

Mark Herschberg Part 2.mp3 - Transcript

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. We're continuing our discussion with Mark Herschberg and this week we're going to hear about his book, The Career ToolKit and also about the app, Brain Bump.

Just reflecting on when you said about networking internally is even more important, I agree. And I agree even more so when they are in, as we are describing in this case study, hostile or toxic. I think when you're in that environment it's very tiring. It can be very depressing and therefore you might accidentally become a bit too cynical and think everybody's like that. By networking, or rather, relationship building, with the people internally, you can differentiate. Not everyone is like that, there is some people who are decent, ethical, well behaved people and I want to be one of them as well.

And you're not only helping yourself, you're helping them because if everyone sits there in isolation and feels I'm the only one, it's me against the rest of the company, when you reach out, when you form these coalitions and find other peers, you don't feel alone and they don't feel alone and everyone is better off.

That's been really helpful for us. I'm now going to go on to the Brain Bump app.

One of the things I found from decades of teaching at MIT is that my students, as soon as the class was over, were done with the class portion. As they walked out the door, I can pretty much see all the information just falling out of their ears to be forgotten evermore. I know when I read a business book or even more generally, a self-help book, you're reading and think there's so much great advice and then we forget it all two weeks later. That's not helpful. When I wrote my book, I wanted it to be useful, want people to retain it and I recognize there's two modes of use that books and podcasts, classes, talks, really aren't designed for.

We have a disconnect because where you read information isn't where you need information. So let's look at the two most common cases. I'll give examples from my book. I have a chapter on networking, where do you read that? Probably, when you're sitting at home, sitting on your couch. You know everyone in your house pretty well already. You might be listening to this podcast about networking while you're at the gym or driving. You're not doing a lot of networking in that moment. It's 2 months later when you're about to go into a conference that you're thinking, okay, now I need to think about networking. What was it I

heard in that podcast, what was it I read in the book? What if you can get those key ideas right then and there, in a just-in-time fashion? Well in theory, you can relisten to a podcast or open the PDF of a book and read through it again. That's a lot of time. What if within seconds you could get here are the keys things I need to keep in mind as I network.

Now the other form of information use is more of a foundational. If you were new manager or you're a new leader, I have advice on that my book as well but you don't know. I need it exactly at this moment and I can't say, wait, hold on, you brought a really good point, I have to go through my book to figure it out. You need to keep it top of mind. We know spaced repetition is one of the best proven ways to retain information. Spaced repetition is a fancy name for look at again or hear it again. It's why when in school we had to study, we'd open our textbook a couple times between now and the test, we'd see it over and over, we'd create flashcards. So we want to retain the information by seeing it over and over. I used to take notes on my books but I'd never go back and look at them again because it wasn't convenient. Brain Bump is a combination between a book summary app, a flashcard app and a daily affirmation app. It takes the key ideas from books, blogs, podcast, classes and talks, the type of thing you might highlight in a book, the thing you scribble down as a note to remember, those are all put there in the app by the content creator. Later this year it will allow you to add your own additional ones. When they're in the app you can use it one of two ways. Either in that just in time mode, so as you walk into the conference you open the app and because all the tips are tagged by topic, things like hashtags, you pull up the networking tips and there they are within seconds. Here are the networking ideas. Just flip through them very quickly and now they're top of mind. Or if it's more foundational, you say well, I'm a new manager, I want to remember all these great management techniques. I want every day at 9 a.m., as I walk into the office, I want to get one of those reminders. It's like a daily affirmation but with relevant information. We only send notification you request. I hate apps where they're just pestering you all day long. You don't care, it's not helpful. So you say, nine am I definitely want my management tip, or maybe it's 3 p.m I want meeting tips because that's when I have a daily meeting and I want to think about how to run this efficiently. So what you doing is, you're pulling the information to you when it's relevant, either at a preset time each day when you don't even have to open the app or when you open it up and pull it up just in time. So it's pulling information that's guaranteed to be relevant to you when and where you need it.

