The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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Jacob 00:02
Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of the future of work with Jacob Morgan. My guest today is Martin Lindstrom. He is a culture transformation expert and best selling author of several books, including Buyology, Small Data, and a brand new book, which I was fortunate to get an advanced reading copy of called The Ministry of Common Sense, which I love that title by the way. So Martin, thank you for joining me.

Martin 00:25
Oh, thank you. And thank you for loving my title. It makes it It means a lot to me. Let me put it that way.

Jacob 00:31
Well, I love that the subtitle is How to Eliminate Bureaucratic Red Tape, Bad Excuses and Corporate Bullshh. And then right over the end of it, there's the little red sticker that says advance reading copy. So it doesn't, it doesn't have the full curse word in there, which I thought was hilarious. And Marshall Goldsmith wrote the foreword to your book, he actually wrote the foreword to one of my books as well and endorsed my most recent one. So we have we have a Marshall Goldsmith connection.

Martin 01:01
Yeah, listen, he's a little bit of a guru, I have to say and and what's amazing about Marshall is his ability to understand human psychology in a very simple way. And and I think in many ways, what I'm trying to do with the book is to do exactly the same it is to put on a pair of really realistic and honest glasses and look at the world as it is right now and ask myself, Why the heck is this happening? In front of our eyes? How come there's so much red tape everywhere? So that's really the foundation for this whole thinking.

Jacob 01:37
Yep. Well, why don't you give us a little bit of background information about you and how you got started with all of this? Have you always been independent? Or did you have was there a time in your life when you had a regular full time job working for somebody else?

Martin 01:54
Yah. I'll tell you a funny story. Actually, when I was 12 years of age, I love Lego. So I decided to build up my Lego Land in the backyard of my mom and dad's garden. Now as pretty serious took me about a year to establish this whole theme park of mine. And I'll never forget it. I opened the doors to this Lego Land one day and only two people showed up my mom and my dad. So I guess that was the lowest

point of my career, right? So I went into panic went down to a local print office, and I don't know how but it dissuaded them to sponsor my label and put an ad in the paper. So guess what, two days later I had a hundred and 31 visitors in my legal land. Only problem was that the lawyers from Lego were number 130 and 131. And they literally came to sue me. And this...

Jacob 02:47
Wait, lawyers from Lego actually came over to you.

Martin 02:51
Yeah, they did. I was 12 years of age I had my own little Lego Land. So they literally want to sue me back then. Now this is long time ago in 1982. And they did that with a smile I have to say. And the deal was they said, Hey, you probably can't use the word Lego. And but by the way, would you like to work for us? So I got a job at Lego at the age of 12. Probably the youngest kid in history. Working for Lego is a little bit like the Willy Wonka Chocolate Factory story we're talking about here. And so I literally start to work for Lego in the r&d department. And later on, I started up my own company and sold it so yes, I've always been somewhat independent, except my Lego story.

Jacob 03:37
I love that. So they, I guess first question, how did they even find out about that you created this little Lego Land? And it's actually a very so they I mean, they were doing it obviously as a joke to, you know, to kind of encourage you to go there. They weren't, you know, seriously suing a 12 year old, but how did they find out that you're even doing this?

Martin 03:58
Well, they did find out because I did advertising and you have to remember, I'm born and raised in Denmark, and Lego is Danish. So it's only about 100 kilometers from where I was living. So when I put an ad in my local paper, they would see the ad as well. Right. And the ad, as you know, as we talked about, was sponsored by the local print office. So it literally generated quite a lot of attention to the opening of my little Lego Land where I was charging $1 per person. So yeah, I know it's it's such a crazy story. People still today think is that real. Yah. I still have the evidence for it.

Jacob 04:37
That is awesome. I love that story. Okay, so after in actually I had some folks from Lego on on the podcast A while ago some I'm a huge fan of them. You know, my three year old is a fan of them. So shortly after that, you kind of went off on your own and you were just kind of one person or did you have some co founders?

