



Steve Garguilo, Johnson & Johnson

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### Transcript:

Bailey (00:01):

Welcome to get together. It's our show about ordinary people, building extraordinary communities. I'm your host Bailey Richardson. I'm a partner at people and company and a co author of get together how to build a community with your people of fire colored special short book with Kevin. Hi, Kevin,

Kevin (00:25):

That's me. I'm Kevin co-host for today's podcast and Bailey's business partner at Beeville and company. That's our strategy company, where we advise orgs on how to create purposeful communities.

Bailey (00:37):

In each episode of this podcast, we interview everyday people who have built extraordinary communities about just how they did it. How did they get those first people to show up? How did they grow to hundreds, maybe thousands, more people today we're talking to Steve Garguilo. He's a partner at cultivate and an author of the book. Search your guide to put any idea into action. When I first met Steve and heard his life story, I was so dang excited to get him on our podcast early



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in his career. Steve did what I would say is the impossible. He led a grassroots transformation of the culture of Johnson and Johnson, which is the fifth largest company in the world. They have something like 130,000 employees. That's a lot. It's a lot. Steve was frustrated by the pace and challenges of the big company culture who's new to and decided to do something that he'd done in college.

Bailey (01:33):

Host a TEDx. He hosted a casual Johnson and Johnson TEDx event at a bar and soon others wanted to get in on the idea, sharing their research up on stage, hearing wild ideas and learning more about their colleagues. By the time Steve was done, 23,000 people at Johnson and Johnson had engaged in one of these TEDxes and Steve, an engineer by trade had been hand selected by the head of HR at Johnson and Johnson, to join that team and do more of this work as head of instigation at Johnson and Johnson. Now he's a partner at cultivate and does some of this transformative work that he did at Johnson and Johnson for other companies, Kevin. Hello? Hello. What's something that you learned from our conversation today with Steve,

Kevin (02:20):

You know, Steve reminded me how these community building principles that we keep coming back to. They hold up. When you're thinking about bringing people together within a company, we spotlight a lot of stories on this part about groups outside of work. And honestly, since the pandemic started, people company has actually been taking on more strategy work with orcs, hoping to build intentional communities with employees and more of this internal versus kind of external around their business clients. Steve's experience underscores, you know, one of our tenants, which is you can't fake the funk, you know, genuine passion, attracts passionate

Bailey (03:00):

People. That's what Steve encountered at J and J when he craved a community that shared ideas and an encouraging environment, and he found others that cared about that too. Let's jump in with Steve in El



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Paso. Are you ready at Kev? Steve incoming go, Steve, welcome to the podcast. I want to jump right in. I love your personal story and your professional background in history. So if you don't mind, can you take us back to the early 2010s you were at Johnson and Johnson and you became what you would describe as a community instigator. Where were you at at life back then and what motivated you to become an active participant in the community at Johnson and Johnson?

Steve (03:42):

Well, thank you for inviting me to a today's get together. Appreciate it. So yeah, if I go back to that point in time I was early in my career, fresh out of school newly minted engineer. They, they tell you some propaganda at Penn state that like one out of every seven engineers in the world is a Penn state engineer, which can not possibly be true, but that's like this thing that they tell you. But

Bailey (04:08):

That's an interesting thing to say. You're like you are the world, right?

Steve (04:12):

It's like one out of seven feels like too many, but so I, I get into a lot of these big companies have these leadership development programs, you get to come in and learn the company and that stuff. So I decided to cool it, this is what I want to do. And I had this opportunity to do something I'm really passionate about, which is work on projects, focused on emerging markets. So I had responsibility for middle East Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa and thinking about market appropriate products in those regions. And it was exciting to be able to come in and be told, Oh, we want you to come with new ideas and fresh perspectives and how might we do things differently? And yet I found that it was actually a challenge to actually do those things, even though the encouragement was to do those things. And so I kind of started looking around the company for, okay, who are people who have been successful to any degree in making new ideas happen and making interesting things happen. And so really the stuff that led me towards



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anything community related was really a selfish desire to learn how do I actually get stuff done in this company? How do I actually make new or interesting things happen in this company? And so I just would go around and talk to anybody who would talk to me. And that's, I guess, how the journey started.

Bailey (05:37):

There's so many things about your background. Like you said, you being an engineer, you were involved in TEDx at Penn state and you were like, I've done all these amazing adventures. Like you've been to, I think, is it a hundred countries, you did the Mongol rally, like you're, you're such a dynamic person. How did you become such a proactive person? I think a lot of people get frustrated, a company culture, and they just lean back on their heels and kind of just like do the minimum viable effort and survive. And, and you instead leaned in and Sheryl Sandberg, shout out you leaned on your, you know, into the problem and became an active participant in changing it. And I'm just curious, like, where do you think that comes from from you?

