?

chat.

D

Duena Blomstrom 04:23

Right? Well, that's it. I like that because people keep thinking we're all about the talk and everyone's about the talk in this space. And what we do write in particular, the objections from the from the agile and tech community have always been 100%. You don't need to sell me to what psychological safety is we're not this is not an HR, or do we have to discuss it with? I like the HR audience might know, but there's no exact audience. So we know what it is. We know why we need it. Why are you saying that this thing is going to make more of it. And we didn't at first we didn't know how we went through any number of iterations. We tried all kinds of things with Try to work on leaders, we try to work on emotional intelligence, which all of these things are necessary and need to be worked on. But we need to find something that made quick change fast so that that enterprise could go, oh, this is the thing we need to do, I will allow my people to do it, I will help my people will empower my people, and I will make more people autonomous, and that will make my people happier by letting them use it. And what it does is practically allow people to express themselves to take an action that will correct that behaviour or help their behaviour, and then see the effect of that action in that data. When when you close that measurement loop, and people see the effects of their own work. It is magical. I've seen people cry, I've seen people transformed. The effects of the work in behaviours are a magical thing to witness. And I believe we can make all of our tech people do this work themselves if we empower them.



Jason Knight 05:54

So this is a platform that's used by employees, by managers by HR teams to effectively I know it's a dirty word these days, but manage the interactions between the teams and between people within the company. And understand the interactions and the results of those actions and the management that they're doing. Is it something along those lines?

D

Duena Blomstrom 06:14

I feel like that was a very smart runways way appreciated? No, not at all. Not at all. It's for the team at the team level at the bubble level, this has nothing to do with anyone, no one needs to prove it. No one cares about the systemic approach how? Look, I believe in team topologies. All this stuff is valuable. I believe in generative cultures, but all of this stuff is fluffy. It means nothing. Santa Claus is not going to come and puke a generative culture upon your enterprise. And tomorrow morning, you're gonna wake up...



Jason Knight 06:46

There's an image!

D

Duena Blomstrom 06:47

So yeah, it's not gonna happen, right. So what we do need to do is smaller things that move the

needle, they show the people that if they stopped doing some of the stuff, it will move the needle, it cannot be that anyone waits for HR who let's face it, it's that mean? Only these days, no matter how much we're fighting to keep them out of it. And it cannot be that we're waiting for anyone else to do it. These are things a team can and will do at their own level, if we just empower them. So no, nothing to do with HR, no one monitors anyone else. No one needs to know this is for only the team to know and to act on.



Jason Knight 07:16

Sounds good. Well, maybe we'll come back to HR in a bit. So I know talk about HR in your book as well. But I also do have to ask them and you're a technology platform, then in this case, despite the name of the company, you're using technology to enable this stuff, but is it purely a technology play? Or are you also going in kind of doing consulting work with these companies as well and kind of using that as an add on and maybe even sort of helping them to use the platform and white gloving them and helping them to understand some of the specifics that they have to do within their context? Or is it purely a technology play?



Duena Blomstrom 07:46

I will be honest and say I have tried really really hard to make it purely a technology play and I have failed I will be very honest, it is not doable. So one of the asks I had when I realised all these tech companies and all of the companies I love so deeply have human that and we can get to the definition of that if you like you know what, but when I realised that fact, I wanted us to make something that is an artefact for change. When we are not in the room. That was my only ask. I said to my co founders I do not want another consultancy that the pain and the suffering of going into a room telling people what's want them going no totally I get you and then out the door and everyone forgets it cannot take that I want the product or a piece of software or something just like JIRA. I said to them I thought people...



Jason Knight 08:35

Not just like JIRA surely come on, not like just like JIRA...