Martin 04:56
Well, I did actually startup my own advertising agency straight after about a couple of years later on. Lego was, by the way, my first client, can you believe it? And when I was 18 years old, I sold my agency to BBDO. And went with this advertising agency group for for multiple years. And in 1997, I um, I know, I discovered something called the internet and I did that in 1994, when the World Wide Web was appearing, but in 1997, I was asked by BBDO to travel around the world to set up interactive units worldwide. And that became BPO Interactive, and later on it merged into all sorts of different other

names. So I work a lot in the online space for multiple years. And in 2000, I basically decided to retire and that's where I began writing books and realized oh my god, life is boring when you're retired. So I was dragged back in again into reality and that's where I started up Lindstrom Company, which really is where we still working today and where we are helping Fortune 100 Brands around the world companies to transform so they survive as technology and other good stuff is happening in our world.

Jacob 06:09
Why did you write this new book? The Ministry of common sense what what prompted that?

Martin 06:15
Well, I have to be honest with you, when you work within innovation and with transformation, you quite often realize that all the great ideas which are popping out of ideation workshops, and a lot of hard work in general that they are dying very quickly. I'll give you an example. One client of ours McDonald's. Many years ago, when Charlie Bell was the CEO asked us to reinvent the happy meal. And I said to them, yeah, I'd love to know reinvent the Happy Meal as long as I can make it healthy. So and we created an objective for the reinvention of the happy meal. I wanted to make six years old, they come so happy about this happy meal, they're willing to eat Broccoli. And I think you know with a three year old at home, how difficult it is to make a kid eat broccoli, but that was the ultimate goal. So we really started to redesign the entire Happy Meal around that philosophy and create this amazing concept where the forest in the, in the, in the know the bushes in the forest would be a broccoli and the tomato will be the murder weapon and the cucumber will be and no also different tools in this narrative and kids, they absolutely loved it. The thought was amazing. The parents loved it. The franchisees loved it. So we rolled it out as a pilot across Europe. And then I went to the headquarter which is outside Chicago and and pitch this thing and the first thing they said to me was, it's interesting. Now back then I did not know what that meant that word. So I thought hey, they love this concept. And basically what happened after two years they were ready To launch this new, amazing Happy Meal, and guess what the Happy Meal was? Well, it was a conventional Happy Meal with all the usual suspects and an apple. And that was really the moment..

Jacob 08:13
Haha...an apple

Martin 08:13
Yeah. So that's why I realized how innovation is killed. So we started to hire psychologists in our team to oversee processes and understand what's going on in a company. And that's where we realized and this is around 15 years ago, we realized that every company had what I call an immune system. It really is a defense mechanism for change. And companies have it because as soon as they migrate from being a small startup company to become a real serious bureaucracy, and then what happens is that people are protecting what they already have. And through that, they create processes and compliance and rules and guidelines. And all that becomes almost an invisible straight jacket, which is almost sucking the oxygen out of the room in terms of innovation and transformation. So a lot of my work went down the path of understanding the immune system. And through that, it was pretty evident that we're now starting to see, and all this lack of common sense. And it really became very evident for me when I was working for a major bank and one of these hundred thousand people plus banks, and are sitting

with this lovely lady, and it was a workshop, you're running all night. And at two o'clock in the morning through this workshop program, she stood up and said, I'm sick and tired of all this stuff. There's so much crap in this bank. And I said to her, so what do you intend to do? She said, Listen, we're going to fix this I want to reinstall common sense. So what she did was she came up with this brilliant idea and she said, You know what, I want to set up a ministry, and I want to call it the Ministry of common sense. And that really not only became the title of mine next book or my new book, it also became a real ministry inside this bank. And really, it's still running today. And every year they receive more than thousand inquiries from people across the entire bank, telling her about the most stupid things happening. And this ministry had the ultimate power to change things to remove rules to arrange dues, simple format of compliance, to make life easier for the customer. And all that stuff is really what it has turned this bank around. And that's my point right now, that right now we are in a situation where there is no common sense in our world. And really, my objective is to ensure that we can recover again and get back to work.

Jacob 08:32
I love that bank story. Do you have an example of maybe like one of the things that somebody might submit To this ministry of common sense,

Martin 10:00
Yes, I have a ton of examples of what they are submitting. I mean, one of the stupidest things happening in banks. And this is another bank that actually had a rule, which is that if you are sick, you have to call in to the bank and warn them about this, but you have to do it 48 hours before you get sick, I'm not sure how that on earth is possible. But that's a classic example of some of these things happening with

Jacob 11:31
Wait that was an actual rule? Call 48 hours before you're sick?

