

Episode 6 - Kay and Julian

Julian: [00:00:00] Well, he talks about the fact that our modern education system around the world basically kills creativity and children. So all children are innately creative, but once they've gone through the education system, it's squeezed it out of them. I think we do the same thing in the workplace in exactly the same way that we have these constructs.

And we have these whole ways that we try to regiment the way that people work. We basically make it very difficult for people to be creative. We really have to find new ways of unlocking that creativity and not constraining it more than anything else, more than COVID more than all of the other things.

That is the thing that we really need to address, because we're not going to solve a lot of our own company problems and we're not going to solve certainly any of the problems in the world. If we don't start getting more curious, more creative, more collaborative. Than we've ever been before

Eric: [00:00:56] creativity and disruptive innovation have become hallmarks of the tech industry. And it's clear that the longer we're apart, unable to tap into the collective creativity that comes from shared spaces and shared experiences, the more innovation will take a hit. But before we go rushing back to the offices of memory, We must acknowledge that we are at a pivotal moment when work, as we know it is ripe for disruption.

I'm Eric Kerr, and this is a holistic workplace experience podcast. In this episode, I'm joined by Kay Sargent and Julian Phillips. As we explore how past lessons can guide us to future innovations, as we embark upon this new era of work, welcome to the podcast. If you both could introduce yourself,

Kay: [00:01:42] I'm Kay.

Sargent. I am the director of workplace at HOK, which is a large architectural firm. Uh, we do work internationally and I head up our workplace team, which means I work with our clients that have multiple projects in multiple locations, all around the world. And just to kind of put that in context in 2019, uh, we did projects in 44 different countries.

Our team delivered about 55 million square feet of space. So when you have clients that have that much real estate, you can imagine they don't like surprises. So I spent a lot of time doing feature casting and thought leadership for the park. And I am based about 10 miles South of Washington, DC. Uh, actually half a mile through my backyard is Mount Vernon plantation.

George Washington's home.

Julian: [00:02:32] So I'm Julian Phillips and I'm senior vice president of global workplace solutions that Avi SPL that ABI SPL in the new version, which was the merger between wetlock and Avi SPL last year, which is now fully complete. And that was where I was for 10 years prior to, uh, to the new ABI SPF.

Um, what that means global workplace solutions is that what I do in the company is really intersect between the world of technology and the world of space, um, and design often those are two disciplines that have actually been separated from each other. And we tend to think about space and buildings and the movement of people in one particular design principle.

And we think about technology separately. Um, given everything that has actually happened, uh, in the last year and everything that we need to think about moving forward, we really have to start thinking about that as one design process. And so I spent the last year trying to figure that out and trying to figure out how we might be able to change the diet.

Um, I am North. Okay, DC. Um, I'm actually in Pennsylvania and a little village called Glen Moore. Uh, which sounds very Scottish. Doesn't it? Um, that's me.

Eric: [00:03:44] Well, I'm thrilled to have you both on the podcast and this isn't your first time meeting. I would love to kind of hear the backstory as to how you two met

Kay: [00:03:53] Julian.

I think it all started. I think I was asked several years ago to speak at a conference, uh, an AB conference about, uh, the workplace of the future. And I have. Very strong opinions about how we should and should not approach the workplace of the future. Uh, and I truly believe that we should be designing intelligently from the beginning, which means I think we should, you know, Amy and it needs to be thought about very early on.

And of course, I think maybe, I don't know, Julia, maybe that's what caught your ear when I said that. And, uh, we had a great conversation after then, and we've been fast friends since. I've spoken at many conferences together and yeah.

Julian: [00:04:36] And all around the world. K as well. Um, so, um, in fact it was HVAC, which is the AAV, um, executive conference run by fixer.

Um, and, uh, what was interesting. I was on the board of a Vixa at the time and. What K probably didn't know is that, although she was a guest speaker at this event, she was also being highlighted as a potential recruit for the board of a mixer. And it was a case of, well, let's see what she has to say. Uh, and she blew the whole audience away, uh, at that point.

And so she rapidly became part of the search committees target. And, uh, as of this year, okay. You are on the board of it. Yeah.

Kay: [00:05:17] Hi, I am. Yes. And I'm very excited about that. I did not know that. Yeah, I didn't know that Julian, so thank you for sharing, but,

Julian: [00:05:26] but I think in that very, uh, story itself shows that there are efforts being made to try and bring the world of architecture and space and design together in the world of technology.

So it's just great that, you know, Kay can sit on the board of a technology association, you know, providing that view of, of what the world of space and design and, and the future of work is from that perspective. And I think that's the kind of thing we need to see more of.

Eric: [00:05:52] So to start off our conversation today, I would love to hear a little bit more about this new project, um, that the two of you are a part of, um, work is the answer.