Duena Blomstrom 08:38

Not just like, just like any type of platform that we're going to be elegant that let's be honest, right? Communication has staples from Slack and so on. JIRA has moved us along and understanding bloody process in technology like Trello has moved us along in understanding process in non technology, we needed these things to be the artefact of this is the thing we need right? And they did the job now, we need that same type of platform for the human work, how else are we gonna do it? It's not something we know how to do. No one came from score knowing how to do a self assessment of the emotions or an understanding of why the team is behaving that way. We need to learn and to learn together so that we regenerate it's our own existence remaining advantage. Is this the humanity of it all. Everything else that doesn't require the humanity of it all. We can get through ChatGPT 120



Jason Knight 09:34

Yeah, fair enough. Well, that's a horrible dystopian future. Hopefully you won't reach quite yet but you've had a career spanning multiple companies. You're well known in FinTech circles kind of where you made your reputation in the first place built quite the reputation in that world top 10 City AM power influencer top three most influential woman in the city who have been done it all. So I'm assuming that there's a statue of you in the city somewhere but but when did you start thing You know, there was a problem with not just what we do at work, but how we do the work and why did you start getting interested specifically in solving that problem?



Duena Blomstrom 10:08

Thank you for that question. I don't know that there's there's not enough statues, I'll tell you that much. I mean, probably never will be because one of the things that I've had to come I'd be out there isn't a very personal one of the things I've had to come to terms with over the last maybe year or two is that there's an element of kind of sainthood, I have to assume for the things that I believe in and I just weird, I have to let go of this extreme sense of injustice, I have as an autistic person towards how it is never proportionate to the amount of effort I put into it, we will never we ask that have seen that human that will never be able to calmly and easily transit to I've never seen this and I can carry on through life, and change my vocation into being a dentist as of tomorrow, goodbye, it will never gonna happen for me or for others like us. It's it is what it is. We know what we've seen, we know that we know things that will work, and that people don't listen to us. So we cannot walk away from it, right? So I accept that forever. I'm gonna have to be doing, saying this forever and ever. Now, what I don't want is for people to not even comprehend what you say there must be some form of statute that says there isn't one. Not only that, but if I am still in FinTech circles or in FinTech tops, I will always be that cookie, one that's on and on about the culture. Now, despite the fact that I'm a product person, I'm bloody. I have an agile fetish. I love making products. I'm the product owner of my product company, like I am just the product person, I'm not this human that has to talk about it and stuff. But I also know that my product without my vision and my insanity to insist, it's just never going to make it because anytime that people lay eyes, on our own hours, they go, Oh, we have no more human that in this enterprise. And we ever assume no one wants to touch this, they don't want to be open, they don't want to do better. So I can't go away from it. So it's why I've moved away from FinTech because I saw the size of this human that in other organisations and in other industries, and it was very clear, an issue that was stopping us from getting a job, an issue that was stopping us from from delivering on the promise of technology, and only seen issue, it's a really silly issue. When you take distance from it, all it would take for the world to be a better place is for the universe to say, right? If you're in the knowledge field, here are the five tenants of Google's findings. Make sure every team in every enterprise in the universe has these five things in place. And then make sure you have no command and control and just good intentioned servant leaders on top of them. There you go. You know what you'd get bloody perfect cultures that are not perfect, because close to humanly perfect as you can get where people do work together. You don't need to do anything else. No thing else you weren't me, none of the McKinsey, hundreds of things you're paying for none of them are necessary. So sorry, I get very agitated. It's just a silly, silly topic that we have so much human debt when we could get rid of it in an intense one year effort in all companies. And then on Wednesdays, this is all you do you talk to other humans, goodbye.



Jason Knight 13:25

Okay, so let's stick with that for a second. And throw my other questions out of the window for now. Because that's an interesting point. If it's that easy, why aren't we doing it?



Duena Blomstrom 13:38

Because we're getting in our own way. Because we have bought into this workplace psychosis of what is the way that things should be? And we are all too blinded by impression management and fear of each other to test any other ways. That's what I think.