Martin 11:35
Yeah, exactly. No, I'll give you another example. One of the largest home do-it-yourself stores in the US, they actually have a rule that you are not allowed to swear. But as it's what's kind of funny is that when they have the professional arm with a deal with the whole development world, contractors and constructors And these people were swearing a lot. It's kind of their vocabulary. So the sales reps in this particular company said to to the senior management, listen, we can't avoid swearing we have to swear with our clients because they swear, that's kind of how it works. So they created a new rule, which is you're allowed to swear when you talk to your clients. But when you talk internally, you're not allowed to swear. And, and it gives you a sense of all these stupidities happening across the world. And so what the Ministry of common sense did in the case of this bank was really to introduce a couple of simple guidelines. And one of them were, whenever you develop a new rule, you have to get rid of a rule. And this bank in particular had more than 18,000 rules, or the reality is that there's no way it is insane and you will notice that if you go through most banks, they probably are at that level. So when we started to do our research We realized while listening most banks, they never really get rid of rules. They don't have one rule coming in one rule going out. So that was a new guideline established by the Ministry of common sense and I remember I spoke to one lady was introduced is this crazy rule and

which were that whenever you are using a buying coffee in the bank, they had free coffee, right? Whenever you use this free coffee, and people are still using too much coffee, and seem to do a whole new guideline and you went to it had them reinstalling this guideline on all the coffee machines, I mean, thousands of coffee machines, and really what it meant was that instead of you pressing once on this bottom, you would not get a full cup, you now get a half cup because then they could save money. Right? And but what happened was that people of course realized this, they were pressing twice on the so they will get too much coffee. In fact, they'll get one third too much coffee and people would pull it out. And then leave with that cops. And that rule, which were really embedded into the whole organization, and meant that they were losing more money than they ever done before. But because it was a rule, you couldn't really change it. So what we did was we went through all these different rules which were introduced and removed a lot of them after they've been running for some time. And it was interesting, because I said to her, listen, how come you haven't removed in restrooms before? And she said, Listen, I'm working in a function, what are producing rules? If I remove my rules, I'm not productive. So I really can't do it. It's the first time ever I'm getting permission to edit and remove my own rules when they're not working anymore. And really, it sounds super simple what I'm telling you right now, but that is the case, particularly in compliance driven organizations that they never really question where they are, why these rules are not working. They're just adding more rules on top of it. And I guess that's where bureaucracy is born.

Jacob 11:35
Yeah, that's insane. I mean, I, I can very much relate to the coffee machine because I have a coffee machine where I have to push the button twice to get a full cup of coffee. So I know exactly the frustration there. Well, first question for you is why? Or where did all this happen? Like, has this always been the case for businesses? Or did something happen during the history of a business where we just started flooding rules and policies and bureaucracy? Out of nowhere?

Martin 15:32
 Well, it's a really good question. And the answer is really coming back to entrepreneurship. The issue is that when you are an entrepreneur, you see the world through a customer or consumers eyes, or you're not seeing it through a business person's eyes. And good example, if you take Snap or the original was Snapchat when they were founded, I'm sure you're familiar with the story the two young founders, one of the guys was smoking weed. And his friend was taking a photo of him and send it online. And the day after, of course, the whole world fell apart. And he said to his friend, I wish there was a technology which could delete those photos after a couple of hours, so I wouldn't be haunted as I am. And that was the birth of Snap. And that is a person seeing the world through the eyes of a consumer. The same with Uber, supposedly, the founder of Uber back then, was in Paris, he hailed a taxi. He went into the taxi and the taxi driver didn't want to go to the airport. And he was so furious, he said, there must be another solution that became Uber. The foundation for most entrepreneurs is to see the world fall through the eyes of a consumer because they are the consumer. So the entire philosophy is grown around that, that point of view, and everyone will join in because they all feel that pain. But what happens over time is that you become afraid of losing what you already have. Are you afraid of someone will steal the idea you're afraid of some employee number 2900 will certainly mess up your brand or your philosophy. So slowly they will create these, the safety net around it, which really is compliance, which is the rules and regulations and the conduct and all that stuff was introduced with

