

Darren Murph: Remote-First, Asynch Communications, Operating Manual | Work 20XX podcast with Jeff Frick Ep01

English Transcript

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Cold Open

Two, one.

Jeff Frick:

Hey, welcome, everybody. Jeff Frick here coming to you from the home office and we're excited about our new show. It's Work 20XX. What is the future of work? And if we know one thing, COVID has been a catalyst to a whole bunch of things that were already in transition and certainly nothing like on March 16th when everybody had to shelter in place here in the US that the work from home and the remote work really got a boost like it never had had before. A lot of things that were already in play suddenly had to happen overnight, and we're excited to have back, we've had him on before. I think, I don't know, the Head of a Remote from GitLab, probably the most referenced, most documented, most guested person in the space. He's Darren Murph from GitLab. Darren, great to see you again.

Darren Murph:

Great to be seen, Jeff. Thanks for having me on.

Jeff Frick:

Absolutely, so it's really wild, just through a bunch of circumstances. You were on theCUBE back in January of 2020, then COVID hits in March of 2020 and then we have you on, and actually you started your job as head of remote, I believe, six months prior to that, and I think we had you on in April. Oh my goodness. Who would've imagined that here we are 18 months, 20 months later and we're still getting through COVID. There's another wave of stuff going on in Europe. There's a whole nother wave of lockdowns. What do you think? How are you doing? This has been a crazy, crazy ride and you're certainly in a different place than you were 18 months ago.

Darren Murph:

Yeah, I'm doing well personally, Jeff. Got a lot to be grateful for on the family front. It's amazing to see this continue to unfold. We are seeing 10, 15, 20 years of motion, of movement, of progress, of disruption in the span of two years. It's really hard to even put a numerical value on how much change that we're seeing, but it's a lot, and I think that what we are seeing now is that two-plus years into this, habits have become so ingrained that it has become permanent and we will see a lot of permanent changes from this. I think the biggest difference from our conversation maybe a year ago is that there were still a lot of leaders or companies thinking,

"We'll just grin and bear it. We'll be on the other side of it soon. We can snap back to the way that it used to be." Two years in, this has become the default, and in many cases, companies are going to have to relearn how to do a lot of those in-office socializations because we've done it, we've been without it for so long, so that has been fascinating to see this much change this broadly across so many industries in such a relatively short period of time.

Jeff Frick:

Right, and I think for a lot of companies, they're still now struggling with this return to office and hybrid, the ones that weren't remote-first in the past, and I think that's an interesting conversation, but where I think that you provide so much value and the lessons that I think are so interesting from your experience is so much of it is actually applicable to whatever you're doing, wherever you happen to sit and plug in your laptop. There are so many lessons that have come up with supporting a fully remote operation that I think are so applicable, regardless of whether you're remote or hybrid or somewhere in between, that I think is really worth revisiting again and calling those out, and then the other thing I think is so unique with you guys is you're open source and it's published, so all the work and sweat and equity and I don't know how many millions of words and 10 thousands of pages that you've created are available for all of us to share, so first off, thank you for that, and then let's just get into it and I think the place to start is on culture and values, and you guys are, as everyone does, you print your values, but not only do you have, like, six, I think there's, like, 50 or 60 sub-values below that, so talk a little bit about the values and then I want to dig into some of the specific ones 'cause I think that's pretty foundational.

Darren Murph:

Yeah, so I'll give the audience a bit of context. What is GitLab? First off, we are the DevOps platform. We help teams make better software faster. We help teams all over the world, co-located, hybrid, all remote, collaborate and make better software together. At GitLab, we use GitLab to collaborate, even outside of engineering, and useful to know for this call is that GitLab is all remote. We have over 1,500 people in more than 65 countries and we have been this way since inception. GitLab was intentionally born to be a fully distributed, fully global company and we built infrastructure that enabled us to thrive in this way. For many organizations who have been forced into remote, it's been a bit difficult because you were built for something else, and so when Jeff mentions our documented values and our documented ways of working, why that is so useful is that so many companies are seeing this and reading this for the very first time and it becomes the blueprint for what the future looks like for them.

