

Transcription - Mark Herschberg Part 1

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we are joined by Mark Herschberg and Mark has quite an extensive intro so I'm going to go straight into that before we let him say a word.

Mark Herschberg is the author of *The Career Toolkit: Essential Skills for Success That No One Taught You* and creator of the Brain Bump app and I have had trouble saying it and reading it since I first saw it. From tracking criminals and terrorists on the dark web to creating marketplaces and new authentication systems, Mark has spent his career launching and developing new ventures at startups and Fortune 500s and in academia, with over a dozen patents to his name. He helped to start the Undergraduate Practice Opportunities Program, dubbed MIT's "career success accelerator," where he teaches annually. At MIT, he received a B.S. in physics, a B.S. in electrical engineering & computer science, and a M.Eng. in electrical engineering & computer science, focusing on cryptography. At Harvard Business School, Mark helped create a platform used to teach finance at prominent business schools. He also works with many non-profits, currently serving on the board of Plant A Million Corals. He was one of the top-ranked ballroom dancers in the country and now lives in New York City, where he is known for his social gatherings, including his annual Halloween party, as well as his diverse cufflink collection of which we have seen just a glimpse before we started talking today. So welcome Mark, that's just a wonderful bio to be able to live with.

Thank you for having me on the show, it's my pleasure to be here today.

Mark, very generously, agreed to talk with us about some case studies. So we've got two case studies that we gave him just the topic of before we started talking. We've asked Mark to think about being promoted to a position of leadership when you don't want it. Now, in previous podcasts, we have given you our views on what we would do and how you should think about that in terms of yourself as well as the organization but we're keen to hear, you've heard Mark's very vast experience, let's hear what mark's got to say about being promoted to a leadership position when you don't want it.

Well let's start by recognising the moment you have this conversation, you've been promoted to a position you don't want, you're already a little late. I was also a competitive chess player growing up and one of the things you learn to do when playing chess is to think, not just one move ahead, but many moves ahead. You want to plan ahead, even knowing that you can only plan your

moves. You can't tell what your opponent is going to do. And of course you got this branching tree structure, we have to figure out what can happen under a number of scenarios. We need to think about our careers the same way. Don't just focus on, am I getting this bonus or this promotion or what's happening tomorrow. Instead we need to think of our careers long-term and we need to be having conversations, certainly with ourself, but ideally with our manager, with HR, with others, about where our career is going, so that they don't promote you to something you didn't want because you've been having conversations for months or years about where you're headed and both you and the company can align.

But, that's a nice thing to do. We may find ourselves in a position where that didn't happen and so when you get into this position, so let me just understand, is it you're stuck in that position already or you've been offered and you're trying to decide how to respond?

I think we'll look at it as they've moved you into this position because that's generally what we'll find in our listeners. They've performed, done all the things they think they should be doing, they think this is the path that they want to follow, and they've been promoted into a position which, in one sense, is not what they expected and so, therefore, they don't want it. Or they've been moved into a role because the organisation has recognised that they've got skills even though they don't like using those skills. If I can use myself as an example, I got promoted into being a training manager and I did not enjoy being in front of a classroom. I loved public speaking, the bigger the audience the better, but not a small group, not a classroom. But because I was so good at what the organisation saw as presenting yourself, I was promoted into this role that I didn't want.

When you find you're in this position, what you can do is first start these conversations, the ones we said would have been nice years ago, because you're thinking ahead for your next role. If you don't like the job you're in now, you need to change it. Now there's multiple ways you can change it. Obviously in an extreme case you can walk out the door and go somewhere else. You can look for your next role at the company and say how do I set myself up for success to get into this new role that I will like more? And we can talk about how to make sure you don't have the same problem, you think it's good, but it's not once you get there.

But then, if you're going to be in this role for a while, the title may stay the same, but the actual role can vary a lot depending on the organization. Now, if you're in

a small company and they tend to have a rigid hierarchy, you might have less flexibility than if it's a larger company which is more fluid or where roles are more dynamic. But you can look at the role, any given role, especially if you are in a leadership position, if you have a team, there's more work than you can do by yourself. That's why you have a team. And can you look and find other people on the team and rejigger all the roles, including yours, so you can focus more what you're interested in and others can focus on what they're interested in or good at. Remember there's an old saying, one man's trash is another man's treasure. Something that you might really dislike may be very appealing to someone, especially someone more junior, who may be looking forward to that opportunity. So here's just a simple example off the top of my head. Suppose one of your jobs is budgeting. You're now in charge of being a budget and who likes to sit there with spreadsheets and try to make everything balance. But there are people who either find that enjoyable or who say, I want your job one day, not in an I'm coming for you way, but I want to be there and I need to build up these skills and you can rely on this person, say, can you help me with a budget? Now, maybe I can't show you people's salaries but I can show you the rest of it. I can show you our expenses. And can you help me do this budget? And this person says, wow, this is great. My boss is giving me work that's helping to grow me as a person, that's setting me up for success. Meanwhile you're saying, great, one less thing I have to deal with that I dislike. So it can be a win-win. It's just about creating the role you want.