good intentions Don't get me wrong, but over time, it becomes almost the end goal to suddenly the company is seeing the world from inside out, rather from outside in. And that's where slowly the company's and drifting away from common sense, where common sense becomes a whole new ecosystem inside the company, where you kind of pop common sense for a second, and you start to create your own level of common sense. And so really, the rule of thumb here is very simple. When you lose a sense of common sense is quite often because you lose contact with the consumer, the customer, the really the people with a paying your salary, and you need to reconnect with the real world. And most companies today believe that doing that through data, they believe that the spreadsheets and all these statistics and research studies are telling them the truth. But the reality is, there's one little thing missing. And that thing is empathy is the ability to put yourself in the shoes of another person and feel what that person is feeling. And as soon as that happens, it's almost like you're resetting the whole mindset. And that's where common sense is coming back.

Jacob 18:33
In the book you talk actually about, you look at a couple of different things that killed common sense bad customer experience, politics, technology, meetings and PowerPoints, which I love that you included, rules, regulations and policies and compliance and legal. So I thought maybe we could spend a minute talking about each one of these things starting off with bad customer experience because we've all experienced this. My wife Blake Morgan actually spends a lot of time writing about customer experience so i've you know, I hear all sorts of stories from her. So how did how did this kill common sense?

Martin 19:08
Well, bad customer experience is really where the customer is in one situation and the company is really not feeling that pain. So therefore that no one acting in a in a different in a different way than what's expected from the customer's point of view. Now, I could give you multiple experiences. Let me give you one which I think is very telling a couple of years ago, a very large organization in the UK was hiring us to redesign the whole ship. One of these cruise ships going around the world now this organization is catering for people about the age of 70. And so it's very senior people. Typically the average age is 84 years of age on board on this ship. So here we are one morning hours and inspecting the whole ship and the design principles are free and and i was i was furious because obviously the completely forgotten about who the audience was I went back to the headquarter teamed up with the senior management and realized most of them were no in the 40s men and they really haven't put themselves in the shoes of the customer. So I explained it for them they really didn't get it. It was very clear for me so the day after I said to them, Hey, guys, I'd like to meet all of you got down to the pier at in the harbor where it had this huge cruise ship line and I'd like you to check in for 24 hours. Now, I was lucky. They were listening to me in the day after eight o'clock in the morning and I'll never forget this. This is crazy that we're all standing there waiting to board the ship. But what they didn't know was that over the last 24 hours, arranged for spacesuits for them to wear literally the ones you wear if you are in a medical emergency situation or a perhaps if you're going up to another planet, very heavy gear and it's super, super heavy, heavy. If you've ever been wearing it, you will notice they have aluminum in the in the feet. So you can Stay on ground because of the gravity. So put this new suit on them. And yes, there were a lot of objections. I had these very thick gloves and put a proxy in the years. I had some glasses, whichever extra thick and have them wear those glasses. And then we went up the

ramp. And it was it was absolutely crazy because as we're standing in the lobby, there was an announcement from the captain saying welcome on board. And of course, they couldn't really hear it. And I said, Now you have to check into your rooms and one guy who was the CEO. Hey, it's so funny. You went up the staircase, and it couldn't really lift his feet because it was too heavy for him. So we stocked two steps up and couldn't get down again. The other guy he went into the elevator couldn't press the elevator button because his fingers were too thick. Again, another one he's trying to complete, but he couldn't see properly. And after about two hours, they were pretty furious about the whole situation now and call them together. And I said Hey guys, I know I'm always situating a little bit here, but the reality is this is hard feels like if you are 90 years old, and UCM is not designed for it, people can't walk up the staircase, if they can't see the numbers in the elevator, they can't hear the announcement. There's so many issues with this shape that you're actually not seeing the world. From a customer's point of view, you're seeing it from your own headquarter point of view when you're 40 years of age. And based on that, we really went back and redesigned the entire shape. And this is an example about how at company was an expert in seeing the world from an old point of view, like this particular organization, in fact, had completely lost contact with reality. And I think this is really symptomatic for most companies that over time you get used to it, you don't even think about it, and suddenly you lose that contact was just so important.