Julian: [00:06:04] It, it, so the very beginning. Um, and, but the idea started towards the back end of last year. And, um, it was a case of bringing together, um, a few people that, um, I knew and trusted. Uh, from different walks of a different walk of life, different perspectives, and really to try and actually have the conversation about, you know, we have this interregnum interregnum right now, uh, that the whole world has actually experienced exactly at the same time.

And the worst possible scenario is, is that when we get through this and we get. Back to some kind of normalcy, whatever that means. We end up trying to return to the way it used to be and try and just improve what used to be rather than really trying to see what we can do that is fundamentally different and better than the way it was before.

And certainly a lot of the evidence we've seen so far is that a lot of people have been in survival mode. And really just trying to think about, you know, how do I get through the next year? And then how do we automate what we've already got rather than treating the opportunity to rethink completely.

And so work workers, the answer is, is really trying to do two things. Number one, it's trying to challenge people to think differently, to be more collaborative, uh, around how do we bring all the multi-disciplines together about imagining. What work could be as opposed to what it is right now, just an improved version, and also to really try and celebrate those that have made great strides and are already doing that as well.

The, the social impact piece is, is really on the basis that historically tend to believe that the only people that can solve the big problems in the world. Whether it be climate change, whether it be social equity, whether it be political division, our governments and non-government organizations. And we tend to look at them as those.

Those are the people that will make the change, but we've never really looked at ourselves in the workplace as workers, as being that powerful movement of change. And if you think there's 3.3 billion people. Hopefully around the world and growing that are working and it's the most powerful economic force that exists in the world.

And so if we can actually get the workforce to think differently and actually play some role, even a tiny little role, maybe that will help to start to change some of the problems that we have in the world as well. So, um, that's, that's the idea and I have, um, some wonderful co-collaborators of which K is one.

Uh, and we, we. And to think along the same lines, but we do have differences in the way we look at it. And Kay, I'm sure will give her perspective. Well,

Kay: [00:08:42] yeah, I mean, Eric, so, you know, I'm gonna, I'm going to ask you a question. Uh, I want to know if you had the same reaction that we did. We had all these wonderful conversations as a group and you know, all of the seventh and

Julian kind of came out with this, uh, org as the answer statement and I kind of flipped through all this stuff and my gut reaction.

I would love to know what your gut reaction, but it's the same as you want to hear mine. Do you want to go furniture? What is it? Um, I,

Eric: [00:09:08] I think that, that, thank you. It's not very often that people ask me questions. So I appreciate that. I, you know, I think initially when I watched the video, which I think was my, my first introduction to the concept, I was like, wow, this is really pretty like, this is really, this is a lovely idea.

I feel like I'm on board. This is great. But what next, like, well, how do we turn this into something that's actionable is, was my initial response.

Kay: [00:09:33] Mine was much more guttural and it was what, what the hell is the damn question, right? That was my money. But I think that's it. What is the question and what, what are we trying to solve?

And I think. You know, one of the very first things that we did as a firm, when we really started to do this, and we had a lot of clients just kind of jumping to answers really quickly. And a lot of people had a knee jerk reaction. You know, I think we're at a very unique moment here. I've been a practicing designer for 35 years and.

There only been two other times and that entire period where we've had the opportunity to really kind of wipe the slate totally clean and never to the degree that it is now. I mean, there are front page articles in every major publication around the world about work. And workplace and what that means.

And so we have a golden opportunity right now to really think about that. And if we go small shame on us, because disruption is affected every industry and the real estate industry is ripe for disruption. And coworking started down that path in the real estate industry, but I didn't finish the job.

Right. And, um, we need to think about things more holistically and more intelligently, and we need to be honest and acknowledge that there were things that weren't working before. COVID, you know, we weren't really addressing social equity. We weren't really dealing with climate change. Stress and burnout were an all time high.

You know what work-life balance. I there's a whole variety of things. And so now we have a unique opportunity to think about how should work be going forward. And can that help us address some of these bigger issues as we go forward?

Julian: [00:11:29] And I, and I think, you know, the, the reason we settled on work is the answer is more of a provocation, um, statement specifically to initiate that response, which is, well, what is the question?

Well, the fact is there are many questions. There are many questions that are left unanswered and, um, but we do believe that work in itself. If we rethink about it, if we. Uh, work together to reimagine what it could be, not just an improvement of what was then I think we can actually, uh, use that as a powerful, um, change.

And it's not just about what companies do, because they will definitely play a role. It's also about individual workers. And I think what we're starting to see is the rise of the power, uh, of the activist worker. Uh, I noted that Google, um, Google employees and are forming their own union. Right now who would have thought, you know, West coast technology company would have a union movement coming from its own, uh, workers.

And, and the reason they're doing this is that they want to be able to have a voice, not just about their own rights. As an employee around pay and conditions, they want to be able to have an influence on what Google does in the world and they want their voice to be heard. And I think we're going to start to see more and more of that happening in the workplace.