Steve (06:17):

I actually once paid for a taxi ride in Ecuador with a copy of lean in. So it has, it has incredible social currency around the world, but, but I think for me, the, the biggest, I guess, driving factor of trying to be proactive or trying to figure it out, it was this recognition that like, I actually had a really strong connection to the purpose of J and J as a company that's focused on how do you help people live longer, healthier, happier lives and, you know, across consumer healthcare and med device and pharma, and, you know, I know that the healthcare industry there's a lot of different perspectives and perceptions about, you know, what it does and what's good and what's bad. And I think a lot of those, those things are valid. But I felt, I felt a pretty strong connection towards saying like, yeah, I believe in that I want to work towards figuring out what's my slice towards how I do that.

Steve (07:08):



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And so that's what kind of led me down that path, I guess, but, but I do think, yeah, going into big company is it's, it can be the wild West in terms of figuring it out and figuring out culture. And I think the biggest thing for me, that's, that's helped keep me aligned towards what I want to do is being really aligned to the purpose of the organization. Like if you can't get up every day feeling committed to the purpose of that big company, then I do think it's probably a lot harder to be proactive and figuring out what am I going to get done.

Bailey (07:40):

I want to ask you now about Ted. So you had an experience with Ted at Penn state is as far as I've read and you decided, eh, you know, as sort of one of the actions that you are going to take within Johnson and Johnson to have more, maybe a opportunity to express ideas, explore ideas innovate a little with your coworkers, that you would bring the Ted format into Johnson and Johnson. And I'm curious, you know, can you share a bit about your background with Ted and, and why do you think you felt so drawn to it?

Steve (08:16):

I think it was when I was in school and sometime around like, Oh seven Oh eight when I first saw a Ted talk probably in a class and it was like, Oh, these are kind of cool. And I remember in like 2009 scrolling through Facebook and seeing a friend was going to something called TEDx CMU at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh. And I was like, Oh, that's cool. These things are happening at universities. And it's like, well, when's the one at Penn state. And it's like, well, there wasn't one. It's like, maybe we can do it. And so put together a team and we did the first TEDx PSU. And I think I had viewed it at that point in time as kind of being this one-off kind of thing. That was just fun. But it was seeing the impact after that, where it was like three of our speakers had like their lives pretty profoundly changed based on their talk.

Steve (09:04):



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W one of whom who had this like little thing called this race relations project at Penn state where he was bringing students from Iran and Israel to talk with students in central Pennsylvania. And it was based on his talk kind of going viral now has, I don't know how many millions of views they ended up establishing this whole new center for him at the university. He's been able to totally scale what he's been doing there. Another woman who talked about engaging boys and learning, using gaming got invited to be on this white house council for boys to men. She's now a Dean at this other university, like the really big deal. And that kind of gave me this pause that like, Oh, there's something kind of powerful about amplifying, you know, relatively unknown voices in a community and allowing for their ideas to spread.

Steve (09:52):

And so I think that insight combined with me coming into this big company and trying to find, you know, who are people who have interesting ideas and are able to make them happen, I think kind of clicked for me one day to think, well, what might it look like to try to do something like a TEDx program inside of a, a big company? And so at that time it hadn't yet happened. It wasn't yet a thing. And so I remember talking to the team at Ted and they're like, yeah, sounds cool. And so I just applied and just did it like no one at J and J was like, Oh yes, you're the one allowed to do this, whatever it was just like, I'm just going to sign up and do it, and we're going to do a small event. Yeah, exactly. And so it was like, let's just do a small event with three speakers at a bar after hours, like see who shows up. And so that's kinda how it, how it got started.

Bailey (10:47):

Tell me a little bit more about that first event. It sounds like you had like a, almost like a work stream of, of building up your list of names and relationships with other people who had changed the culture or had seen an innovative idea through at Johnson and Johnson. What went into making this first decision? Like why was it at a bar? Who



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did you invite? What, what speakers spoke anything to just kind of bring to life, how you shipped to that first event?

Steve (11:15):

Yeah, I think like it was at a bar, cause it was free to do it at a bar and it felt like better than doing it at the office, like trying to do something that shakes up the environment a little bit. And then in terms of, yeah, the folks who were invited and participated, it was ultimately like, I guess, I didn't know that I was kind of list-building at that point in time, but I would have built my list of interesting people and just fired out to say like, Hey, this is happening. And I think it was within something like 90 minutes, like the seats were filled and stuff, which is kind of like, okay, that's like a cool feeling like there's interest in this. And then those first couple of speakers were people who I had also kind of met along the way of people who seemed like, Hey, they're, they're advancing change in J and J that's the kind of stuff that I personally think is cool.

Steve (12:02):

So let's see if other people think it's cool. Cause I'd love to see more people doing stuff like that. Of course there's some run-up to it. And you know, the first steps was really like deciding, Hey, does this seem like a good idea or something worth doing asked that around to some people kind of recruited a small team that had helped put it together. So there was definitely groundwork, but like not a ton of groundwork in analysis paralysis either of just like, Hey, this is going to happen. It's going to be small. We'll see, you know, what it's all about. And then it was, it was kind of after that, when it, when it started getting just more interesting and much bigger than I expected. And like, I wouldn't have called it at that point in time. It community in annual cycle though, maybe it was, Hey, the first people interested in this kind of thing.