Jacob 22:44
So I have so many questions for you. So the first thing that popped into my mind is earlier you were talking about how you got asked by McDonald's to design a happy meal. Now you're talking about a cruise ship. Obviously these are very different things right. I mean, a Happy Meal versus a cruise ship. So I'm really interested in how do you go about solving problems? So when clients come to you with these very different problems, whether it's a happy meal, or cruise ship, how do you start to think about it? What's your process? Because I think a lot of people listening to this podcast, they are frequently tasked with trying to solve problems overcome challenges. So maybe if you can share a little bit about your framework that you use, and maybe it's something that they can apply.

Martin 23:27
Absolutely. Listen, the first thing I do besides talking to stakeholders in the organization is to map down the immune system. It is to understand you have an org chart, but what is your unofficial org chart? What is the unofficial reporting lines and quite often what we do is to wait permission from everyone I want to stress is to start monitoring the traffic flow between people. So how many people is using snap? Or what's up? How many people is using unofficial channels to communicate and we look at the traffic flow We're not actually per se looking at what people are writing. But we're looking at where do we have the most communication going on. And out of that, we quite often see a completely different picture, we're seeing a picture where it may be the CEO is in charge. But actually, the CFO is the one running the show, because that's where everyone is communicating to. And it may be that there is a bottleneck somewhere in the middle of the organization, where everyone is just going to that person all the time to check everything, we can see this huge fat communication line going to that individual. So based on that, we now start to realize where are the real issues. The second thing we do is, and this is really unusual, we actually take people from the organization with us into the homes or into the offices of the customers or consumers. And we do that because we want them to feel what the consumers feeling. And let me give you an example. I'm going to introduce a third industry here, right. But one of our large

clients is one of the largest firms to clients or companies in the world, and they are very large manufacturer of respiratory disease products. And so we said to them a couple of years ago, hey, do you really understand your patients? And they're all Yeah, absolutely we do understand our patients. And we said to them, if you understand your patient so well, do you feel empathy when you interact with them? Absolutely. At a score out of 10, probably eight or nine. Fantastic. We said, join us out in the homes of the patients and they started to come out to the homes and they realize the real situation if you are an asthma patient, and in some cases, the entire configuration of the home would be different. It literally pillow is sitting in the middle and the chairs will be surrounding that person that the the tables will be around that person so the person can jump or fall across the home because the person can literally not breathe and they're all shocked to learn it. And then what we did was to take them all back the entire senior management we did an exercise with them. We switched off the lights, we were playing a tape of a person breathing very heavy breathing one of these breathings wave feel the person clearly cannot really get them enough air through it through every breath. And then we gave everyone a straw, and we asked him to breathe through the straw holding the fingers on the nose. And after around 30 seconds, half the room gave up. And we switched on the light after a minute. So some of them were blue in the face. And we said to them, Do you know what happened right now this is how an asthma patient is feeling. And they were shocked because I've never thought about this before. Why? Because I've never had the sense of empathy, and empathy and remember is the ability to put yourself in the shoes of another person. And from that point of view, from that point of time, these people started to innovate. Having the patient in the mind because it felt it was not just a piece of theory that felt that uncomfortable situation about cannabis. Really survived this thing. And that meant that the whole innovation pipeline change, people started to be more aligned. And of course, these bottlenecks we saw throughout the organization, we had a focus on them in particular, ensuring that they were participating in these empathy, empathy challenges, because then they would be much more willing to change their behavior whenever people will go to them. So long story short, the rules of thumbs are very simple. You have to see the world and experience the world through a patient's eyes or a customer's eyes. And you may say to me, Well, I get a lot of videos every day I go to focus groups stop, it, is not helping you. You have to get your hands dirty, and get into the real world. And that's where the majority and when I'm saying majority is 99.9% of companies around the world really have stopped the game. They're not spending time with customers anymore. They're simply too busy doing all the bureaucracy in the headquarters.