Jason Knight 13:56

Yeah, I mean, you talk about impression management in the book. And I think it did chime with me because I think I chatted about this with someone a while ago that normally happens. But this idea that the majority of problems in work almost because you have these two genuinely men, but you know, obviously just people around the organisation peacocking each other all the time trying desperately to look like they know everything, and that they refuse to admit any weakness at all. Because they're, they seem to be judged, or they feel that they're going to be judged as being a failure because they didn't have all the answers or they didn't bluff their way through the thing or something like that. So do you think that impression management is at the root of a lot of this, this idea that people just need to seem powerful?



Duena Blomstrom 14:38

I think it's a little bit more complex than that. If you allow me to go back to the definition because it I think it is really important that we know it isn't a behaviour that is only reserved to those in power or a behaviour that's rare, or in fact, it's a very human behaviour that we engage in several times a day, maybe 10s of times a day and some of the So it's normal human behaviour to want to appear in a certain fashion to manage the impression that others are getting a view, right? So no one is saying that one should not have this happen, right? Some of this management is intrinsic to our identity, it's how we present ourselves to the world. It's what who we say we are, that's all right. And part of that is, and obviously, you should keep doing that. Part of that is how we present ourselves in a professional fashion. Sure. But where it becomes problematic is, first of all, when that professional fashion is completely unquestioned. So when your professional being becomes a brand that you have not re evaluated hasn't grown with you, doesn't quite represent you because you weren't quite very autonomous or grown up or, or clear in your opinions when you form that. And then you carry that with you. And it becomes more and more chipped at by instances when you've been put down punished or made to not offer your opinion. And in time, those self doubts grow those moments when you don't offer your participation grow. And you end up being this individual who thinks they are a thinking person who is offering their input, they would if they would be asked maybe, but they are in this space, where anytime they think of opening their mouths and offering their opinion, they are held back by a fear. And this fear has been identified by science to be a fear of looking incompetent, of fear of looking intrusive, of fear of looking like you're asking for too much and feel like you're not capable of serving people. And so these things are the types of fears that when you get that, sort of, I can't say this, they're gonna think I'm dumb, or I can't say this, they're gonna think I don't know something, what I can't say this, they gotta think I don't know

how to programme this. That is when you want rob yourself, have a moment of connecting with your team, and have a moment of offering something which grows your connection to them. And you rob your team of your perspective. So as a collective, you cannot have innovation, you can't have collaboration, you can't have the things you need to have, so that you move a product team along without having psychological safety. And the dark side of psychological safety is being psychologically unsafe and feeling this impression management needs in this four ways, which is why these four things, we measured them in the very middle of our product, for instance, it took us years to realise, until people start understanding, oh, I do sometimes bite my tongue because I'm afraid of looking stupid. And they started it's a very simple CBT technique we employ which is start noticing what is happening. And you'll notice it's happening less, just keep yourself accountable to show up. And you'll notice this happening. Everyone can do this today, why aren't they doing it? You tell me Jason, why not? Because they know what it is. They know how to do it.



Jason Knight 17:49

I would say that one reason that they might not do it, even if they know that they want to do it is simply because they actually do work for people that would shout them down if they did it, which obviously is the flip side of it. And I'm not suggesting that that means that they shouldn't try to do it. But you know, we've all worked for bosses that would react really poorly to that. And I guess then there's a question. They even if you do notice that you're doing it and you do notice it you want to do it less and you do try and start to do it less and you are then getting shouted down or penalised for doing it. What next in that situation aside from obviously going to get a job better company?



Duena Blomstrom 18:26

I mean and these times, right. We've talked about them for the last few years right quiet, quitting galactic disengagement, the great resignation all of these things. Ironically, I don't think any of these big moves have been in the technology realm as much as you think. I think when you look at the stats, a lot of the developers stayed very put, which concerns me deeply because in my opinion, that is exactly the segment they should have moved because they had the opportunity and now if anyone after this shake up is still in a place where they're afraid to speak up and is in a technology position. I would suggest in some I don't want it to sound condescending but I don't know any other way than to be honest which is forget that employer quiet quit all you like and put your mind at building a personal brand today right now go out there say what you think not to your employer because they don't want to hear it to the world you have a channel become a creator on LinkedIn I don't care Go tell your point of view because if in this day and age you're telling me I'm not allowed to speak up that's on you. It's not only on your employer the economy today but here for us in the knowledge industry means we do not have to take it we don't let's be honest and then eventually when we don't there have to give up command and control because it is dumb and they can't do that with grown up professionals with the brands and some self respect.