It's focusing on the problem is not the problem, it's how you are looking at the problem.

It's how you can frame it for success.

What do you think about, you think you don't like that role but you really haven't done it before. And what about asking yourself the question, they selected me for this role, obviously, I want to see, maybe look through their eyes? They must have thought that it would be a good move from a company perspective and outcomes. So what's your thoughts about thinking that way?

First, we should never just think, we should always ask. Why do you think this is a good role for me? What is it you see in me? What am I doing right? What should I know about? It's okay to have these conversations and when we guess, when we assume, sometimes we're right, but sometimes were off. Importantly, when looking at a role, a role you think you might be interested in now or in the future, one of the mistakes we make is we look at it from the outside. It reminds me, I think of people I know, couples I know, where I've looked at their marriages

and thought you have this great storybook marriage and then I find out later they're getting divorced, it turns out it has been terrible for years, but of course, I'm not there in their kitchen late at night when they're screaming at each other. I see them happy and smiling. We see a limited view of their lives. And we often have the same things with other roles in the company. We have a limited interaction with them, in a limited view of what we think they do. And honestly if you look at most job titles, they tell you very little about the job. They list about 17 different responsibilities but those responsibilities, how they're executed are very different. I'll give you a very simple example. I work often times as a CTO, Chief Technology Officer. I've been at companies where the CTO might be very hands-on, where with small ones, CTO actually codes. At others you can be very in the code and very technical. I've been at companies, as a consultant, where the CTO hasn't really touched a computer in about 20 years and is doing more strategy and budgeting and organization. In some, the CTO is external facing as they build alignment with partners and with others it's more internal. And these are all equal CTO's and they will have their job descriptions, similar lists but the weighting is very different. How much time you spend on one task or another. And so, it's important when we look at a role, whether it's a new job at other company or internal in our own company, we say what is this actually like? A question I love is, walk me through a typical week. By the way, first thing you get when you ask that is, well no week is typical. Yes, I get that but if you averaged over a year, what's a typical week? How much time do you spend on this task versus that task? And find out. Are you spending 20 hours a week in meetings? That might sound good or bad. How many emails do you get a day? How much time do you spend building up your team? Depending on the weighting, this may be more or less appealing and you can know that ahead of time to know if it's the right fit.

What occurs to me as you're talking there is that if you ask that question, walk me through a typical week, and they launched straight into "on Mondays we do this, on Tuesdays....", that also is telling in terms of their perception of the role.

Exactly. It's what people leave out. I'll usually ask, walk me through percentage wise, how much time you spend on certain tasks. Don't even worry if it adds up to a hundred, I just want to get the relative weightings in the sense that it's more this than that. That's helpful. Ask what do you like most about the job? Again whether its internal promotion or external, what do you like about this job? What makes this job stressful? You might get a lot of emails and you hear, by the way, the manager for this job, your future manager, she wants all your emails to be responded to within the hour. That's going to be a pain or that's okay. So again, it's find out those details because the devil is in the details.

I've used that as a question in recruitment interviews. I would say, you've seen the position description, what is it you think you'll like least about this job because that gives me a sense of what they would prefer to do in the role which then offers the chance to mix and match in the team a bit. You've got the opportunity to take on someone who might not tick all the boxes but is going to give you and going to give the team, something more to work with than if you have someone who ticks all the boxes at the average level.

You can use the same question as an interviewer. Okay, you're here for a director of marketing role, describe your ideal world to me, how would you like to spend your time? If this person says, 70% of the time I want to be out doing conference event and I think well that's really 20% of the time for this job, we will have an honest conversation about it and we'll figure out if this is a match or not.

Saves so much time and anxiety afterwards because you've got this round peg you're trying to fit into a square hole, neither is going to budge or fit.

Our second case study is about networking in a hostile or toxic environment. It's about where the work environment is negative rather than a takeover situation. The organisation is there but it's not a nurturing or safe environment in terms of what you do. So how do you comfortably network? I guess it comes back to what we see as networking because that's been an ongoing discussion we've had. It's not a word I enjoy because my associations are all about having to go to meetings and talk yourself up to people who might or might not be interested. So let's talk about networking first of all, then about how to do it when you feel the environment is not particularly safe in a career sense.

Well, let's talk about networking in general as you suggested, then we'll talk about, in this particular organization, we're going to talk to specifically, it sounds like, about internal networking.