Jacob 27:55
I love those stories. And in fact, in my new book, the future leader I saw I interviewed 100 40 CEOs, and I asked them about the skills and mindsets for leaders over the next decade. And empathy actually was one of the things that came up quite a bit. So I love that you talk about it, because I think it's very, very relevant. So what about people who are listening to this or thinking, you know what, you know, I love Martin stories and examples, I can't do that. Like, I can't get all my employees and take them over to a customer. I'm just the mid level manager or I'm just, you know, maybe an individual contributor. How can or maybe they they're saying, Well, my customer is the is somebody inside the company, right? I mean, for HR, for example, a lot of hrs customers are different business units or business lines. So how can they take some of your ideas or concepts and maybe apply it in situations where, I don't know maybe they don't have the resources or the access are the tools at their disposal? Can they still do anything here?

Martin 29:00

Absolutely and I think the best way to explain how you can do it is to take you into a piece of psychology. And some years ago, there was a huge study done on where do you create the strongest degree of empathy with people you don't know. There's a multiple situations appearing. One of them were that if you're in a crisis, and you have people around you, which are sharing that crisis, and then you suddenly create empathy with other people, but there's also another phenomenon, which is just in front of our eyes, which we never think about, and that is campfires. Yeah. Have you ever been to a campfire? And if you have, I'm pretty sure you you agree with me you have this sense of belonging. You have a closeness you have a kind of a trust. It's kind of a very unique feeling sitting in the forest with people which you may not know. And just talk about life.

Jacob Morgan 29:49

Yep, definitely been to the campfires

Martin 29:51

Yeah, exactly. And if you tried that, you will also know that it gives you a sense of honesty. Now we took that whole idea And by the way, what I say right now is backed up by science, because multiple experiments are showing that that's actually one of the highest degree of empathy you can create, and with strangers is through a campfire experience. So we took the campfire idea and we basically said, How do we introduce a campfire into an office. And we did that every Friday afternoon, we lose one of our clients. And we basically said to them Friday afternoon, you guys have to come into the main room. That would be about 20 or 30 people in each office section. And we had a projector predicting a video of a camp fi on the wall. We had a speaker on the on the floor, playing the sound of this crackling thing you know, when you are listening to this campfire, we had a light in the middle of the floor and then we asked everyone to sit down in one round circle, and we switched up the light. And then we had people telling about the frustrations. And then first there will be some people be very polite and then another person Because you can't really see each other, tell a little bit more a true story about what's really going on. And after 10 minutes, you will notice people are really starting to tell the truth about how frustrated they are. What happens very quickly is you will notice these frustrations are pointing towards one direction, which is lack of common sense. People are sick and tired about whatever warnings restrictions, guidelines would have been created people not thinking on their own, and you will write it down. And what will happen is this will be the first step towards people opening up and removing this stretch jacket because he's really the issue. The issue is that today I would estimate around 40 to 45% of the work and the time you spend in your corporate life is to remove lack of common sense it really is to navigate bureaucracy where you spend far too much time in meetings, far too much time navigating around the same issue in order to get stakeholders on board. Far too much time producing an endless stream of people Have presentations right? Or even worse, far too much time in meeting rooms where the technology never works and where you're trying to plug in and clock out, or conference call lines where the password is not working, or you can't hear people, all that stuff. So what we ask people to do is to write it down. And then the second exercise is super simple as well. We ask people to take photos of the most frustrating moment they have over one week. Now, then people will take all these photos and we will attach a commentary to them, we'll print them and we'll hang them in the room. And you will very quickly realize you're going to room with 500 frustrations hanging on the wall was is queasy. And