Jason Knight 19:47

Well, they can try. Right so the book People Before Tech, interweaves two threads. I mean, there's more than two things in there but it to kind of core concepts in My opinion, one of which

is the importance of agility, which you've touched on. Now, obviously, agility itself is a loaded term these days, and whether you split it with a big A, or let's delay or put the trademark off, but whatever, but also then the importance of psychological safety, which you've also touched upon. And everyone's kind of talking about these days, or at least trying to talk about it is at least in the discussion, do you think that both of these things are required for an organization's people to thrive? Or can they kind of pick and mix? Like, is it all or nothing? They have to be agile, they have to be psychologically safe? Or is there some kind of spectrum there that they can kind of try and find no, no place?

D

Duena Blomstrom 20:34

No one has to be anything. No one has to be anything, right. And there's no mandatory that to do anything. But in my view, if we're talking about the technology company, absolutely. There is no other way. I wish I could think that there is another way but the reality of it is, the more I think about it, the more I realised that, you know, I've been talking about this for five years, six years, I've been saying the exact same things to the point that I'm discovering some articles of mine, sometimes I go like, Oh my god, I completely agree, I'll share Tyrone. It's just embarrassing now. But I don't quite know why it takes us this immensely long to adopt agile in the way I would want us to, I'm starting to think it's a neuro divergence versus neurotypical ability. But I don't want to go too much into that, because I don't have enough data yet. And I'm hyper interested in it. But irrespective of what mind, it takes, you cannot do Agile until it has seeped cept, whatever gotten into your soul, until you have it in your DNA until it is in your every breath, it just, it's not gonna happen, you can do the process, you can show up for the stand ups, be in your head, if as long as you don't comprehend why things started being, you know, kind of ticketed or segmented that way you're not gonna get, then you will recognise you're doing HR when you think of other things that are not forward happening in your life that you have segmented the same way I write that same way I thought we would do our management is put into the same way, we wouldn't be able to exist otherwise, can you even just imagine attempting a linear life again? I can't even it's scary. Now. We don't have the time for this competition. Yes, the world is going Agile, yes, we need to queue. And yes, we need to do the human work, and no buts about it. But if you're a company that doesn't need technology, and your sequential waterfall process works for you. And you can legally whip people into oblivion to do that stuff for you. Go right ahead with your bad self.



Jason Knight 22:38

Now there's another image, but one of the terms that you've coined to describe some of the problems that companies have and people have within companies is this concept of human debt that we've talked about a little bit, we've kind of touched on it so far. So just for the record, how would you describe human debt specifically, in terms that might resonate with people who've never really thought about any of this stuff in detail before?

D

Duena Blomstrom 23:01

Right? Well, to me human that is exactly the same thing as tech that but for people. So all of the times when we didn't quite do the right thing. All of the times when we didn't quite say everything we wanted to do. And there were those meetings where the Emperor's were naked,