It has helped a lot of leaders and companies transition into what's next. Many people ask, "Where do we get started?" And the Values page is where I point people, and oftentimes they'll think, "We already have values. Can we talk about the next thing? How do we actually get good at remote?" But the nuance here in documenting values is that in a great remote-first team, nothing can be implicit or implied or unspoken rules of working. Remember, you're fully distributed. There's no office to act as that glue, so you can't just observe a team working and learn these things through osmosis, so at GitLab, we didn't stop with just six core values. Those

spell CREDIT, by the way. That's C for collaboration, R for results, E for efficiency, D for diversity, inclusion and belonging, that's one value, I for iteration and T for transparency.

We could've stopped there, but here's the thing, you've probably heard transparency or efficiency or results before, but we need to answer, what do they look like specifically at our organization? So we documented lots and lots of sub-values, these are substantiators of values, that make it easy for anyone in the company, and indeed anyone in the world because our handbook is open source and public on the web, to know what collaboration means at GitLab. A few of my favorites are no ego, low level of shame and short toes. We say, "Short toes, what does that mean?" Anyone can contribute to anyone else's domain without fear of stepping on their toes because at GitLab, we collaborate with short toes, and while this may garner a laugh, it's really, really important for remote teams to know that this is how their entire team is expected to operate, so step one is getting serious about documenting your culture, your values so that everyone understands how to work well together.

Jeff Frick:

Okay, so let's back up a step. Before we get into that, I'd want to jump into the short toes 'cause I think the short toes is fascinating. The specific context is don't worry about stepping on somebody's toes if you get into their kitchen or you get into their space. A lot of big organizations are so matrixed and so much effort is spent every day not stepping on people's toes and making sure that you're checking all the right boxes and getting everything cleared and everybody's on board and pre-vetting, which is also a very important skill. Not having to do that opens up a whole lot of time and energy, so how do you actually get people comfortable with the fact that there's stuff happening within their project maybe that they're not necessarily directly involved in or comes into a side angle 'cause I would imagine that that's a potential huge point of conflict, and if you can solve that problem, oh my goodness, how much do you wash away?

Darren Murph:

You alluded to this earlier, but all-remote forces you to be great at things that any business should be great at anyway, but you have to do it much earlier in the organizational building and with much greater intentionality, so the point here on stepping on folks' toes, my question is, was that ever really the best way to go about driving a business? The most dangerous words in business are, "We've always done it that way," so we just assume that staying out of people's swim lanes and not stepping on toes is the best way to run a business, but is it? What we have seen is that if you make work more transparent, more visible, GitLab's mission is everyone can contribute, so when you believe in that and you enable everyone to contribute, what you find is that people you would have never thought to invite to a meeting or tag in a document may have incredible insights, even if they aren't classically trained in whatever your function is, and you usually have an aha moment of like, "Wow, someone that I didn't even think to ask has added this incredibly rich and diverse perspective.

It makes my project better." That's usually when people start to buy into this, and to your earlier point, that's applicable whether you're in the office 100% of the time, whether you're in and out

of the office or whether you're fully remote, but the truth is you have to do this as a remote team because when people are so distributed, the geography itself prevents everyone from always knowing what's going on at any given time, so this notion of let's keep everyone on the same page or let's keep everyone's synced, there are limits to that, and so one of the magical formulas that we have discovered is decoupling consensus gathering and decision-making. Most organizations try to merge those together and that's when you run into these conflicts about stepping on people's toes, but if you can separate those and you use a GitLab issue or an asynchronous document to gather consensus, ask people for feedback, write down an idea, give people the ability, the time, and the space to then add context to it and then assign a DRI, a directly responsible individual, to the ultimate decision that has to be made, you're able to separate those and you get really rich feedback in the consensus-gathering element of this project, and then ultimately, you arm the DRI with as much input as you can and then you trust them to make the best decision possible, but you really want to think differently about how you invite contributions. We've just happened to find that that works really well in a remote setting.