I've been into this room so many times. And I'm stunned by the amount of complexity which is happening in all the stupidity happening in the organizations. And then we categorize it we basically say which one of these lack of common sense are basically just so frustrating but what can be sold immediately. Material it will put it into three or four different pockets, but he comes the third thing was Really clever way to never say to people, let's set up a steering committee and let's work on this for the next two years. Instead, we say, first of all, we create 90 day interventions, short, very intense processes, we're going to fix this issue. The second thing we do is we say, let's initiate a project with on one hand, both is solving the frustration, on the other hand, is earning money at the same time. And that's entirely possible to do. And you just need to think about this from a creative point of view. So I'll give you an example from the car industry. So again, one of our car clients many years ago, in Japan, were really frustrated about the amount of energy they're using, and they wanted to save money across the company. And one of the way they did that was to switch off the air conditioning systems during the summer period. And it was really causing a lot of frustration among employees, I mean, thousands of employees. So one day we had this campfire idea and one person came in With an idea, he basically said this, if you go into our huge construction halls where we have thousands of robots working, have you guys noticed one issue here, and everyone looked at each other, they had no idea. He said, The light is on. But there's only robots in there. Why don't we just switch off the lights when the robots are working. And they did that. And they saved millions of dollars, based on a simple idea. So they basically solve two or three problems at the same time saved money, they saved the environment at the same time, and then made common sense thrive through the organization. And that's my third point, you like to notice you're able to earn money by introducing a different set of common sense. And what we do is we take 50% of those money you earn and put it back to the division. So they are motivated by continuing this process themselves. And we take 50% of that, and we use it to innovate and remove lack of common sense elsewhere. And that means you suddenly had this on process, going through the entire organization and slowly starting to clean up things. So this is not a Metapod saving money necessarily. It's about saving money, or earning money and at the same time, remove the lack of common sense.

Jacob 35:13
I love these stories, you have so many wonderful stories from these organizations you've worked with. So I mean, we've only just talked about bad customer experience, you have so many other roadblocks that kill common sense. Maybe we can talk about them briefly. Politics, I know is a huge one inside of organizations. Do you have maybe a sentence or two that you can explain about that and any advice how to overcome that, if any.

Martin 35:39
Well politics remember comes down to an issue about me not again, seeing the world from another person's point of view. So I had no interest in in dealing with other people's issues. And there's two issues here. First of all, I don't feel what other people in other divisions are feeling. So I really don't care. And the second thing is the KPIs. The key performance indicators are not aligned. And that's a huge problem today because increasingly, because we want to report to Wall Street, we want to be very transparent. Each division in each function have different KPIs. And they're not necessarily aligned. And I want to tell you a very quick story just to give you a sense of how bad this can be. So one of our clients is another client is Merced, which is a largest shipping company in the world, they sit

on 21% of all trade in the world. They asked us to fix up the whole customer journey worldwide. And we went to China and we listened into all these calls into requests coming in and realize that thousands of these requests, Funny enough, were complaints and not only that, they'll complaints and they were all categorized as false. musher will no force mature is when something dramatic happened, like the COVID-19 issue or like an earthquake, and but really thousands of issues every day. It didn't make sense. So I was sitting there listening into the call center with an interpreter and And realize that when the request the complaint came in, the person would click force mature, because we'll only be one screen you had to fill out. But if you taking any other reason for this complaint, you'll have to fill out multiple screens. And we'll take a lot of time. And when I went back to the KPIs, time was really the essence. Because the customer service department was measured on time, how quickly they could turn around a call was not measured on NPS net promoter score or customer satisfaction. And what we realized was there was a disconnect between each of the different divisions not having the same KPI so a key factor to generate politics is when you our agendas are not aligned with the KPIs are not aligned. And when you don't feel a sense of empathy for people working in other departments, which have another goal, which doesn't happen to match up with yours.

Jacob 37:51
That's hilarious. So basically, they were all putting force measure because it was, it was the easiest thing to do and it saved him the most amount of time.

Martin 37:58
 Exactly.

Jacob 38:02
Okay, let's talk about the technology

Martin 38:05
Well, technology is it's wonderful, except that I'm pretty sure that most people also feel any huge degree of frustration around it. And there's multiple issues with technology, which I think is frustrating the world. First of all, it's all the technical problems you have every day. I mean, just yesterday, I tried that I had to start up my new DELL LAPTOP, white, and my password did not work for some reason. And then it says, Would you like to recover your password? I clicked it and it said, your laptop is not online so we can't recover it. So tell me how can I enter my new laptop when it's not online and I can't go online because I can't use my password. And so it's a catch 22 we're talking about here. technology issues is everywhere. Whether it your printer is not working, whether that Skype call is not functioning, whether that conference call line, everyone He's on the wrong time zone or whatever it is. And isn't it getting worse and no reason statistics are showing that perhaps around 15% of the time we spend today is due to technology issues, if not even more, and we add to the had become less productive because of this not more productive because we spend more time trying to learn ourselves through technology. And it's also not effective, we're actually becoming less productive because the time we actually normally would had to reflect on lives. We use some social media, and that means that buffer will be too big it would have time to reflect and jump into an helicopter and see the world from a different point of view is just gone. I mean, that's one of the reasons why I personally don't have a phone anymore. And I'm not kidding. I really don't have a phone.