and we all pretended they had clothes. When we started saying that, you know, DNI is super important to us. But then some do change. And then some people lived and they wasn't trendy anymore. So we kind of dropped it. Every time we said we will care about teams, and we'll ask you all the things and we had some good intentions for a minute. And then we just kind of didn't care what you said anymore, because we got busy. All of those times in an organisation are creating more and more of this human that and it becomes so embedded, and so fast that this is what terrified me most often these days is to see startups and scaleups in this situation. Oh yeah, it genuinely terrifies me because if you are starting to have this paralysis and this inability to communicate and this inability to get close to a consumer and to do a real team thing, at this level, you are spending zero chance to exist in the next few years. And in some people it is almost impossible. I've been asked to consult a couple of companies have you You've asked me earlier do we do consulting Yes, unfortunately we have to do consulting because no one gets just technology these days sadly, it might just say dislike it we do. So I know what kinds of success based models here have the thing and use it let us go home sort of thing. But five said no to some companies because I just don't think I could possibly help them or by that I mean I would have helped them the industry would have moved on so fast in what they're doing that they can't catch up with the technology. Because the difference between me and other people is I can go in and say this is the day I can see your take that as well. And I can see how you built it. I can see the combination between them how you build these two together. And I don't think you should you should close shop is practically what I would have liked to have said These people, and don't get me wrong, it wasn't just looking at it. It was also asking them, let's test this. Let's try that. Let's try that and extreme reticence to attempt very small changes. Where are you going to go with that? Where do you how do you patch all the holes in thinking about in startups and in in scalars. In bigger organisations, you have some hope, because you're all in the same boat, and you can moan and you can drink beer, and you can tell each other how shy it is all. But when Who do you tell when it's when the buck stops with you, and you have too much impostor syndrome, and you don't know how to be a boss or any other way, by then by telling people what the fuck to do. And you don't know how to reconsider things. And you've operated in cliches and scared people off. And now you don't know if you have any value. Where do we take these people? And how do we make them back into the useful people we need?



Jason Knight 25:51

Well, I'm going to ask you your own question now. Because where do we take those people? I mean, we've, I agree, by the way, there are a surprising number of companies out there that get some of the problems that you'd expect to see in big companies way too soon. And I kind of put this down maybe simplistically at the idea that maybe some of the people that they got in came from big companies, and they kind of brought some of those problems with them. Maybe that's true. Maybe that's not maybe it's just the human condition. But where do you take those people apart from closing up shop? Which, I guess pretty much no one's gonna want? They want to hear that. So is there anything that you can do in that suit? Not maybe not you, but like anyone could potentially do to at least make some progress in the right direction, right? Or are they just going to start to get dragged down by their human debt and never recover?



Duena Blomstrom 26:39

There are multiple ways in which you can you can tackle it right? I am a firm believer that doing anything about it is better than nothing. It is kind of like immense weight or whatever, or

smoking a lot or anything like it right? Just reducing a bit will be will go a long, bloody way. We'll live longer. So let us start. Let us at least let these teams Okay. Let's reduce it at a very molecular level of agile and programming, which is pair programming. Can you tell me how people can pair programme when they don't know if the other dude has any kids? Because I It boggles my mind how we put two people to work with each other to create with each other to hold each other accountable. And those two people have no real emotional connection between themselves. No one has facilitated discussions. Vast majority of these people are non neurotypical, it's really difficult for them to interact with other humans anyways, no one has given them any tools. So now they sit there uncomfortably for three quarters of their time. And for a quarter of it, they get annoyed enough to they'll tell the other dude, why he's an idiot. That isn't what we're trying to do.



Jason Knight 27:51

Yeah, well, that doesn't sound like the best use of a pair programming pair. But there are parallels. I mean, you've kind of paralleled it with that already. And the thing that I like to talk about with regards to debt, most of all is, I mean, it's the same as any kind of debt, right? It's the same as financial debt. To some extent, there's a bunch of debt that you build up over time, based on short term decision making or wanting to kick stuff down the road. And then you have this kind of concept of good debt, you know, maybe like a mortgage or bad debt, maybe more like a credit card with a higher interest rate. And it's kind of idea that as with tech debt, as with cash debt, or as with financial debt, you've got this kind of almost like a priority order that you have to pay stuff off in. Otherwise, you're going to be consumed by the interest payments. I guess the question is, though, does all human debt needs to be paid off? Or is it really just a case of chopping off the worst of it, and that there's this kind of acceptable level of almost underlying debt that no one's ever going to be perfect at?