Jeff Frick:

And I apologize I didn't give you a longer introduction. For people that don't know Darren, just Google Darren Murph remote and you've got days and days and hours and hours of great quality content, and as you said, there's thousands, literally millions of words and thousands of pages of documentation available. I want to zero in on some of the specifics because I watch and listen to all your stuff all the time, but one of the keys is this concept of there's no one to tap you on the shoulder or for you to tap on the shoulder, which is what forces this kind of information attitude that everything needs to be documented. You're a "Guinness Book of World Record" holder writer. A lot of people have a hard time writing and it kind of goes back to software development, where everyone thinks the hard part is actually writing the code, where actually the hard part is in the documentation and the supporting material and the training and all this other stuff, so from just a documentation ethos, how have you helped people in the company who maybe didn't come from that point of view to really start to think about go to the documentation first?

I think you say go to the manual first versus picking up the phone or I'm just used to yelling over the top of the cube at somebody next to me. How has that worked for people? You often say you have to unlearn old habits, but how have you driven a documentation philosophy strategy way of getting things done in the company?

Darren Murph:

I ask people if you were to purchase a really important widget, something that you really valued, you spent a lot of money on, you had high expectations for it, chances are it would have an operating manual. There would be some sort of written documentation on how it works. It may even go into what the genesis of why it exists, and generally speaking, the more documentation, the happier you are with the process and the purchase, and it also makes it very easy to scale that purchase, like if you let your spouse or partner or child use it, you can just share that operating manual instead of having to sit there and regurgitate exactly how to use this. It's

amazing how few companies have operating manuals, so we expect this about everything that we purchase and consume and utilize on a day-to-day basis as a consumer, but we don't have those same expectations for our own organizations, and so you'll hear a lot of people in the remote space throw around the term documentation, but at GitLab, we try to use the term handbook first.

The reason for this is language is very important, number one, but number two, if you just empower each team to document in the way that suits them best, you just end up with this textual chaos. You still lack the taxonomy and codification needed to make it structured information. The more structured you can make information across the company, the more cohesive everything is, the more seamless things are, the more that people understand the goals and objectives, the shared understanding of moving a company forward. We actually did a remote work report where we surveyed around 4,000 people globally and we found an interesting link between transparency and visibility in work, which comes from structured documentation, and the sense of team belonging. Over a third of people said, "When my company invested in this documentation to make things more transparent, to make them more visible, to make them more structured, I felt like I belonged as a part of the team," so no need for happy hours, no need for wearing funny hats or any of the usual things that we might try.

Just get better at documentation. Make it easier for people to know what success looks like, what their goals and objectives are. For those who do not like to write things down, Jeff, I'm going to be honest, I think this is a future skill to work on. I've actually seen some learning and development departments within companies spin up new business writing modules to upskill their entire organization to get better at writing. It used to be a nice-to-have, but incredibly polished storytelling and communicating is now a must-have in a more distributed world. The other thing here is there are some amazing tools like Yac that allow you to use the spoken word if you prefer to verbalize and then machine learning takes over and it's able to convert that into text.

People who want to share their screens and talk something through instead of writing something out, that's also an acceptable medium, and then of course, there's the entire world of video. There's a cool tool called Voodle that's really working to help teams build rapport and build cultural bonds using video. The written word is easy to get through via a lot of other mediums. It really just needs to be a key point of emphasis for an executive team that structured documentation matters.

Jeff Frick:

Right. Right. There's an interesting interview, you've said it on a number of interviews, where you talk about if you just take the practice of anytime anyone asks you a question, rather than directly responding to that person, respond to them in a form that you can send the link to the next person that asks you the same question, so I think that's a really nice way to approach it and I think you also have said it a number of times, that all those millions of words didn't start out as millions of words. They started out as let's just get started and to be open to letting it

evolve and grow and get richer over time, but you do have to write it down. You got to document it. You got to resist the temptation to fire back that email and be a little bit more intentional, which is one of the great words you taught me 18 months ago that I've used a lot more since our first conversation.