Steve (12:47):





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But it was when I put the talks on like this little intranet site internally, and I started getting calls from different people around the company. I got a call from this person in Brazil who was like, can we do TEDx at our campus is like, sure. But this team in like Singapore, a team outside of Toronto and Canada, like people started kind of coming out of the woodwork and self-selecting to say, this seems like a cool format for us to get, to showcase some interesting things happening in the company. And, you know, and people's ideas who might not otherwise have a forum. So I somehow kind of became like the center of helping people out in doing that. And really that's when it became clear like, Oh, this is really building a community of the innovators and the change makers and the people around the company who want to challenge the status quo. And that ultimately became pretty powerful force.

Bailey (13:39):

How did that first event feel? You know, you'd been to other Ted X's and I, I sometimes like to ask people, how did they know to keep going or to keep organizing? Was it because of the nature of the event or was it like you said, just because other people in other offices in another regions really wanted it in their local, local Johnson and Johnson environment.

Steve (13:59):

Yeah. I think there's a combination of both obviously getting cold emails and phone calls from people in the company is you know, an encouraging sign and kind of an exciting thing. But I think there was, yeah, definitely. Also I talk sometimes when you talk about doing events like these metrics of, of goosebump moments and shining eyes and kind of being able to look out and, and see those shining eyes and have a sense that like people are, are really transfixed and engaged and excited about having the chance to share and others stories and have this space for ideas and conversation. That was really a motivating factor. I mean, I think the impact stories out of that first small event, weren't quite like the level of the things from, from Penn state of like, you know, starting a whole new center at a





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university, but, but one of the speakers who had talked about her journey with heart disease ended up being able to make a connection, to collaborate on some of J and J initiatives in that space and actually ended up starting a foundation based on that.

Steve (15:02):

And now she's like doing, speaking around the world or whatever, and this is someone who's like, like one of my favorite parts about working with speakers is people who don't want to speak or like to speak or feel like they know how to speak. There's now this professional circuit of people who want to go around and do talks and do all that, which is fine. It's, it's an industry and it's a job, but then there's the judge just like average person who just like, I just kind of want to do my thing. And it is terrifying the idea of having to go up and talk about it. And I love getting a chance to kind of help those people break out of their shells a little bit and share like, Hey, there's this really interesting way you see the world that I think can flip a switch in some other people's brains too. And like, let's allow for that to happen if you're game for it. And I'm sure you've experienced any of this. I know you've experienced this of like when you just wake up super excited to work on something. And it's like, I was super excited to get to work on this and try to do this. And so continuing to, to feed that energy, it wasn't an option to not do that.

Kevin (16:04):

Was there an initial reaction from you know, quote unquote leadership or other folks at the company that, you know, either helps sort of fan the flames with what you're doing or the opposite

Steve (16:16):

In the, in early days that this wouldn't have even been in something that was on any of like leadership's radar really that now what was interesting is like we intentionally tried to curate audiences so that they are diverse and egalitarian. And that does mean that you have some people there who, you know, Oh, have some fancy title and some



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people who don't one of the blessings and curses about a company like J and J with 140,000 people, is that someone who might be a really big deal in your function, in your unit, in your little group of like, Oh my goodness, that's this VP. And I have to talk to her this way and be buttoned up one unit away from that. Nobody knows who that person is or, or care. And so nobody's going to be weird around that person that like, Oh, she's a VP.

Steve (17:02):

Cause like they don't even know. And so like, we intentionally would do things like title isn't even part of like your introduction or it's not even part of your name, badge, just not part like, like I think we did work really intentionally to make it much more of an egalitarian space. And I think it took quite some time until that even got on anybody's radar in terms of what's what's really happening here. I mean, it was, it was, it was two years in and probably 30 some events in wow. Before I got a call from the head of HR who flew me from, cause I was, I was working in Switzerland who flew me to the headquarters in the U S and met with me once. And he was like, we need to talk just, yeah, it was just, it was, it was actually kind of that it was kind of like, who are you and what are you doing?

Steve (17:54):

And about like 10 minutes into the meeting, he's like, wait, but no, who, who are you? And, and it was actually, it was a, it was a pivotal moment in the course of events because it was at that point in time when he was like, okay, cool, I'm going to be engaged in this now, which obviously, as you can imagine, pros and cons, but he's like, I'm going to be your sponsor. You're going to come work for me. We're going to start a department now focused on how do we create a culture of innovation at the company, and we're going to build it on the back of this community and how we empower people. And that led led to us being able to do way more than just TEDx events. And that turned into building out digital platforms and building out immersions and workshops and development experiences and getting to actually work more intentionally with the C-suite and kind of his peers on what are



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they doing to help empower people. And so it was a, it was a real inflection point when that finally did happen, but it's almost like there's no way that could have happened unless there was that two years of being under the radar for

Kevin (19:04):

Hmm. Just to underscore something that you, you know, you said, it sounds like folks were showing up perhaps immediately for inspiration, you said for new ideas, but one of the, kind of more, a secret like outputs or benefits was the bridging that happened both across, you know, the fancy titles and the less fancy titles and across the organization across departments that, as you said, like at the end of the day, these folks, you know, it's such a huge company with such so many different like nooks and crannies that this sort of gathering, if you just bring the sort of people in that are interested in a certain topic, you're going to start bridging some of these. And that's something that, you know, is so important for an organization to be able to work more effectively.