Duena Blomstrom 28:51

I think some that will our time itself out of the enterprise, and it will not be morally acceptable? At some point? I think we, our generation has a lot I cannot believe I'm saying this. And it is something that has occurred to me over the last, like literally few years, through the power of social media. And I have come to from loathing, the use, under the snowflake theory and the lack of wanting to execute and the you name it, to realising that the place they come from the place of I am different, and I will make you accept me for being different, is an extremely valuable place that we should have fought for ourselves at our time, and we didn't and we have them to think that in the world of work, going forward, it will not be acceptable to be completely blind to people's differences, whether those are in need for accommodation, and thankfully, these accommodations are going now away from the more extreme things that are are very evident they need to be saved, bullying, evident cases of discrimination, they're going more towards, how do we now make it a place that works for everyone, including the fact that let's face it in our industry, we have a higher percentage of neuro divergence than any other industries, we probably have one in two people that are thinking different than the other ones. And then we're sitting them down and we're forcing them to do what the other people are doing. Whether they can or not, we judge them on it, we penalise them on it, we make them do these things. And then we give them nothing to help them like to come up to the requirements of this other world. So back to your question, what would I say to companies unless you want to close the doors? You have to go back to the drawing board completely and go? What is

common work? What is solo work? Where why do we never need to be in an office? When do we need to humanise What are common outputs? How do I make people owners? How do I make people care? How do I make people love each other and have fun and be happy here? These are the only things you need to function you figure it out, then you slap on Aristotle, principals on top of it. So you make sure that your data shows you are they still dependable? Are they having psychological safety? Are they having impact? Are they do they see that impact? Do they feel their purpose? And do they have structuring clarity which in my opinion is the most overlooked thing in organisation or anything these days, if you got just one thing, right, get bloody structure and clarity and psychological safety, right. So if you can get only one thing, right, get these two.



Jason Knight 31:28

But that's interesting, because you talked earlier about your platform and the measurement. And you talked just then about measurement as well, this idea that it's important to measure the change that you're having within your organisation so that you can kind of be confident that it's happening in the first place. But this stuff is traditionally quite difficult to measure. And I certainly remember working in, for example, a mental health startup and having tremendous trouble trying to work out a way to sell the long term benefits of mental health initiatives within organisations. And with my mentoring platform. Now, same kind of thing kind of feels like a nice to have for some people when I know that there's a lot of people in that kind of HR tech space, they're really struggling to kind of encapsulate the change that they're creating in the workplace in a way that actually resonates with maybe some of these hard nosed, financially minded, cost driven top class within companies. So you talked about yourself, again, the font with regards to your platform, what is the best way to actually measure in a quantitative way? How this stuff is working? So you can kind of prove that it is?



Duena Blomstrom 32:27

I think it's really an interesting question for various reasons that two types of measurement in my mind, right that we need to get out of showing that we do the human work. And I don't know to what degree this is so much bigger than us. And I don't even care if you buy from us or you make your own platform. I don't care at all, you do it by ... I care, but don't get from that perspective.



Jason Knight 32:48

Don't tell your investors that!



Duena Blomstrom 32:50


Right, right. So I think it would be easier for anyone to have platforms obviously, don't do it by hand, but you could do it by hand. Right? So the first thing I think, and why it matters is you need to measure to one show progress. So you can retain something I call organisational permission, meaning the money the Okay, the support, the reminder, the time the blockers, the no one tells you all of the even than the fact that you're rewarded, all of these things have to