Networking in general, it's relationship building. That's really all it is. Unfortunately, many people have the wrong view. When we think of that ideal networker, we first think, or maybe stereotype more than ideal, we think of, we walk into some conference and a sales person says, I'll be right back and goes off. An hour later he comes back with 20 business cards, look at all these people I met. If you see a TV show or movie showing networking, they show a montage of handshakes, smiles and business cards exchanged. That's not networking. Suppose right now I pulled out a dating app like Tinder. I start swiping and all of

a sudden I swipe right on some girl. And she swiped right on me and then if I said, oh look at my new girlfriend, you're going to laugh at me and say she's not your girlfriend, you just swiped right. That's it. Now, you have to build a relationship. We call that dating. And the same is true of actual networking. Just because we add each other on LinkedIn or exchanged business cards, like matching with that girl, or getting a phone number at bar, we don't have a relationship with you yet. Now we have to build the relationship. If you've ever made a friend, you know how to build a relationship. But unfortunately we think it's instant. We also think, when do we network? When we need a job. So imagine if I meet you at social events, you ladies seem lovely, it's been great chatting with you so listen this weekend I got to pack up my apartment and move. Why don't you come on over, don't worry I'm buying pizza, you can help me pack up my whole apartment and we have a great time together. Aren't we good friends now? What you're doing is meeting new people and saying hi strangers, here's what I need from you. That's the wrong mentality that so many people associate with networking.

So you want to build relationships that later you can rely on. Just like I can call my friends who I have known for 20 years and say now I need your help packing my apartment this weekend. That's my big philosophy on networking.

Now in this particular case we're talking about internal networking, which first is very important. So many people because again they think networking is, I need a job and that means somewhere else, I'm going to network. But building our internal networks is very important and arguably even more so in a toxic environment. Internal networks matter because they can get us information, they can send us signals. I only have a certain visibility into the company, I basically sit in this area, I talk to these people, I get these reports, emails, I don't see things happening elsewhere. But through my network, I can learn about other things happening. I can get indications, good and bad, of things I should know about. I can also build up allies, I can build up people who can help support my position when I want promote some new ideas, I'll have others who can buy into it and support me or have other people who, when I'm not in the room, can advocate for me, for my team, for my ideas. And so we all want to build up these, even in the best of environments. People think about, this is politicking and politicking is bad. First, politicking is not good or bad, politics are just like politics in a government in your country, there are some negative but we certainly don't want a country with no politics. It wouldn't run. And so relationships are how some things get done in companies. Sometimes it's more important. Sometimes it's less important. But when you're in a toxic environment, when you have people who are coming after you, for whatever their reasons, isn't it better not to

be alone? It's better to have other people, first, so you don't feel alone, psychologically, you don't feel it's just me against the company but also putting when other people are saying bad things about you, your team or your ideas, there will be other people out there who can speak up and the voice on your side is now louder. It's not just you, it's other people, it's your allies. So especially in toxic environments, it's important that we build these networks, we build these relationships so they're there for us through the challenges that we'll face.

I think the most important part of that is remembering that it's a relationship. They're not relationships of convenience either, they're based on mutual exchange as most good relationships are.

Exactly. Just like our friendships, I didn't pick you to be a friend just because I think you can do something for me today and then I forget about you. We have a true genuine friendship where we help each other. Now your professional, your network relationships, they might not be people you hang out with on the weekend or invite over for the barbeque and that's fine. But you do have that relationship that when one person makes a call the other person will pick up the phone. It doesn't even mean you have to grant every request but that you will at least hear each other out and try to support each other when you can.

I wonder if that's a line that's blurred, that we don't recognize that it can be two different things, that we can have the work relationship and we can have the outside work relationship, that there are different priorities, different needs. Perhaps the overabundance of social media is forcing us to think that the relationship has to be the same regardless of the environment that it's in.

It's important to be clear on some of these boundaries. Just like we used an analogy of dating. If you start dating someone, imagine someone thinks well, we should be texting everyday and seeing each other three times a week. Other person thinks, you know, if we text a few times a week and we go out once a week, that's good for this phase of our relationship. That's a mismatch if they don't talk about and there's going to be frustration on one or both sides. Likewise if we form this professional relationship and your view is everyone on my network, they're good friends, why don't you come over and meet the family? I'm thinking you're nice but come five o'clock I got my own thing. Again, we'll have a mismatch if we don't set those expectations. On a similar note, some companies are companies where everyone, they are good friends. I've been at companies where we've got our annual ski trip and most of the company go away and they hang out with each other on the weekends. And if you're not a person who does that, just know you might be socially a little more isolated, even while at the

company or vice versa. We want to make sure that's a fit, so we have matched expectations.

It all comes back to communication. My favourite word is communication throughout all of the podcasts. It's about communication, it's about talking, it's about hearing and it's about understanding.

100%.

That's the first part of our discussion with Mark Herschberg covering two case studies that we had previously discussed amongst ourselves and now we've got a third perspective on them. Join us for Part 2. For now, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.