And I think it's a genuine statement that individual workers, employees. Can make a difference if they are given the space to do that, if they're supported in that particular endeavor and it will not only, um, hopefully contribute to a better world, if they do that, I think companies will be better too, because I think they will have a more engaged, more passionate, more purposeful.

A more creative, uh, workforce than they would in this, these old fashioned constraints that we've worked through for many, many years. The one

Eric: [00:13:21] thing that really kind of comes to mind for me, just, just in all of that is. Where is the change coming from it? It's interesting. Cause it's, it's, we've, we've got kind of companies and leadership and then we've got the headlines and then

we've got society and then we have employees and like, it kind of feels like the change needs to come from every direction and that it's not going to be up to one group in particular.

To take full responsibility that everyone is going to have to be a part of this conversation. And this movement forward is kind of the one thing

Kay: [00:13:52] that that feels right. No, no, no. You're right. Erica. I think that, that is it. And I think we're at we're at a critical point and, um, you know, HR, I think, has to play a much, much bigger role in have to be much more proactive.

And I think, you know, it'll for a long time, we have been talking about, uh, human centric. Spaces. And what I mean by that is 80% of a company's money goes to their people costs. And so the most valuable asset most companies have, but they're so focused on, you know, squeezing down the real estate or pinching money here, you know, doing something here.

And they're not really thinking about how do we help people live any more sustainable way. And we need to challenge the status quo because quite frankly, the way that we've always done things isn't really working anymore. And so. If we have this opportunity right now to rethink the workplace, we have an opportunity to rethink work and the workforce and where they have to be in all of those things should absolutely be on the table right now, so that we really can address, uh, you know, how do we deal with systemic, uh, prejudiced against, you know, a whole variety of different things.

I mean, you know, we're, we're facing multiple things right now. I mean, I think one of the facts that was lost unfortunately was the three months before COVID we crossed the threshold in the United States that most people went unmarked. And it was the first time that women represented more than 50% of the workforce in the United States ever.

But because of the pandemic. Women have been laid off in a significantly higher percentage than men either because they don't get paid as much or they're, you know, they're in the types of jobs that are getting laid off or they have more responsibilities maybe in the household or more stress. And so we are back down to 1988 levels of employment of women.

We have lost 35 to 40 years, two generations worth of progress with women in the workforce. And so. You know, hence why you're seeing things like on the cover of a major New York magazine the other day about, you know, should we be paying women to stay home and raise their children because they can't get childcare and they're now they're becoming the de facto teachers and you know, all the other things.

I mean, there's lots of things out there that are being thrown out as possibilities. And I think one of the things that our group talked a lot about is. You know, we are, we are also acutely aware of the fact that if you work in an office, you're probably better off than a whole lot of people that don't, I mean, only, I think it's only like 40% of the, of the working population even goes to an office.

And there are certain countries where less than 16% of the entire workforce actually has goes to an office and or workplace. Right. And so we need to not only just think about, uh, the workplace, but just work in general and how do we really address this for everyone to ensure that we're really truly addressing better solutions?

Julian: [00:17:02] You know, I think that we've, we've talked about it earlier, and I think it's something that we do need to bear in mind is that there's a lot of conversation at the moment, which is very COVID related. In other words, how are we going to deal with a pandemic? When are we going to return, what is work going to look like to accommodate this shift?

And, and there is, there is no doubt that there are going to be certain things that will be different. Or ever moving forward, but there are a lot of things that are going to be the same as far as the need for human beings to be together, to connect and to be able to be creative. And, you know, these are, these are the kinds of things that are, is really what humanity is about.

And so, you know, a lot of the stuff around, you know, we're fundamentally going to be all working remotely and what have you that's and that's not going to happen, but there are going to be some opportunities. Which we shouldn't miss out on as well. So when we talk about inclusivity and we talk about the opportunity for bringing a more diverse workforce, there is absolutely no doubt that remote working.

Does bring opportunity for that, because it does mean you can bring people that do have childcare duties or other responsibilities who couldn't travel for work or couldn't commute in the same level. That could actually be very valuable in their contribution, but we need to make sure that if we are providing that opportunity, we support remote working better than we've done before.

I mean, it's typically been the people that work from home have been considered as the sort of red headed stepchild of the organization. Haven't been afforded the same level of investment or care. And therefore joining into remote work has been a challenge. So we have to rethink that particular aspect and hopefully it will, we'll do that.

Likewise, we're also going to have to think about what the purpose of the workplaces. Is it a destination where people commute four hours a day in and out just to sit at a desk and do processing work, or is it a place of gathering where people come together to be creative, to be, uh, to spark innovation, to be able to communicate and build bonds of trust and understanding with other people and not just people in your own organization, but potentially from others or other groups.