Darren Murph:

The sure sign of respect in an organization is paying it forward by answering with a link.

Jeff Frick:

Yeah, love it.

Darren Murph:

That's high praise and it also helps you reframe what, oh, sorry, go ahead.

Jeff Frick:

I was going to say, so let's get into another real specific detail, and you guys give some great information and that's meetings, and a lot of people's first inclination is to have a meeting, which by definition is synchronous, and you help people, even to the degree I can give you the text for an email of how to gracefully decline a meeting and try to get it to an asynchronous communication. I just love it, so I wonder if you could share your thoughts about meetings and trying to not use meetings when you don't have to, and then at the same time, I'd love to know when do you have a meeting, and when you think about meetings as such a special and rare resource, when do you use 'em, how do you use 'em, how do you make sure that when you do have that synchronous time with people from 60-some-odd other countries that you're making the most of it?

Darren Murph:

A Chief People Officer once asked me, "How do we make our meetings better as a remote team?" And I replied, "Make them harder to have," and I could see the wheels turning, but underneath that very genuine answer is this understanding that you should be very deliberate before jumping into a meeting. Meetings should not be or synchronous meetings should not be the default way to move a piece of work forward. There should be some friction, some thought involved, a flowchart, if you will, on does this really need to be a synchronous meeting or can it be achieved via some other means. I'll dive into that a bit, but I want to say part two to this is relearning the language around meeting. There's this understanding, this assumption that when we say meeting, it has to be two or more people gathered together synchronously, but when you think about the word meet, there are lots of ways to meet.

We can use mediums like GitLab. We can use shared documents. We can use all of these new digital tools and platforms, Figma, MURAL, Miro, the list goes on and on. These are new ways for us to meet, meeting of the mind, and in fact, many of them allow more minds to meet than ever before, but it's going to take organizational unlearning and rewiring of the defaults to think about meeting in those tools and meeting potentially asynchronously. It's not like we can't have

async meetings. It just might drag on for a week here and there. Thinking about this very differently is going to be critical for the future of work.

I really think the future of work is more about the future of living, and one of the telltale signs on have we arrived at the future of work is if you default to trying to do something asynchronously instead of just defaulting to getting on the phone together.

I'll give you one sub-value here that I want to accentuate this point with. GitLab has a bias toward asynchronous communication, so the team is hardwired to think, "If I'm inclined to get people together synchronously, maybe there's a better way to do it," but where does that come from? Many people would say it's probably tied to efficiency or results in terms of values, but if you look at our Values page, it's actually nested within our diversity, inclusion and belonging value, and here's why. If you take the effort to move a piece of work forward without commandeering time from someone else's day, you are fundamentally being more respectful of their time. That's giving them that time back to stay locked in on focus work, or to rest more, or to read, or to call their parents, or to spend time with their kids. Remember, we're working from home now. Any of these things I would argue are superior to spending time synchronously doing work that we could've done more inclusively in a different way, and I think this is something that you will see more organizations take stock of and they'll start to look at sync and async not as things that are in opposition to each other but as two tools in a toolbox, that we need to get better at selecting the right tool for the right time and place.

Jeff Frick:

So when do you meet? When do you have a synchronous meeting? What kind of objectives and goals and things raise to that bar? 'Cause for you, that's a super high bar.

Darren Murph:

One-on-ones are great for synchronous time. I think those are very hallowed, especially if you're a remote team where that might be the only time you meet all week with direct reports. Those are worthy of synchronous time, for sure. Anything dealing with culture and building bonds is great for meeting synchronously. I like to say that we're getting really good at moving work forward asynchronously, but there's still nothing quite like spending time together, even if it's virtually. Breaking bread with people, celebrating what makes us different, those moments are really, really great, and this goes to why I think you should work more asynchronously so that you reserve and conserve that energy for those synchronous moments to be more about culture building and rapport building,

And the last thing that I would give you is if you're stuck on something, truly stuck on something, at GitLab, we have a rule that if we go back and forth three times on the exact same point, it might be worth considering hopping on a synchronous call to iron out whatever that difference is.