Steve (19:47):

Totally. There, there was always this saying in J and J of if, if only J and J knew what J and J knew which is, which is a classic challenge in big companies where it's like, you have this tremendous expertise here in this area, and you have people in need of this expertise out here in this other area. But they're, they're so vastly disconnected. And so trying to find ways to do that, I mean, that's actually a lot of people's experiences with, you know, innovations such as buzzword, but like a lot of people's experience with innovation at big companies is often with what I call these, like where ideas go to die platforms, which is with the best of intentions, people will set up some website that says, Hey, exactly. Like, Hey, submit your ideas. And like, one of you will get picked and you'll get a Starbucks gift card.

Steve (20:37):

And then like, your idea will happen. And it's like, it sounds so well-intentioned like, we want to listen to our employees, but like so



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frequently what happens is people share ideas and they say, well, I shared my ideas, no one did anything with it. It just kind of sat there. And so it's kind of flipping it around a little bit and, and creating a space for people to share ideas and then helping empower them to say, cool, now you go do something with it. Here is this diverse group of people from around the company in different functions, in different spaces who you can now connect with to work, to make it happen. And some of our most successful community members totally would approach things that way, where it's like, you know, Hey, you have this opportunity. There's this woman Magda, who was like, you have this opportunity to share this, this kind of crazy idea that your boss hates and doesn't want you to be talking about, but it's like you work on a [inaudible], which is the nasal delivery of ketamine anti-depression drug.

Steve (21:32):

She's very passionate about mental health, very passionate about depression says in addition to the pharmaceutical intervention, I actually think we could change the way we diagnose depression through video game play. And at the time like the mattress scale was pretty much, that's the way that depression gets diagnosed, a clinician asking a series of questions to a patient and making a determination. And she thought was actually through people's decision-making in video games, you could actually have a more efficacious understanding of what might be their condition. And so she kind of shared this idea out with the company through one of our community programs. And it was based on people coming up to her afterwards and say, Hey, I love this idea. Great. You're now my clinical person. Great. You're now my finance person, great. You're now my supply chain person, whatever it is and could build these diverse skunkworks teams. And that was how she ended up getting like the first ever video game through a clinical trial and actually getting something launched in this partnership with Microsoft. And it was like, when you can create spaces like that and allow for things like that to happen, then it's like, that's how, you know, you're, you're not just transforming the company, but you're making an impact to our, our ultimate stakeholders.



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Bailey (22:50):

Hmm. Is there anything that, that might keep a company from creating that kind of space? You know, we hear a lot of folks talking about the politics that show up in internal community building when we do projects there and, and, you know, sort of a silos and the dynamics of power that are at play in a company setting. And I'm curious, you know, do those things matter or what things do matter that could keep something like what happened to Johnson and Johnson happening other places

Steve (23:21):

It's tough for me sometimes to reflect on these kinds of questions, because it's almost like knowing what I know now, I would, I would know too much to have been able to make what happened at J and J happened. Cause I would have been approaching it way too intentionally and smartly and structured Lee and whatever that it's like, why wasn't thinking about any of those things. I wasn't trying to create a community. It wasn't like, so there's aspect of naivete and just being able to fly under the radar and saying, you know what, I'm not going to try to do this big bang approach. And we're going to change the culture of the company and we're going to start a community for that. And those feel like really big things that when you make them big, they're now big promises to the organization. They're now expectations to the organization.

Steve (24:05):

There's a lot of baggage that comes with doing stuff like that versus the total, like, Hey, I'm just a random person in the company trying to do something and we see what happens and there's no expectations and there's no baggage and there's no any of that. So like when we talk about kind of what senior leaders roles are versus the random person in the organization that just wants to start something, I think it gets to that dynamic of like, how do you as an HR leader or an executive work to not be a squasher, which is the most common thing of like, what are these people doing? I have a community initiative. I



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own community in our OKR is as the organization, why is this person trying to do this and, and squashing it, or squeezing the life out of it in some way, instead of viewing your role as a, as a connector and a facilitator and a supporter of those kinds of things. And recognizing that like, Oh my goodness, don't you just see, like, this person just saved you so much work. They're already building this great community. Like, why wouldn't you want to support them doing that instead of feeling like you need to be the one who does it in this specific kind of way. So I think it can be really hard sometimes for leaders to see their roles that way.

Bailey (25:24):

Yeah. I mean, I think what I hear there is that it, you know, if you're an HR professional and a senior level, you've probably spent your lifetime at work, your work lifetime developing points of view and maybe principles and maybe processes and how do you grow expertise, but also keep openness. And I think one of the things that Kevin drew for our book is this community spectrum of control. And on one side of the spectrum is a stranglehold. And on the other side is a free for all. And you know, our argument almost always within a professional context is to move more towards like less control. That's a long way of saying that what I hear is there's actual like strategic value in giving up some of the control that you might be tempted to have when you're a manager, when you're a more senior level leader at a company, if you do want new ideas to emerge.