And so the nature of what we're going to do both remotely and the nature of what we do in workspace itself is going to change. And hopefully. For the best too. Um, one of the things we, we have, uh, a code collaborator in work is the answer and David Pearl, um, who's the author of, will there be donuts if you ever get a chance to, uh, to listen to that as, uh, an audible, then I would definitely recommend that.

But David introduced me to a guy that I sort of knew by name, but I didn't really know his work is sir. Ken Robinson. So Ken is a educational revolutionary. Unfortunately he passed away last year, but there is a Ted talk where he talks about the fact that our modern education system around the world basically kills creativity in children.

So all children are innately creative, but once they've gone through the education system, it's squeezed it out of them. I think we do the same thing in the workplace too, in exactly the same way that we have these constructs. And we have these whole ways that we try to regiment the way that people work and how we organize work.

We basically make it very difficult for people to be creative. And I think ultimately with this whole AI. Revolution with robotics and the whole shift in this new disrupted new world. We really have to find new ways of unlocking that creativity in all people and not constraining it. And that, that more than anything else, more than COVID more than all of the other things.

That is the thing that we really need to address, because we're not going to solve. A lot of our own company problems. We're not going to solve certainly any of the problems in the world. If we don't start getting more curious, more creative, more collaborative than we've ever been before.

Kay: [00:20:55] So I want to pick up on something that you said, Julie, because I think it's really important curiosity.

I think that part of the problem that we are in right now is that everybody wants simple solutions and they want it. Pre-packaged in a box and this is it. And quite frankly, nothing is that simple. And I think we were all raised with a very flawed concept. The golden rule do unto others as you want to be done apart.

That assumes that everybody wants what you want. And in 90% of the arguments or discussions that I've heard about workplace people justify their position based on their own personal preferences. Okay. There are a lot of people who it is actually dangerous for them to work from home, or it is not safe for them to work from home or economically.

They can't work from home. There are some people who, you know, uh, neurodivergence who get overwhelmed with workplace environments. And so they love it. That they can work from home and now they can be employed. But there is, there are just as many who are getting isolated, who are getting depressed, who need the stimulation of being around other people and are really suffering.

And what we need to do right now is open ourselves up and hear the stories. You know, we're undertaking a massive initiative right now about designing for social equity. And part of the problem is, I don't know your story. I don't know your perspective. I don't understand where you're coming from and therefore I can't get it.

And I'll, I'll, I'll give you one, I'll give you two aha moments. Uh, I think for our team, one was somebody was talking about an open Plaza. And it was, uh, it was a middle-aged white gentlemen who was saying, you know, in public spaces, making sure there's clean lines of sight so that everybody can see you and you're in full view and all of that stuff that's important that makes people feel safe.

And one of his black colleagues said, and do you think that makes me feel safe? It doesn't I feel exposed and vulnerable or, you know, a story I share is I was doing a walkthrough once with the CEO of our potential project. And he was so proud of this amazing atrium that somebody had designed for them with this sweeping glass staircase up the middle, and people are milling around or, you know, all through the space and he wants, you know, to take me upstairs and walk up this class staircase.

I was wearing a skirt. And there were a bunch of men meeting underneath the staircase and I hesitated and I paused, and I did not feel comfortable walking up that staircase. And it had never dawned on him before, because he doesn't have to deal with that. Right. We need to open ourselves up to hear the experience of others.

And at the end of the day, basically the conclusion that I've come to in all of, all of the research and all of the things that we're doing. Is, we need to give people options and choices so that they have more control so that they can find what fits them best, whether it's they work when they work, how they work, all of those things, things, and we need to trust and empower people to do the right thing.

And I think that's when we'll get the results that we really need and we'll really create spaces that are inclusive.

Eric: [00:24:21] You bring up a lot of really, really great points. Um, w w comes to mind for me, I'm Julian, I'm curious, just in regards to the, kind of the equity piece from a technology perspective, you know, I think a topic of conversation that's been coming up for a lot of people is this fear that, you know, as people start to migrate back to the office, that we're going to get collective amnesia and forget what that remote experience is like.

And I'm hopeful that, um, you know, out of last year coming into this year, that there'll be a. On a whole swath of new technology to kind of solve those problems. But what are your thoughts about just kind of equity kind of through the lens of technology?

Julian: [00:24:58] You know, w w what's interesting with, we're seeing, um, I mentioned earlier this survival mentality that we had last year, and so that is very much been in play.

And what is surprised? Many many people around the world is this stuff actually worked. You know, there was a genuine belief that it wouldn't work and then it did. And so a lot of organizations are saying, okay, um, it can work. We need to explore that more. The second thing is in returning. And very few are returning in numbers to workplace at the moment, anywhere in the world.

But in turning, there is very much a sort of stage view of how can we make best use of the technology assets we've already got, because we probably haven't really. Integrated that very well at all, because we designed it in silos and it wasn't talking to each other. So there's a lot of activity at the moment about how do we get the technology that we've already got just to do what it was intended to do.