be part of this organisation of permission so that you can actually feel what you're doing. It's not just some side project, because you're the colourful hair person. So that's a big one, that measurement for that so that the organisation sees something's happening is useful. But I would put it to you that has nothing to do with with the type of measurement you also need to create, to see change happening, right? So we realised when we were studying for this, and when we researched TensorFlow methods, we've tried three or four different iterations of this product that I don't even want to think about some of them how far we went into producing perfect teams and perfect leaders and perfect dilemmas when none of this was possible. All that's possible is whatever paper you have, make them do the thing together, because they like each other. They enjoy it. And it's a it's a decent thing to do. And it fills them with purpose. So we went through all of these things, why would it make change want to make change? Why would measurement mean something and it wasn't until we realised the product and the market dragged us through this realisation, which I think to me as a product owner was shocking, because I should have worked it out. Otherwise. When COVID had we opened the product to everyone to get for kind of just anyone to use for free, because let's face it, no one was going to get approval from a procurement department to use it. And there were loads of instantly distributed teams that were really struggling to show that they're even doing anything so they needed to kind of come together somewhere. So for many people, it was the saving grace of having a common platform to kind of guide them through all that was happening. We even had these complaints of we're all in this together. We know how you feel. A lot of the questions we were asked At the time, they were in, in a package created just to keep people knowing that we're all in the same boat. And the software at the time was essentially just a dashboard that was opening to the individual individual leader was seeing it and the individual contributors were seeing it, they were answering some questions, then all of them would look at the dashboard and make some decisions for what they want to do as a team. It wasn't bad very, very clearly almost what we have today with the meat of difference that the market has brought, which is when they finally open the access to everyone and 10s, hundreds of teams flooded in. The first question we got instantly was, wait a minute, so I can see this platform. Yes. And my people can see this platform. Yeah, how you share the screen. And then you kind of facilitate this conversation and this discovery of what they did and what they chose. And the immediate question was, well, why can't they see it meanwhile? And when that question was asked, it dawned on us, of course they can, there is zero reason why this sense of accountability for your own well, being as a team should be only the owners on the on the own on whatever the scrum master or the HR coach that they were having, or the team owner or whatever who was doing it. This has to be everyone's business. So as soon as we opened the view to everyone, and everyone saw the dashboard, it changed the behaviour in the actual product. And what we found was, people were like, Oh, now I have ownership. It depends on me, I see this data whenever I like, I can do anything about this. Whenever I like, people started leading actions, they started answering more questions than ever, they were reusing it overnight, it was a lovely period where people genuinely sunk their teeth into it, I think there's a thirst in humans to learn about the emotional side of things. I think there's a knowledge we can't continue without these behaviours. I think there's a lack of tourists and the lack of belief in ourselves that we can do it.




Jason Knight 36:51

Now I'll buy that. And it's interesting, because it feels like almost the metrics themselves. I'm sure they're interesting, but it's almost the sharing of the metrics and the talking about those metrics, it's just a real magic, right? It's having a little dashboard with a green light on it.

 Duena Blomstrom 37:05


Precisely that it's a conversation space, it's a workspace for your feelings and your behaviours as a team.

 Jason Knight 37:11


So that all sounds really good. And we've obviously covered various areas in quite short measure so far, and we're never going to be able to solve everything in one podcast. But I do want to...

 Duena Blomstrom 37:20

Oh no! Now you're telling me!

 Jason Knight 37:23

Well, you know, come back for part 2, 3, 4, 5, through 24. But I do want to get super actionable, before we go and try and find some inspiration for a team leader or business leader, maybe who's maybe listening to this, or maybe they've already thinking about it a little bit. And they're starting to think about how they could start to clear their human credit card. As soon as possible start to pay off that debt, start to get their interest rate down, start to make sure that their repayments aren't crippling them. What is one first concrete step, the first stage that they maybe could try and go through again, if they've never done any of this stuff before. And they just want to get started with anything to try to make things a little bit better.