Steve (26:19):

Absolutely. Yeah. And that, and that's one of the reasons why I get together as part of our welcome package for new employees. So it's one of about six books with originals and rebels at work and a few other things more specific to like, you know, change-making inside companies, but that community building piece of it is huge. So I'm a, I'm a big fan.

Bailey (26:41):



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You don't work exactly in. And we don't work exactly an internal culture building, but those things overlap. And one of the big principles that we agree on is we call these people, your hand raisers, you call them, you know, cultivators or change-makers. But you know, in our first email exchange, you replied to me and said my passion is really in unearthing and amplifying makers inside really big companies and helping connect them to form a movement. Why are these people so important in your words?

Steve (27:18):

Yeah. I mean, you also just said, why they're so important, right? In those hand, raisers are the people who are just showing up with so much energy and passion and commitment to the organization's vision. Right? You talked about that commitment to purpose and a desire to say like, Hey, let's get some stuff done. Like I want to make this happen. I want to make something happen better. Like, how are we thinking about how we're working? How are we thinking about what we're working on? And like, I'm always collecting good cultivators stories. I think at some point I want to launch like an Instagram account. That's just like cultivators stories. Cause I have like a massive Google doc, but like some of my favorites are ones that I think are almost more popularized in the lexicon now. Right. But people like Richard Martinez, who was the janitor at Frito-Lay who one day the manufacturing line breaks down.

Steve (28:05):

He it's, it's just plain Cheetos that don't have their orange dust on them yet. So he'd like take some home, put some chili powder on them. It's like, Hey, this tastes really good. And somehow gets to the CEO's office with his makeshift little bag. And these chili powder on these plain Cheetos and says, I think this could be something. And Frito-Lay says, yes, you know what? It can be a flaming hot Cheetos is now their number one selling snack product. Richard is now a vice president at the company. Right. And you have so many stories like this

Bailey (28:35):





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Selling snack product. It's

Steve (28:37):

The number one selling Frito-Lay snack product.

Bailey (28:39):

Oh my gosh, this is how I relate to community leaders is how you relate to these people. You do need to make this book. I want to read all these stories.

Steve (28:47):

One of the coolest things about leaving J and J and, and going to work with other big companies is you, you know, you have that fear right. Of like, is, is anything I know going to apply or be relevant elsewhere? Or am I totally taking this leap that is completely unfounded and will not resolve

Bailey (29:06):

That. I feel that. Yeah, totally

Steve (29:08):

Right. And I think the thing that has been so comforting and exciting is that these cultivators are everywhere. Every company has them. And it's a people who might have some office in a basement with no windows somewhere. It's not where you expect most of the time, but simply empowering. These people is like, it's the key to all the locks, like everything else that people talk about, about culture and employee engagement and retention and all these big buzzwords that people have massive strategies behind. It's like empower these cultivators and try to help support them to make more cultivators and connect them around the organization. It's like that unlocks the rest of it. Let them tell you the things that you need to do so frequently. It's, you know, we want to bring in this big strategic, this big management consulting firm and sit behind the kind of glass windows of the conference room and figure out our new values and our new whatever.



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Steve (30:03):

And it's like, who are the people on the outside looking in there, who, and I say this about myself as a consultant. Like I don't breathe nearly as much passion for your company. As these people do that. People who've worked there for X number of years who show up every day, thinking, how do I make this company better? You should be listening to them way more than you should be listening to me. I mean, I can help facilitate a process to help you find them and make sure you're listening to them and make sure you're empowering and supporting them. But at the end of the day, their ideas are going to be way better than anything I can come up with.

Bailey (30:37):

You sound like my business partner, Kevin, when right now,

Kevin (30:41):

No, it didn't. It just reminds me of how we, we start almost every single one of our our labs and sprints and jam sessions with clients with this line that is, you know, your people way better than we do. You care about your people. That's why we didn't come with baked ideas. We came with a process. And what we need from you is to, you know, put on your hat and think about kind of your people and what they care about and bring that to this session. Don't trust. Our ideas is actually really don't. And that's something that we had to honestly like learn ourselves through the process. But I remember as we continue to take on more projects, that it was just further from our world across different industries, there was just a need to trust kind of the people who really know what they care about.

Steve (31:26):

Totally. And then also like allowing for them to be part of those conversations as well. Right. We're so frequently, it's like we, as the leadership team do this brainstorm, it's like, no, you don't like, we've got to get them in here for this. Right.

Bailey (31:38):



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So how do you pinpoint these other cultivators? Like where do you look for them? How do you look for them? How do you, you know, vacuum them out of giant organizations?