And in many ways, the reason it didn't was because there wasn't a huge amount of integration between the design thinking between space and technology. However, here's the third thing that's happening, and this is virtually universal. It'd be interesting to see what key case thoughts are on this.

Every single organization that I'm talking to now has a parallel agenda, which is we need to plan for a new future of work. And this might take some time for us to actually figure that out. But we really interested to actually understand how we can leverage technology as well as new thoughts around the use of space.

And how are we going to do that in ways that we hadn't actually thought of now? The question is they're all talking about it. And there's a lot of curiosity and there's a lot of what ifs I think the real challenge is going to be is how are we going to make that happen? You talked earlier about action, so we need to move away from the thought leadership.

And we now need to see action leadership. What are you actually going to do to really ensure that that happens? But I think technology can play. Uh, many roles, but I think it's also, we've got to be careful not to overplay the role that technology, and certainly not make sure that technology becomes the driving a factor for everything.

Fundamentally is the human experience that it should be the center of all of this, irrespective of whether it's the space design or whether it's technology design. We really need to center around as Kay was talking about not just the archetype or. Human experience, but the human experience of so many different people from different perspectives from, from different outlooks and flexibility and options are so important.

And that is where I think principally technology can play a role.

Kay: [00:27:38] Yeah, I can't believe I'm going to tag onto something. Julian said about technology because I always default to him when it comes to the technology questions, but I'm going to give you some four or five piddles things. So first of all, there's a whole plethora of products that are about to come out that will take zoom, WebEx, all of those to the next level.

And it will be more in an interactive, uh, people can draw, move, you know, et cetera, kind of merging those things together. So. That's coming. Um, second, I believe we're going to see a lot of products coming out that are apps for your phone that enhance the user experience. I can order coffee from my phone.

I can have a robot, you know, deliver my copy. I can book a spot. I can place an order for lunch. And so I just have to go down and pick it up and it's all prepaid. I can. Find a spot on the floor that suits my needs, right? So we're going to be able to leverage technology to enhance the user experience. Uh, third, I think we're going to see technology being deployed to help create low or no touch environments, uh, so that, you know, um, to help with the cleaning and the sanitation of spaces, uh, whether it's foot control, voice activation, motion sensors, you know, we have the ability to do a lot more in the workplace and we don't.

Um, fourth, I think we're going to see more intuitive spot. So if we believe that there's kind of this emerging ecosystem, this hub home spoke. And what has to happen at the spoke and the hub has to be uniquely different. It has to offer me something better or different than I can get from home. And if you think about it right now, most of our cars are more tech, savvy and intelligence and give us a better experience than our workplaces do.

And so if we can take some of that technology and import it into the workplace and have intuitive, intelligent work points, we don't have to have as many. Because they don't have to be assigned because you're not going to be there every day. But if we have fewer than we can have better and they can be more intuitive, they can be more responsive.

And then that might be something quite frankly, that is worth me coming into the office for, because it's giving me something I can not get at home. So I think there's lots of ways. Oh. And then also say there should be some spaces that we don't have technology. But that it doesn't exist, you know, that we need a break from technology.

And so I think there's a variety of ways that technology can really help us in the workplace. And that's just kind of a handful of some of the things we're seeing.

Eric: [00:30:06] Yeah. It's really exciting to think about all of the innovation, um, that potentially could be coming out of this time. Um, which, which makes me think, um, kind of on the flip side, um, there was an article that you wrote recently Julian about, um, Kind of schools like outdoor schools during the Spanish flu, um, and kind of the subsequent roaring twenties.

And I'm curious, um, w w what are your thoughts about kind of insights or lessons from history that potentially could help to inform us, um, as to how to move forward?

Julian: [00:30:43] Well, Eric, the article that you're referring to as the one that I wrote called the soaring twenties, um, and the, the reason I did it, I mean, firstly, uh, I, I was a history and politics, uh, undergrad, uh, and so, uh, you know, I'm fascinated by always looking at patterns of history and trying to actually.

Figure out what may or may not happen based on patterns that have gone before. And I'm one of the things I reflected on is that the 1920s, um, was, uh, the culmination of a number of different events, but fundamentally it was the end of the. Industrial revolution that had started, uh, in the 18th century had just basically just run out of steam, uh, by the beginning of the 20th century.

And it was, and it was basically redundant as a model. And what you S what you start to see in society is you start to see that not only economics, but also societies, uh, go through this disruptive process, a need to sort of move into a new era. And so effectively. Uh, what we should learn from the 1920s is that, uh, yes, we, we have the roaring twenties, which was like this sort of mini economic boom, but then suddenly got hit by the great depression.

And then suddenly the, the political strains that, that caused the second world war and everything that went with that. What emerged was the third stage of the industrial revolution, which was really process, how do we actually use systems and processes and how do we create mass production? Of products around the world.