The one piece of nuance there is that the same thing has to be broken down into the smallest possible step, so for example, if you're working on next year's marketing plan, you're probably going to go back and forth more than three times on it, but that's not the smallest possible component. That's something much larger. Usually you can come to agreement on something major like that by breaking it down into smaller steps, and if you want to learn more on that, look no further than our iteration value.

Jeff Frick:

Right. Right. I want to shift gears a little bit and talk about the different language within different groups within the company, and you've talked about being in your position. Whether it's finance or marketing, sales, development, support, those are all very different functions and very different day-to-day jobs. How have those kind of different roles, clearly if you're a salesperson, you've probably been working out of your car historically anyway. How have those different departments been able to function and then what's the cross-department functionality? Is it anything special? Is it just another interaction? How do you find the differences between functional silos, if you will?

Darren Murph:

Functional teams experience remote work differently, and I think the part to focus on here is in a distributed team, remote work becomes the common thread that holds everything together. In other words, you need to be really good at remote work. What does that actually mean? It means that your business operations are now things like do people know when to use a certain platform to accomplish a certain thing and less of does someone have the right badge to get in the right door in the right office in a given city. Not as many companies have put a lot of focus on operationalizing remote, putting up those guard rails, documenting when is this platform used, who holds the keys to it, how do you submit a request?

Maybe some teams. Maybe engineering teams, for example, are better about this, but when it comes to legal and comms and marketing, it's new for a lot of them. They're still used to tapping people on the shoulder, so operationalizing a lot of these things is step number one for companies to get really good at remote and make sure that they're speaking and collaborating in a common way and a common language.

Jeff Frick:

Yeah. I'm curious, you've talked, again, it's all documented in the manual, in terms of managing people in a remote-first environment, and I would imagine for a lot of managers who've been managing more activity than they had been managing, I'll put it's probably a shocker and I would imagine that there's probably a level of specificity in their goals that they have to document that they've met, maybe never had to document before. I wonder if you can share a couple of the really key people or the key learnings for people that maybe weren't remote-first and didn't necessarily come from that predisposition but are excited about the opportunity, whether it be for the company or whatever. Where do they bang their head when they, from a management perspective, when they come into a remote-first situation?

Darren Murph:

I'm all about boring solutions, so I'll try to give you two boring solutions on how to be a better manager in a remote setting. First is to take a hard look at what you're expecting from directs and make sure that both parties know what success looks like. This sounds really simple, but if you can't write down what success looks like, you can't trust anyone in an office or outside of it to know if they're meeting those objectives, so if you put in the extra work to document this is exactly what success looks like, it's these numbers or these metrics or this amount of progress, then you empower people to go about achieving that in a more autonomous way. That's number one, be able to document what success looks like. Number two is changing the mindset of management from being a director to an unblocker.

Great remote managers wake up every day and see themselves as an unblocker. I like to say maybe put on a catcher's mitt and just get up and wait to catch things that come to you from your direct reports. In a remote setting, you have very little physical proximity, very little visible activity on is someone stuck on something, so instead what you have to do is proactively create a psychologically safe atmosphere where your directs will come to you and they'll provide context on where they're at in a given project and they'll make a proposal or a very specific ask on, "Unblock me here so that I can run really fast." This is very different from management by walking around or management by directing and just assigning tasks. You really have to flip that on its head. A lot of these notions aren't too unfamiliar for those who have studied servant leadership, but it's really the only way forward and it does take some work and some reinforcement, especially if people aren't used to being managed in that way. For some of them, it can feel like a trap. All of this newfound autonomy can feel like a trap and some of them may be a bit afraid to come to you with some of those issues they need unblocked, so it does take some time and reinforcement.