Steve (31:48):

Yeah. I think it's the most common question. And it's the biggest challenge, quite frankly. And I think the thing is, is that people either, when they, when they are one, honestly the people who are asking this question are people who feel like they are one and they want to find more cause they feel really lonely. Right. And it's that whole thing of like being that individual pirate ship versus that moment that you have finally built this Armada of other pirate ships around the organization. Exactly. And the power that you have. And so it's, how do I find other people like this? And it can feel really lonely and hard because everybody in your staff meeting might just feel like, yeah, these people are all just kind of content with like working like this. And I feel like I'm the insane one. That's good follow that intuition, but it's about being able to look elsewhere.

Steve (32:33):

And so I think there's, there's a bunch of different ways that you can do it. Like one is obviously just about being to look, there's the kind of mass thing that like I did at J and J, which was like, let me just go meet with anybody who will meet with me. And I can have a sense in a conversation if like, yeah, this seems like this is someone who's like, I'm going to be my person. Right. And so like, who else should I meet with? And kind of doing it that way, which can take a lot of time. Sure. But I think, honestly, the thing I always come back to, if you want to get more of these people to come out of the woodwork, the best thing that you can do yourself is just be one, like do, be one to the extreme of like organize an event around a shared interest or a shared challenge, throw out an invite, see who comes like that's going to be a really good, you know, arbiter of like the people who showed up there, there's probably something there or create a new project focused on advancing an idea or something that you want to make happen, reach out to people, see who responds, see, who helps.



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Steve (33:29):

Right? Like who are the people who are organizing the random totally. Like who are the people who are organizing the random tech Tuesday lunch thing? Why is that person doing that? How long has that person been doing that? Like, what's that person's deal. There are a lot of different ways to do it. But I think just getting started by acting like one is great. And then when you start to become in more of a position of influence and figuring it out, you know, there's different things of like, you can, over-index at first on more extroverted people, but cultivators are not all extroverted people. And so there's a lot of different pieces to it. But yeah, I think the biggest thing is like not giving up on the idea that I'm alone and there aren't any others it's, there are others and I'm going to work at it every day to find and support them.

Bailey (34:14):

What qualities do you think these people have? You know, you said maybe they're not necessarily extroverted. Maybe they're not necessarily introverted. What are some of the consistent qualities, personalities, like you said, they're purpose driven, but what, how do you describe these people?

Steve (34:31):

Yeah. And I think it depends a little bit on what, like, cause there's there cultivators broadly, right? Of just people who are changed minded and want to make a difference in the company. And then there can be cultivators for specific purposes. Right. But ultimately I think it's, it's definitely things like their curiosity, their willingness to take action in doing something, their willingness to voice kind of their concerns, whether that's in a more extroverted way or in an introverted way, if you're, if you're helping to support that coming out their ability to push back on people or desire to push back on people sometimes has to come first. And then the ability comes later. I think a lot of it centers back on their commitment to the purpose of the organization and their desire when they show up every



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day to say, you know, I want to make something better. I want to make something different. There's this misnomer about change, right? That it's like, if people don't like change, that's not true. People like their own change. People just don't like change that was loudly communicated to them that they didn't have a say in. Right. And so I think it's a matter of being able to listen and support that and that like, you know, a lot of people are like potential cultivators. If you help kind of support them in the right couple of ways.

Bailey (35:49):

I love that. It sounds like this baby really beautiful, tight rope balance was walked. You didn't have grand ideas. You weren't setting out to change the culture. You just wanted to create a space to hear new ideas and push new ideas into the world I grew and grew and grew. And then you get flown to the head of HRS office and have a sit down and imagine there's some people out there who are, are high up in some form of an HR position or HR professional listening to this. What, what would you say to them about how they can help an internal movement like this pop-up or how they can help change makers in their organization? What is, what are things that HR teams can formally do or informally do to help create conditions where this is possible?

Steve (36:41):

Yeah, I think, I mean, part of it is that mindset as an HR leader of like Quasha versus connector, right. And how am I making sure that if something does pass my radar, what am I doing to help connect them to the right people or support them or mentor them or shepherd them along to kind of allow for it to happen. So part of it is, is that once things do cross your radar, I think another part of it is like, how am I actively looking so that these things can cross my radar more frequently? And how in touch am I with the organization? It's really easy for HR professionals to get very caught up in HR. That's the most dangerous place from which to see the organization. And so getting out of the like HR bubble, part of it is an important part too.

Steve (37:29):



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But then when you look across all the different parts of HR, I think it's, it's using empowerment as a driving principle behind all of those activities and saying that like, if we're focused on leadership development in the company, how do we make sure we're not just focused on leadership development for the very top executives in the company, because that's what happens most frequently is that like, well, our top executives and our future CEOs and these people get all this access to stuff and then the lower down into the organization, maybe there's some online video thing you can click through and whatever, but like, are we really focused on development of the whole company or are we just focused on executives? And so I think that's, that's a big part of it. You know, a lot of these man behind the curtain HR functions that are looking at those things like, well, who's our future X and our future, why they're doing that based on a set of assessment criteria that say, well, this person's taken on this role and done this thing and checked this box and done this stuff.