I like the sound of it. I'm interested to know about your toolkit, The Career ToolKit.

The book, *The Career ToolKit*, was partially inspired by the class that I've taught at MIT for 20-plus years, the Career Success Accelerator. When I started my own career, I wanted to become an executive, a CTO, and I very quickly realized that to do that it wasn't just about being the best engineer, there's all these other skills I would need - leadership, networking, negotiating, team building, communications. No-one ever taught me how to do them, isn't that strange? If you think about it, we've all heard networking is so important. Everyone's been telling this to us but no one sits us down and actually teaches us how to do this. It's the whole reason about how our educational systems are misaligned. So I began upskilling myself. I quickly realized these skills are not just for executives. They are for everyone down to the most junior person and I began to upskill my team.

Now MIT had gotten similar feedback and we'd launched that program at MIT and we've seen similar feedback from other universities, surveys done by companies. These skills are not just for MIT students or college students, they are universal for everyone across roles and industries. Depending on how you break it down, I've seen lists go from about 5 to 50 in size. Based on years of teaching, I broke it down to 10 categories, so kind of ten easy sets, ten skills, ten sets. And in the book, each chapter stands alone. So you can literally say, I want to work on my negotiation skills, jump right to chapter 9, skip chapters 1 through 8. It's like tools in a tool kit, pick it up when you need it. Each one has a mental shift. So we talked earlier about networking, it's relationship-building and once you switch from I'm collecting business cards or I'm just adding people on LinkedIn, to I need to build relationships, you are going to look at it in a different way. So each one has a mental shift and then concrete actual things you can do to get better at these skills and if you get the Brain Bump app along with it which is free, then you can get those tips so they're reinforced and you can remember it even after you're done reading the book.

Mark, your journey's been focused and varied. When did you decide that this was going to be your career? You've got lots of qualifications and you went down all sorts of paths, when and how did you make that decision for yourself?

About 30 years ago and yesterday depending on how you look at it. As I mentioned earlier, I'm a chess player. I plan ahead and in fact chapter 1 of the book is about creating career plans. Too many people just think, well, I'd like to be a VP one day, I'm just going to cross my fingers and hope. But instead, we can create an active plan to go and achieve the job we want, to get the success and I've had a plan to get where I want to go. I knew I want to be a CTO. I knew

back in the 90s, you could be a CTO just by saying I work in tech, I'm starting a company and we call myself CTO. This wasn't what I wanted to do. I said, I need to develop these skills. Here's the plan for doing it and I created a path for myself and got there. But of course, any plan we all know from our work projects, any plan you have, it's not going to work out just as you planned. And that's okay. This is what often trips people up. If you were doing a six-month project at work, you need to have a plan. Your boss isn't going to say, just wing it, she's going to say, show me a plan. When you go off plan slightly because things took longer or something didn't work as expected, she's going to say, okay, we all knew this would happen, that's why we have these check-ins because we're going to adjust our plan. How often have we been going towards one goal and somewhere on the executive team they say, hey listen, we know you're aiming for that, but we're going to do this little shift over here because things have changed. So, I knew, I had my plan and executed my plan to become an executive and build tech companies. But a funny thing happened on the way to being a CTO, which is that I realized the importance of these other skills. I got involved in these academic programs and so now I have this parallel career where not only have I taught MIT and other universities, I have the book, I have the speaking that I do and then that spun out into the app. None of these were planned or expected, but I adjust my project plans as I go and so I adjusted my career plan.

Did you find in that time that there were things, or there are things, that you'd still like to do that have come out of that process?