 Duena Blomstrom 38:07

I think that if they wanted one pivotal action, they could start by having the type of team action that will make a difference. And it's a hard thing to find. But once you find something that genuinely works for your team, the value of it is on in unmeasurable. I'll give you an example, we have something called in the software called Team plays, which are essentially just telling people kind of this is why you're doing it. This is how to ask three questions in a microbore. This is what do you expect people to do? It's really simple. Anyone can lead. Now, some of them are very near what you'd expect. And some of them are quite controversial. For instance, one of them is called a bitchfest. In a pitch first, it's a structured way in which people come together and they stay complete these questions if I were CEO for a day, or what I really what really gets my goat is or three years ago, we made the wrong move. And that was such a such or I'm really sick of such as, once you get people to tell you what the bloody hell the tip is, and I I am going to guarantee they all have chips, then you have a clearer atmosphere, you have an ability to move forward. And it's a different story that might not work with all teams. If that new reform, they don't need that what they need instead is a humour hackathon. So they know exactly how irreverent some are and how uptight others are. Maybe they don't need that maybe they need

the team equals family thing because they don't know how old their kids are. I don't know what your team needs, but you need to find out what it is and to give it to them if you're a team leader of any kind tomorrow.



Jason Knight 39:42

That sounds good. Never say again, really speaks to the power of discussion and trying to work out between you rather than just dictating something from the top. Well, hopefully a few people will be inspired to start paying their repayments a little bit quicker. But where can people find you after this? If they want to find out about any of you? Oh, books get updated on the new one or tap me up for any banking advice.



Duena Blomstrom 40:04

I don't know if I have as much banking advice as I used to have any more. In fact, every time I do a financial technology futures thing, I just go like, well, there won't be a future because they don't understand the cultural problem. But...



Jason Knight 40:17

I bet they love that!



Duena Blomstrom 40:18


Yeah, I'm sure they do. But when I can be found this kind of these days, a bit of everywhere, don't bluestone that calm, we'll have most of this. But there's a podcast called The Secret Society for Human work advocates. That is inviting all of us from technology, DevOps, or HR to just be like, get a fake address tell us the real of why. What is the holdup? Why can't we do the human work? We're not making a buck on this at all. We just need to figure out what the deal is. What are the blockers let's remove blockers together. Then there's a podcast called people in tech, which is with my dear technologist, long suffering as no not nearly suffering husband, Dave Valentine, who is VP of tech and people intake is just going to be a conversation between us about what is wrong with him, Why can't he get that job faster? As fast as I do? No, I'm joking. There's no question about that. He explains to me why, why life has to go a certain way. And I tell him why we should move faster. And so we do that live. And then obviously, there's a book coming out in October called Tech Lead culture, I believe culture will help us change technology and technology will help us change culture. It's amazing, really, at this point. And, yeah, there's newsletters on LinkedIn, there's newsletters on my website, and there's YouTube channels and tic TOCs, they can find me on.



Jason Knight 41:30

Well, people better get started from the sounds of it. Otherwise, they're not going to have any time to catch up before they retire. But I'll make sure to link all that into the show notes anyway, obviously. And hopefully you get a few people heading in your direction, picking up a


book or signing up to your newsletter...

 Duena Blomstrom 41:45


That will be very useful. And I want to make sure that I extend this invitation live, so you can't refuse it. So we're going to need to have you on our podcast as well. We have a 10 minute poppin once every addition. So 10 minutes, maybe you can give us...

 Jason Knight 42:01

I would be happy to give you as many minutes as you need. I've got a great microphone, and the headphones and a light and everything. So I'm sure...

 Duena Blomstrom 42:09

You're not afraid to use them! Great...

 Jason Knight 42:11

Not afraid, well, I'm afraid to use them, but I kind of grit my teeth and get through it. Well, that's been a fantastic chat. So obviously super grateful you could spare the time to talk about some interesting important topics and help us all clear down a little bit of debt. Obviously, we'll stay in touch as we've just said, but as for now. Thanks for taking the time.

 Duena Blomstrom 42:27

Thank you so much.

 Jason Knight 42:30

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you found the episode inspiring and insightful. If you did again, I can only encourage you to hop over to [oneknightinproduct.com](http://oneknightinproduct.com), check out some of my other fantastic guests, sign up to the mailing list or subscribe on your favourite podcast app and make sure you share your friends so you and they can never miss another episode again. I'll be back soon with another inspiring guest but as for now, thanks and good night.