Jeff Frick:

Another concept you talk about a lot is remote-first versus office-first. People have working from planes, trains and automobiles, conferences and hotels and coffee shops forever, so I think it is kind of, I like the way you say remote-first to office-first in terms of where do you get up and go if you have nowhere else to go, and you've mentioned a lot of times, some people may not want to work from their home specifically because they may not have a great situation, but if you take that idea first, I think it's so powerful, and you guys have shared so many best practices that regardless of where you're sitting, by taking a remote-first approach to your communication strategy, you can be much more inclusive and a much more complete kind of communication with this asynchronous and all the documentation than you could if you were office-first, so I wonder, when you say remote-first, you love it 'cause you guys are pure and you think that's the best solution, but for the people that just can't or they're trying to get there or they're taking steps, I still think they can take this remote-first kind of attitude, which is really an attitude about communication versus an attitude about where you get in your car and drive every day.

Darren Murph

100% in agreeance with that. The core narrative of our discussion needs to fixate less on physical location and more on how work gets done. This global narrative about return to office is a missed opportunity to ask ourselves, "What have we learned about working differently that we should continue and extend no matter where people are physically located before or after any given point of time?" I also want to share this as a mental model. You're either office-first in the way that you work or you're digital-first or remote-first in the way that you work, and the reason why this is so important is that if you audit and pressure test all of your workflows and you make them, if you change them in a way so that they can be accomplished in a location-agnostic way, then it no longer matters where someone is.

If someone chooses to work from a piece of real estate, whether that's a company office, whether that's a WeWork, whether it's a shared office, whether it's their spare bedroom, an airplane seat, a hotel room, you name it, they don't work differently. For companies that really struggle with this, I go so far as to say that if you're going to reopen your corporate office, it must be treated as a place where people go to work remotely. If they go into a space and they start working differently, for example, writing on a physical whiteboard that has no connection to anyone else in the company, that's a red flag that people are shifting back to office-first ways of working, and why this is so difficult for the masses is that for a very long time, everything has been office-first, and so even for companies that allowed work from home, all of their workflows were optimized for the office and then those who were outside of it were on the B team and they had to make do. They had to work extra hard to have access to information and the meetings after the meetings and all of these things, but now what we're seeing is that COVID has forced this permanent change where remote-first will be the way. People are going to expect this level of flexibility in their work lives and so companies have the burden of shifting those workflows to make sure that they can thrive and operate from anywhere in the world.

Jeff Frick

Yeah, you touched on something I want to double down on and that's allowing or enabling or saying it's okay to work from home, and certainly over the last 18 months, versus actually investing in people, and you've listed a number of very specific actions that you have taken at GitLab to invest in people's, obviously there, you're 100% remote, but there's a lot of very specific things in terms of how you allocate expense dollars for getting together, how you support those efforts, how you let them expense things like infrastructure, and I think we've seen what the role of broadband and stuff, really almost is more of a necessary component to getting by in 2021 and beyond, so what are some of the specific things that you see when you say we're investing in remote-first versus just a lot of companies are enabling it or saying it's okay.

Darren Murph:

First off, it's that not everyone wants to work from home every day, and so when you are a company with no offices, you have to support people who choose to leave their homes and go to a Regus or a WeWork or a communal office space like Switchyards or Codi, and so if you allow those people to submit expense reports, it enables them to do their best work at the place

that they so choose. For a lot of companies who think, "What am I ever going to do if I don't have any real estate?" There's a lot of options and so it starts with that. The second thing here is workspace. You have to make sure that people have the funds and the planning to be able to build a great home workspace. Especially for companies who have invested 10 or \$20,000 per cubicle in a skyscraper, it's only fair to share some of that back for people as they build home offices.

By the way, this is incredible for people with mobility challenges. They might not be very comfortable admitting any of those in an interview, but if you empower them to build the workspace that works for them, they're able to build the most inclusive workspace for them and that would actually be more difficult to accomplish in an office versus outside of it, so it's putting yourself in the shoes of others and making sure that you empower people to have the right equipment, and then the last part here is make sure people have what they need to do their jobs well no matter where they are. This usually boils down to two things, how we work, so operationalizing. When do we use this tool? Where does work conversation happen? Where does informal communication happen? And then the second part of it is culture, making sure that people have an ability to plug into the company. For a lot of companies, that's getting teams together. GitLab gets our whole company together once a year to build bonds as a team and that's an amazing week in the year.