Absolutely. I know, for example, that I really like teaching. I chose not to become a PhD academic and I didn't quite know why at the time but that turned out to be the right path, not to do that. Because as much as I like teaching, I don't want teaching to be a huge part of my career. I don't want to be a professor where I'm spending a certain amount of time every semester teaching. I was a competitive ballroom dancer, I could have turned pro but that would have meant I'd be spending hours per week teaching students. I used to coach the MIT team, the BU team, the Northwestern team. That was fun, it was just a few hours a week, it wasn't full time. I wouldn't have enjoyed that. So I've been finding, I like some things and can I get just that right level and now I'm fortunate I still get to teach at MIT and other places, I get to do speaking, sometimes virtual sometimes in person, thankfully it's trending more in person now that covid has been waning a little and I enjoy doing that. I know speakers who are speaking 50 to 100 times a year. I don't have the time or desire to do that much but I get to do it once or twice a month which is about the frequency I look for. Perfect. So it's finding that

balance for me.

Looking forward, is there still things that you're working towards, you'd like to be achieving?

There are some things I'd like to achieve. I'd certainly like to have an even bigger impact on the world, both with some of my companies and in my ability to help people improve their professional efficacy and find happiness and success. With Brain Bump, I think that has a long way to go. I hadn't even thought about it a few years ago until the idea came to mind. I thought would be a side project but as I see the potential, as more people talk to me about it, I think well I can't step away from it, I need that to keep growing. Meanwhile, I have another tech company that I'm doing, as well as some consulting, and the speaking and other things. So it's just trying to squeeze more in and find the right balance. I'd also, I haven't yet, run teams of five hundred, a thousand people, that might be fun to try. I tend to do tech startups. I tend to be earlier so the team size is single digits or lower end to the double digits or lower end triple digits. I'd like to get to the higher end triple digits to try.

Now all of that tells me that you're very driven. What do you do for down time?

This is downtime. This is what I do for fun. The teaching is for fun. I've been on over 300 podcasts, this is fun for me. Talks and speaking, that's fun. So I really enjoy that. Obviously as well, there is the Halloween party, the chocolate fondue party and the other parties. We haven't had many the last few years, but they should be picking up again. Spending time with friends, learning, reading, watching probably more TV than I should, those things all keep me happy.

That's great. It is about the balance. It's interesting, we have people who will hear this snapshot of you and think he gets all of this stuff done, when does he have time for what we would call "a life"? I'm glad to hear you say that this is what you enjoy because it comes across in the way you talk and the information that you're handing out and so that then becomes easier for people to take on that idea that they can say I enjoy working, I'm never going to retire. That's okay to think that way because if you do, retiring is not something that you think about.

When I think of the stereotype, the corporate man from the twentieth century, who would go into the office and it was just tiring and not fun and come home at the end of the day and think I hate my job, I have to do it. And I was thinking, this is such a core part of your life. You're spending a third of your life asleep. During your adulthood, you're spending the biggest chunk of your time at work. It's

probably more time than you spend with your family. If this doesn't make you happy, what are you doing with your life? I'm not saying every job I've loved and earlier on, I didn't have the options I have now, you had to take what you had, but as I've gotten more experience and had more opportunity, I said, I want to do what I enjoy. At times that means I'm turning down places where I can get a lot more money because I just wouldn't enjoy that and I make enough that I can do that and say I've got enough or it's nice but not at the cost of happiness or other things. So really I hope everyone can find a job, a career that makes them happy. It's not going to be perfect all the time but that's why I do what I do. That's why I have the book, the classes, I go on podcasts. I give away, by the way, everything other than the book is completely free, I give the stuff away. I don't even ask for emails, take it, use it. I want everyone to be as happy as I am with their careers.

We can relate to that because when some people look at us and say, how much money do you make with this? But the happiness of what you do comes through for you and for us as well. And I think so many people are able to get information without having to subscribe, as in financially or anything like that, and you feel good because other people are being helped like somebody helped you in the past.

That seems like a very pleasant way to end our conversation today. Mark, we do thank you for your time and for your insights and your help with those case studies. We will certainly put the links to the book on the website and also to the Brain Bump app.

Thank you. Thank you both for having me on the show.

That was excellent. I really enjoyed it.

If you're looking for more information on the products that Mark talked about in this podcast, the book's website is thecareertoolkitbook.com and the Brain Bump app is available in both iTunes and Android. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, we've been talking with Mark Herschberg and this is Inside Exec.