And that is, you know, what we basically enjoyed in the major part of the 20th century and really into the first part of the, um, the 21st the challenges, however, is that effectually that's now coming to an end. And I think what we're now seeing is the fourth industrial revolution, which is moving away from those.

Product efficiency systems based model where everything has its place and everything is organized into lines and boxes a little bit, the way that we used to organize work. And we're moving into this new world. And I think we need to learn the lessons that you can't just change the economics. You actually have to change society it and make that ready to be able to take advantage because of that.

And so a lot of the stuff we're seeing, unfortunately, and a lot of the political rumblings around the world, not just in the U S but in Europe and in Britain with Brexit. And what have you is a direct result of a lot of these stresses and strains that are actually happening along with this economic shift.

And that's what I really do. Hope that we do learn from history is that as we are preparing ourselves for this new economic reality, we have to take as just as much of attention to how we think about. Society and social equity and inclusiveness and how we actually empower people to play a role in this and not disenfranchise people that then move towards, um, sort of radical positions anyway.

So that's, that's my historical context of all of this. Um, but I do believe. So that's where we really

Kay: [00:33:43] are right now. I love the fact that you're a student of history and you're so optimistic and think that we learned from the past, because I don't even think we learned from what happened yesterday.

Right? I mean, we've been, we've been working from home for 20 years. There are multiple companies that have been doing this and every company acts like they're the first ones to ever do this. And they're starting from scratch. I mean, look, look at what tap one did. Look at bank of America. Look at Yahoo.

Look at, yeah. IBM. They all had incredibly robust programs and they, you know, they were very successful in some regard and they all faltered in some regard. So look at the lessons there. Um, I think after every major, uh, crisis that we ever go through, we go through a period of minimalism. Right. And so, uh, we're going to go through that.

And we're going to have, there's going to be some knee-jerk reactions and we need to make sure that we're not creating spaces that are, are de-humanized and totally void of style. And, uh, you know, really impersonal. I mean, everybody's throwing up, you know, Xs and signage and, you know, uh, markers, et cetera, that just scream, danger, danger, danger.

I mean, we know better. Right. We know better than this. Okay. Um, you think about, uh, just, just the experiences that we have in a grocery store and the fights that have happened in grocery store. Okay. That's a total stranger that you're walking by for five minutes now let's think about, well, what's going to happen when we go back to the workplace and you're sitting next to somebody who has a flagrant disregard for safety, because they feel.

You know that they're, you know, have superhuman powers and you're feeling very vulnerable and you have to sit next to that person for multiple hours and they happen to be your boss. Like you wanna talk about the tensions that we're going to deal with. Right. So I think there are tons of lessons that we could learn that would help us navigate all of this so much more quickly, but we don't.

And I think part of this is people in our industry. We have the curse of knowledge, you know, and I, and I realized that I had to, you know, I was talking to one of our teams recently about, you know, they just didn't understand why, you know, one of our clients was not getting something very fundamental that we've been doing for years.

I said, because they've never done it before. This is, this is the first time they've ever done it. We do this every day and we've done it for hundreds of companies. They've never done it. And so we need to educate them. We need to take them along this journey. We need to share what those lessons are. We can't just assume that they know.

I mean, I have to tell you, I mean, I used to, to laugh out loud in the beginning of this whole pandemic about how many people were like. Oh, my gosh, we actually can work from home. You know, for somebody who working from home is a luxury for me, I'm used to working on an airplane or in an airport, you know, you know, to me, you know, being in my house is Taj Mahal, right.

Because there's a power plug and, you know, stuff like that, but it was amazing how many people have never done it before. And I think. Again, it's part of this is we have to listen to other stories. We need to understand that not everybody's experience is exactly the same as ours, and we need to kind of take everybody on this journey and, and leverage those lessons that we have learned.

Eric: [00:36:48] So speaking of the revelation around remote work, Kay, I'm really curious to hear are your thoughts in regards to a lot of these big boy tech companies and these kind of sweeping headlines around going to being completely 100% remote going into the future? W what, what are your thoughts about that?

Kay: [00:37:08] Well, I mean, I don't want to be or here, but I'm going to, I'm going to call BS on a lot of the stuff that we're hearing today.

Okay. And we've already seen some of these tech companies work it back. So we work for a lot of companies and a lot of them made very bold statements in the beginning. I think a lot of people are overestimating how easily it is too easy. It will be to work from home and, and the impact that that might have on their workforce and their culture and everything else.

Um, For, from everything we know from most tech companies, they thrive on quick, rapid innovation and ideas might come up when you're alone, but they bake and they kind of, you know, kind of germinate when you're around other people. Right. This whole thing. Julia and I, Julian and I have talked a lot about silo busting and divergent creativity and tech companies.