For a lot of companies, they're investing in senior leaders, giving them biannual or quarterly budgets to get their sub-teams together. In-person matters. We're humans. We're relational, communal beings. The goal shouldn't be to just build a company where people never see each other. The goal should be to be strategic about when you get together so that for the other 300-some-odd days of the year, people are empowered to live and work in a community that really, really matters to them.

Jeff Frick:

Yeah. Darren, I could talk to you for days, and thankfully it's all documented, so we don't have to. We can do it async, but I want to close on a couple of thoughts. One is this is really about flexibility. It's not about where you drive and it's not about sitting in a commute or not sitting in a commute. It's really about flexibility and it strikes me that one of your core values is about trust, and it's almost like can we trust other adults to make a commitment to get something done and we can turn our face and they can get it done and come back, or it seems like there's so much about flexibility and trust, and if we can give people the ability to block off on their calendar from three to four on a Thursday to catch their kid's performance at school, which is slotted by a quarterly review the hour before and a one-on-one the hour after, how does that not make sense and how do we not give people the ability to manage their own lives? And I think you pointed out in a number of your talks that with that flexibility comes a lot more wellbeing and giving up that two hours of commute gives you more wellbeing, whether you use that time to sleep or play tennis or do nothing. It just seems like this is so much more of a humane, adult way to treat people.

Darren Murph:

We have a leadership principle at GitLab called manager of one and it really encapsulates all of the things you just mentioned. A manager of one is able to manage their time and attention with the understanding that someone's peak productivity hours might not look the same as someone else's, and so if it's going to make you more productive to spend three to four engaging with your child at school and then you'll choose to work at a different hour, companies should empower and enable that. It's actually going to be more beneficial for them to do that versus not, but this manager of one principle is something that has to have executive sponsorship and it has to be viewed and lived at the highest level of the organization and then trickled all the way down. Of course, this is documented, so if you Google manager of one, you'll see exactly what I'm talking about.

But people often ask me, "Why do I care so much about this? What's really so great about not having the commute, not that there's anything wrong with not having a commute, but really, is that all there is to it?" And the truth is intentional remote work is so much more than what we've experienced during COVID. Quarantine work from home is just enough of a glimpse of remote to get people hooked on it and they want to know more, but for my own family, personally, we adopted a newborn at birth almost three years ago and the ability to go down that path and explore that journey of fostering and adopting becomes much, much easier when you are the manager of your time and attention. These mid-week sessions aren't so much of a burden anymore. You're not trying to cram these things around the confines and edges of life, so things that used to be impossible or very difficult become fairly common, fairly ordinary.

What does that mean globally? That means that if more people, tens of millions of people are able to go remote and have more flexibility in their day, they can invest that time into causes that matter to them. That's the orphan crisis being solved in a matter of quarters or years with no additional infrastructure just by giving people time back, and then there's all sorts of other things that the world could use our help on that if you give people the ability to be more flexible, it'll galvanize them. It'll be effort focused on the right things and employers will benefit. If you empower people to live better lives, they're going to explode with gratitude in the form of productivity back to the company, and I really think that's the next frontier for organizations that enable it.

Jeff Frick:

It's so funny, I just had a post on LinkedIn the other day, Greg Jones talking about, his prediction is people are only about 60% capacity 'cause most of them are disengaged at work. They're not feeling that they can commit, and what you're talking about is really an opportunity to let people get more committed by freeing up their time to do other stuff that's important. I just want to ask one follow-up question. When I looked through your values, they're very clean and they seem simple, some of 'em are a little harder than others, but I'm curious how they translate internationally. You say you operate in 60-plus countries and I don't have a good feel for the culture overlap with all of those. Some of 'em are pretty sensitive values. How has it, or does this humanity, this general purpose of we're all the same and we're all just trying to get by and

we're all trying to take care of our kids and our family, does that supersede? I'm just curious, the global overlay on that cultural definition.