Steve (38:23):

And they're not often looking at some of those things that are indicative of someone being a cultivator. And whereas like those are actually people who are going to be, I think, much more likely. And this is some of the research we do. We have this big research partnership with the feral center for innovation at Penn state where we do research specifically on this that's focused on like, these are actually people, the people who show up in this way are, are much more likely to be successful in some of these roles, but you're not considering them for these roles. And cultivators quite frequently have to jump between companies, even though they don't want to, they, they love often the company they're working for, but if it doesn't take too long, under some bad managers or some bad direction to say, you know, I don't think I can realize my potential here. I got to go somewhere else. And so focusing on these people is I think really critical to the success of, of big organizations.

Bailey (39:17):



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Yeah. Now you're a partner at a company that you started called cultivate and you focus on these issues on driving culture change through working with change makers, with cultivators at different organizations. Is there something that you've just been had absolutely affirmed and something that you've questioned through applying your thinking elsewhere?

Steve (39:41):

I mean, definitely the affirmation that cultivators are everywhere, right? They're there in every organization and every type of organization and actually the trend. So just in the last three and a half years since I left J and J all the different enterprise tools that are now out there that actually help make it easier for cultivators to, to be spotted and to connect and to find each other tools like teams are actually like incredibly

Bailey (40:05):

Fabulous in it who doesn't know

Steve (40:06):

Right. Microsoft team. So essentially, you know, Slack, but more frequently being used in big companies and actually with a lot more capabilities, but things like the ability to, to throw up a Microsoft teams space and be able to easily collaborate with other people and, and build a community in that space is tremendous. Or even things like Microsoft stream, which is almost like an internal YouTube capability is allowing for, for cultivators inside companies to essentially build an audience the same way people build an audience out in the world on the whole worldwide web, right? Of like, yes, you could start a YouTube channel, unboxing, whatever, and build an audience that way you can also start kind of a stream channel in your company and start to build an audience that way. And I'm seeing more and more of people taking advantage of that and doing that.

Steve (40:52):





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And I think it's, it's a, it's a, it's a tremendous level of excitement seeing that and just knowing how much that's going to continue to grow in the coming years. So again, that just affirms all this stuff about cultivators. I mean, one of the interesting things and we're working in some different companies is like words like leadership development in some companies are actually kind of dirty words. Like they're not really prioritized which is kind of unfortunate and sad, but also just like interesting to know that like, Oh, I've spent a lot of time in a company where that was really valued and there's other companies where you have to position things differently.

Bailey (41:28):

Why is that? What is, what is the reason to sort of reject leadership development? Because it's viewed as

Steve (41:34):

An unnecessary investment when you're really focused on bottom line and business outcomes. Right. And so, but I think what that means then is just getting savvy enough to how do you tie things like empowerment and things like internal community building towards those business outcomes and towards things like customer centricity and efficiency and things that aren't, you know, things that like, yes, the development and retention and engagement is kind of baked into those, but it's not the hero in those conversations. So I think that, you know, that's been an interesting one and then I think the other interesting one has been because my experience with J and J being embedded and also being, you know, over the course of really like a six year journey at getting so big and kind of doing all this stuff is that at first, I think we were trying to tackle a lot of our work focused on like a whole company perspective.

Steve (42:29):

And I think now we are much more intentional about focusing on like kind of a departmental perspective. And it doesn't mean being siloed in that department. But what it means is if, for example, we're



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working with an innovation team and they're part of this innovation department that says our objective is to do X, then it's, then what we're focused on is just helping them kind of build their community and power people in their space around what they want to do. And then you grow from there. So for example, have a client that has like their fancy innovation lab, which they've defined their innovation processes. And we have these, you know, four week sprints and then this four month sprints and this four hour thing and blah, blah, blah. And they were talking to me once about like, Oh, well we have, you know, the people who go through or are our alumni.

Steve (43:18):

And one of our alumni once tried to steal one of our books to run one of their workshops and their work and whatever. And it's like, they were so closed and so controlling over everything. And, and the thing is I actually get that and can empathize with it because especially when it comes to stuff like innovation, there's so much baggage of so many failed innovation initiatives that people who are entrusted with running these types of things now feel like the worst thing in the world would actually be someone taking my tools and my processes that I spend a ton of time developing and making good and going and running that with someone else and, and it being bad. And the people in that are now totally turned off to everything I'm doing at no fault of my own. And so I get having that perspective, but I think it's helping them open up, like these aren't your alumni.

Steve (44:04):

Like this is your community. These are people that you have had the chance to touch in this way and that you should be empowering them to do this. And we just need a structured way to do it right. And all this kind of stuff. So being able to, to be focused on what's a specific department in the company, what are the objectives that they have and now how are we best empowering people and connecting people to help them do that is, is really the sweet spot because they become so more. I mean, I'd hate to use the word powerful, but they really do



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become more powerful when approaching it that way. It's a huge differentiator for the people that really want to make

Bailey (44:42):

Change. One thing that we talked about when we first met is how the word community shows up in your work. You know, I think you talk a lot about culture and about change and about a company as an organism being equipped to get to where it wants to go in the future. And what role does community play in that, in your mind, how you see community show up in your work or communities show up in your work?