Always designed their spaces to be so enticing that you almost never want to leave. You almost don't even want to go home. Right. And they're designed so that people will come together and spend a lot of time together, finish each other's thoughts. And so it leads to rapid innovation. The notion that now they're just totally abandoning that.

And they're going to work from home forever while by the way, they're all out there scooping up tons of real estate right now. Uh, you know, I don't think. They really intend for people to work from home forever. I really don't think so. I think right now there are, there are talent Wars that are going on.

They are trying to attract and retain the best talent I think, to do so. They are saying what they think people want to hear, but I don't think that at the end of the day, it really truly fits their model of how they innovate and keep people and retain people. And so I think it will be a blended solution, but I'm going to call, I'm going to call a little bit of BS on, on what they're saying.

Yeah.

Julian: [00:38:54] And just on that whole idea of blend, um, you know, let's call it hybrid or however we want to do that, but I think. Just to say that it's going to be work from home or you're going to be in the office. That's not how it's going to be. It's not the case that I'm always going to work from home, uh, or I'm always going to work in the office.

And I think we saw that dynamic previously, um, you know, more and more people commuting when they didn't really need to. Uh, but they went in because that was the established norm. And there was this general level. Most, most organizations are level of distrust. The people working from home would not be as productive and as valuable working from home as they would do in the office.

I think what the last year has done is it's busted that myth, um, because people are working harder, they're working longer hours and they're actually producing more from working from home. So I think what we need to do is start thinking about this hybrid environment. And I think what, what it means is, is that we're going to see more motion and we're going to see more fluidity in the workspace.

So I might choose to work from home one or two days a week, and then go into the office for three days. It's not necessarily going to be the same two or three days that I'm going in and out. So you can't plan capacity by everybody by the alphabet of their last name coming in on a Monday and going on a Friday, that's just constraining the level of creativity and energy that you need in an organization.

So I think, yeah. It comes back to that particular point. The workplace becomes this hub of humanity and creativity and togetherness and not just sparking, but the sort of formation of ideas and an action as well. But it needs to be very dynamic in a way that we never really seen workplace or a dynamism in workplace before.

And that's where technology can play a role because we need to help support that. With a knowledge of what's going on, how people are moving, where they are. Can I book space? Can I shift things around as well as how can I optimize my experience while I'm there as well?

Kay: [00:40:50] Yeah. I want to challenge the notion though.

Um, you know, so. We've been studying people, working from home and coworking and all of that stuff. And, and, and literally we've known for years that people that work from home, uh, could focus more. And on average, they tend to work 10 hours more a week than their office mates, but there's. An impact to that.

There is a negative impact for doing that over a sustained period of time to our health, to our, you know, to our bodies, everything, if we are not taking steps to kind of move and be active, et cetera. Okay. And just the mental toll that that takes, but, you know, very rarely do I have a CEO say to me that, you know, uh, they're worried about creating a widget faster.

Knowledge workers aren't necessarily creating widgets and disruption. You know, Airbnb, Uber, Lyft, they didn't do the same thing faster. They broke the mold and they came up with a different way to do it. And so we shouldn't just be focused on everybody being productive and there. Their inbox being emptied.

The question is, are you innovating? Are you ideated? Are you creating something new? Are you changing something or keeping the company even relevant? Because I don't care how productive you are. If you're producing something that is driving a company into obsolescence while somebody else has come up with a new way of doing it differently.

And they only, they only worked an hour a day, but they came up with a new way that changed everything. Okay, I'm going to tell you which one of those is going to win in the end. And so I think what we're overestimating and focused way too much in productivity, and we're not talking enough about social capital and innovation, and that is starting to suffer because most of us, yeah.

Have a stronger connection to the people we have physically spend time with. If you travel with somebody, you, even for two days, you know them in a different way than someone, you know, you might've sat next to for a few months, you know, at your office, you just, you build those bonds. And then that builds trust.

And that really leads to opening up and true innovation. Okay. And we are all running out of that social capital. We left the office and we, we were running on that borrowed capital that we had, but as people are starting to retire, as new people are coming on board, as we aren't necessarily in the room with people as we're those casual conversations that we had before the meeting or after the meeting aren't happening or those side books that I might've shot you during the meeting, those aren't happening.

And 55% of communication is non verbal. And a lot of that I think is totally lacking today. And so. Eventually, but a lot of companies realize is it does start to erode your culture and that social capital and those bonds, which build the trust that lead innovation, if you weren't coming together. And so I, I get, I, I think we need to really think about what is the right balance of the two and every study we did before COVID.

Show that the people that feel the least engaged are the ones that never go to the office. The second group of people that feels the least engaged are the people that never get to work from home. So it's the people that have options and choices, because if you're always in the office, you kind of tend to take your coworkers for granted, right?

Oh, they're always there. I don't need you. Whereas I'm rarely in one of our offices. So when I go, I make a point of talking to everybody and connecting with everybody and, and finding out things, et cetera. And I think we need to find that right.