Darren Murph:

They work because they're internationally derived, and this is really where everyone can contribute starts to matter a lot. The values at GitLab weren't just designed by the executive team and enforced upon everyone. They are co-created. Everyone in the company has the ability to submit a proposal to tweak or add or even remove sub-values and values in the company and that's how they've been grown over the years. In 2020 alone, there were over 100 different changes and iterations to the Values page, so when I say it's a living, breathing document, I mean it. 100 in a year. That's a very active page.

Jeff Frick:

Is that the subs or, so break that down for us a little bit 'cause that's pretty significant. This is a fundamental pillar of your company, you guys, and I saw some videos doing some research for this. The CEO's even talking about getting called out for specific things. How does it both be dynamic as well as foundational?

Darren Murph:

A lot of those changes are relatively small. As part of our iteration value, we celebrate the small changes. For example, if you see a run-on sentence or you see formatting that doesn't look correct, then you make a proposal to change that. Some of them are very minor facelifts for example, but some of them are more significant. We went through this process where we started realizing there were a lot of sub-values. Is there a process for removing them if it doesn't suit the scale of the company anymore or so on and so forth? And so we had an amazing team member that put together a proposal for this is what the removal process looks like and it further defined something that is helping us to be more intentional and more focused, and a lot of them have actually been combined. We've noticed that there's been some duplicative sub-values, and for a company that's all about having a single source of truth, it's nice to galvanize people on, "Look at these every day. Can we make them better?" And that's really the spirit of it.

Jeff Frick:

Right. Right. All right, last question. You sit here and you talk to a lot of smart people and you're really in a catbird seat when it comes to this. What are people that are either new to it or not paying as close of attention just 'cause they're busy with their day jobs, what are they missing? What's the big thing that they think they know what's coming but they don't really know?

Darren Murph:

The future of work is going to be about people organizing their lives based on the lives they want to live, not on the job they want. Many companies are vastly underestimating the significance and the permanence of this change. A lot of companies are thinking, "We've let people work from home before. It's just like an expanded version of that." It's not like that at all. We've had the entire globe shift their perception of what work can and should be and especially

what the ratio of work and life should be, so expectations are forever changed, and I think it's interesting. I have a almost three-year-old now. I think when he enters the workforce, it's going to be almost comical to him that for many years, the default was people left their homes, got in a vehicle or a subway and gave away hours of their day to go into a building, open a laptop, and complete work digitally. Even when you say it out loud right now, it seems comical, but I think in 15, 20 years, it's going to be one of those like, "I was there when" type of moments that we laugh at our parents saying now. That's the one that we're going to share with the future generation.

Jeff Frick:

Right. Right. They're all going to laugh and then they're going to say, "People used to drive cars? Are you kidding? You have to sit and operate this thing?"

Darren Murph:

Yeah, it's fair. It's like, "What were these, commutobiles?" Yeah, it's going to be interesting.

Jeff Frick:

Darren, it's always great to catch up and congratulations on your success. For the people that haven't, again, you've got so much great material out there. The fact that you have such a sharing and open-source ethos and culture, I think, is as exciting a part of the story as any because it's all out there for us all to take and to learn and even to contribute back if we see something significant, so thank you very much. Thanks for being a voice out there and really appreciate the time today, really, really, every time I talk to you, I learn something new.

Darren Murph:

Happy to do it, Jeff. Thanks all for listening.

Jeff Frick:

Thank you and have fun with that little guy.

Darren Murph:

That's the plan. Thank you, sir.

Jeff Frick

All right. Take care. Thank you.

Darren Murph:

Always a pleasure. Thanks for doing this, man.

**Darren Murph: Remote-First, Asynch Communications, Operating Manual |
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English Transcript**

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