Steve (45:08):

You know, foundationally, we often are first focused on how do we empower the right people and help them develop the right skills and the right kind of space of what you're trying to achieve, but then ultimately if you really want them to realize change and like culture change and culture is such a big thing, right? And like there's in big companies, there's so many subcultures and it's changing in pockets and changing in small ways. Like the ways those things start to change is when you have these communities come together, if the communities have stanchions around them, right. And it's like, we believe these things we're together because of this shared interest and this strategic direction, and we're moving here and we're going to move here together. And so I think one of the examples that has probably the most focused on it right now is a lot of big companies have what the, what they'll call ERG employee resource groups or affinity groups or diversity groups, and frequently what they are is they're comprised of people working in that company who share some aspect of diversity.

Steve (46:14):

So they'll often be groups for Hispanic employees or groups for disabled employees or groups of, for veterans or whatever it is. People who share some kind of aspect of their identity. And so frequently those groups haven't really been super empowered. It's just kind of groups that like, yeah, we get together and we get to do some events and we listen to some speakers and, you know, that's kind of



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what we do as we, as we try our best to support each other. But I think people are recognizing now with, especially all the attention in 2020 on how are we really supporting our employees and creating the right kind of inclusive workplaces is they're actually empowering. These ERG is to act much more like thriving dynamic communities where it's like, yeah, not only do we share this aspect of our identities, but we're now going to work to actively try to shape policy in the company to support us. So we're going to work now to actively work, to make sure that we're represented in key roles in leadership teams or various different things that go beyond, you know, what can often be these kind of weak communities and companies that are just, just we're engaged around a shared interest, but getting towards those strong communities that also have that strategic direction and that movement aspect behind them. And I think that's, that's really the key of maturity.

Bailey (47:39):

What is your team at cultivate really trying to figure out right now? You know, we're one thing that's obvious is we're in the middle of a pandemic and that I'm sure has changed workplace culture so dramatically, but, but what's on maybe it's that, is it something else what's on your mind and what challenges are you trying to crack

Steve (47:58):

A thousand different things, right. But in terms of being able to be prioritized definitely one, one is I mentioned the research partnership that we have. So a big part of what we're focused on now is actually supporting research and working in tandem with some universities and some of our clients, and being able to get to sh to demonstrate examples and answer the questions of why this is happening this way, how others can learn from it. So that's, that's a part of it. Another thing we're focused on right now is because we have been so entrenched in our work with our clients, we've taken the chance to step back and say, how are we kind of lunching stuff that's for anyone and not just launching things specifically in client organizations. And so we actually have a correspondence course launching in January



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that we're really excited about, which is going to be for, you know, for kicking off 20, 21.

Steve (48:50):

If I want to be an empowered cultivator in my company, how, how might I best do it? And so we're going to be putting together, I think a pretty cool, you know, email-based course not like sit through a bunch of webinars and whatever, but like at your own pace here's tools, here's the community space behind it, whatever. So we're gonna have that coming, which we're really excited for. And then the other big thing right now for us is actually given our recognition of the importance of community. We said like, we really should have our like cultivating community as well. Right. And how are we helping cultivators in different companies be able to connect with each other and learn from each other and support each other in like, what are you doing at Merck and what are you doing at Google and what are you doing here? And you know, that kind of stuff. And so we're just in the early stages of our cultivator community. But for anyone who's listening, who is working for a big company trying to make change, this is the kind of stuff you're interested in of how do I show up in a way that I'm able to make change and empower others in my organization. Then please join us in the cultivator community because that's something we're actively working to to try to grow and support as well.

Bailey (50:04):

Awesome. Well, I feel like there's probably no better person to be near than you and your team and that community. So Steve, thank you so much for the time. Really appreciate it.

Speaker 4 (50:14):

If you want to connect with Steve, you can reach him@stevegargiulo.com. That's G a R G U I L O N. Or check out cultivate@cultivateall.com special thank you to our team. Thank you to Rosana cabin for engineering and editing Greg David for his design work and Katie O'Connell for marketing this episode.



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Bailey (50:36):

Thanks team can find out more about the work that Kevin Kai and I do as people and company, helping organizations get clear on who their most important people are and how to build a community with those people. By heading to our website, people.and.company. Also, if you want to start your own community or supercharge one that you're already a part of our handbook is here for you. Visit [gettogetherbook.com](#) to grab a copy. It's full of stories and learnings from conversations with community leaders like this one was Steve. Oh, last thing.

Speaker 4 (51:11):

What might it be? You're listening to a podcast or what could be, what could be possible.

Bailey (51:18):

You have some time on your hands, or you're just reflecting on this podcast later and thinking, dang, I learned so much. Maybe you could go in and review us or click subscribe even on the podcast store of your choice. That stuff really helps our podcast get out to more people. So we end every episode, just nudging you to remind you. So anyway, if you feel like doing that, that'd be rad. If not, no worries. We still appreciate you. Alright. That's it?

Speaker 4 (51:43):

Yeah. See you later.