Julian: [00:44:33] Can we bring more with regards to the challenges of working from home and this, this sense of saturation that I think most people feel is these endless webinars, these endless video calls, um, because the technology is so readily available.

It does lead to you having more meetings and all the rest of it. And then there is a point it's the, it's really the in-between time that I, I miss more than anything else. And I know speaking with many others, the fact that, you know, I used to have to drive to the airport at four o'clock in the morning and jump on a plane and have time to think and process and recalibrate and all the rest of it.

And then think about my challenges of the day. I can't have that anymore. I mean, I literally make up stuff at the moment during my week. Yeah. Well, I'll just get in my car and I'll drive around pretending that I'm actually driving somewhere

Kay: [00:45:21] a false commute. There are a lot of people that are, that do a false commute, just so they have that mental turning off from one and turning onto another.

And that time. Yeah.

Julian: [00:45:33] You know, this theme I think is going to play out is that we need to empower people with options and choices, and we need to stop focusing around this notion of efficiency and productivity. I couldn't agree more. And I think we need to start thinking differently about what it is we're actually trying to achieve.

And how do we unlock that real sense that people do have, which is I want to, I want purpose. I want to be able to really make a difference. I want to be able to be part of making real change for the benefit of my organization and hopefully for the better of everyone else, but stop putting me in this box, stop giving me these constraints and stop creating environments.

And what have you that, that leads me to this, this, this ridiculous notion of. What use, what productivity used to be and bearing in mind that historical context we needed productivity and efficiency because of that, that industrial model is that's

what was required at the time. So whatever we did before served its purpose in the context of where we were, it will not serve the purpose of how we're going to be relevant and be prosperous and thrive.

And look after our planet in the next 50 years, we can fundamentally have to rethink that.

Eric: [00:46:47] So final question for the two of you. What has been the biggest lesson for you from this past year? What has been the biggest takeaway?

Kay: [00:46:56] Yeah, I mean, I think, I think I was on a treadmill and I think I, you know, I was on a, I was traveling 90% of the time and there are certain parts of that that I miss.

There are certain parts of that that I do not miss. And, um, I think, you know, we kind of get into a routine and then once you've kind of broken that routine, you know, I have a new routine, et cetera, but, um, I value. Being able to connect with people and being with people. But I also have found a, you know, it's kind of nice to sleep in here in the same bed every single night.

I will say my shampoo budget has gone like totally ridiculously out of control because I'm used to getting appreciated through and hotel rooms. And I don't have it now look like my hair is literally like twice as long as it normally is so that isn't helping me. But, uh, I think, again, we, you know, this, this has been a hard, hard, hard reset.

For a lot of people and it's made a lot of people take stock about what they value and what they don't value and what's important to them and what the real priorities are. And I hope those are lessons that we don't forget when we start coming back out.

Julian: [00:48:02] Well, I, I don't have the, the challenge with shampoo the way that Katie does.

Um, but in exactly the same way. I mean, I, I don't think I actually traveled as much as, as Kay, but I, at least 60% of my time I was away from home. Uh, and I haven't traveled since March 7th of last year. But one of the things that did happen last year, uh, in March, uh, was that I became a grandfather for the first time.

And it was my daughter in Sweden who gave birth to a baby boy in Nicholas. Uh, and I haven't held him. And that is a realization for me, how important human connection is, how important us as human beings about not just being able, because I've seen him on video and we've chatted and done the Google Google stuff, but all of that's been great as a substitute, but ultimately you cannot.

Take away. The fact that human beings were designed, you know, we became who we were as a, uh, as a species based on our ability to, and our need to be able to connect with each other. So when we start talking about remote working and video and all the rest of it, ultimately at the end of the day, these are just tools to help facilitate us getting together again, and being, um, who we are also like a mentioned as well.

It has caused, I think all of us to reflect on what was working and what I, what we were doing, but yeah, also what's important. And I think there's a whole lot of things that I used to do that just wasn't important. And I just pledged that I'm just not going to do them again. It's not a case of having to suffer them and all the rest, it's just like, they're just not relevant and they're just not important.

And I think the more and more people that actually do that, The more, we're actually just going to be able to wipe away a lot of the nonsense that we've actually injured, uh, in the way that we organize ourselves, the way we do work and what have you. And we just start getting them, focusing on doing the things that matter and that's, and I am an eternal optimist.

So I am going to say optimistically. If more and more people think that way and are prepared to take action with that. I think we can make positive change and that's my hope for what will happen in the future.

Eric: [00:50:16] Julian. Um, Kay. Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate you joining me today and having a great conversation.

Julian: Thank you.

Kay: [00:50:26] Thank you.

Eric: [00:50:40] This has been another episode of a holistic workplace experience podcast. If you enjoy this conversation, you should subscribe and check out our previous episodes. I'm Eric Kerr. See you next time.