Jacob 39:46

Woah, Oh, we got to talk about this. We're gonna be scaring people here. So you don't have a phone of any kind?

Martin 39:53

No, I don't have a phone of any kind

Jacob 39:55

Not a cell phone, not a landline

Martin 39:56

No cellphone, no landline. I do not have a phone and I actually skip the phone. And because of three reasons, and I was two years ago, I did it. First, we never present anymore. Now, how often have you tried to talk to a person who is nodding? and nodding and nodding? And you just know he never heard a word of what you're saying? How often Haven't you tried? Did you go to a bar? And you're waiting for someone to show up? And guess what the person is late. So what's the first thing you do? You grab your phone, and you do anything with a phone, so you don't look like a loser. So the fact here is that we're petrified of being alone. The second thing is, we don't see things anymore. We don't see those seemingly insignificant details in our life, which actually have a profound impact on us. And the third thing is really the worst thing. We never get bored anymore. And boredom is the foundation for creativity is that moment where we can reflect and connect dots in ways we normally have time for not doing and that's the reason why I skipped the phone some years ago because I realized My ability to do exactly that was starting to disappear. And I think that's an issue we are feeling and seeing in the world. And by the way, that's also another form of technology. I'm not saying to everyone listening to this, skip your phone. I know it's really hard to do. But I'm saying you need to have discipline using your phone because the phone, to some extent is a tool and after that it becomes a weapon against yourself.

Jacob 41:24

Yep. And I love that you mentioned being bored because so I'm, I'm very much like addicted to chess. So you know, I and people who've listened to this podcast or have seen any of my content, know that I talk about chess a lot. It's in my books, it's in my talks. It's everywhere. And so whenever I get a lot of free time, I'm very tempted to you know, try to do like chess puzzles on my phone. And my wife actually says, she's like, Jacob, just sit here and be bored with me. Like she will she will actually use that phrase. Because you're right. I mean, if I'm like waiting in line for something, you know, I do chess puzzles. If I'm, you know, I have time to kill I'm doing chess puzzles. Like, I am constantly just doing that. And a lot of the times my wife has to bring me back and just say, you know what, it's okay to be bored. And you know, sometimes I have to remind her of that too. But you're right

Martin 42:12

I like your wife. She and I are very much in the same path. Do you know she's absolutely right and and now, just to give you a technology analogy here, and we all talk about you want to defragment the computer and we all know defragmentation basically means is restoring all the data in a more

structured way. Well, defragmentation in a human way, is either dreaming, or at least when we lie to reflect in the old days we would reflect when we sitting in a car, because we couldn't be on the phone. We were not in contact with anyone, but suddenly that space was occupied. In the old days you will be when we standing in line in an airport. Well, that space is gone now nowadays would be when we're waiting for the bus but that's gone. So the defragmentation during the daytime is disappearing. Instead, we are on a constant hunt, to tick boxes in our to do list and to reflect back on emails and it becomes a self fulfilling prophecy of more giving more know producing more. One of the studies we did recently for the for the new book was really showing that the more emails you send, the more you get back, there's actually a direct correlation between those two factors. So we produce all this content, but it never allows us to reflect on things and connect the dots. You as a manager or CEO, I senior person in the organization, your role is not necessarily just to connect dots, or to tick boxes, it is to connect the dots it is to jump into that helicopter and see the world in a perspective because no one else in your organization have time to do that. So that's your role, but with a smartphone and other devices and technology taking or we don't allow ourselves that space because being bold is being a loser in our society today. And I think a good example of that In one competency in one company and this is again lack of common sense in one company and the literally we realized when we did our research that our calendars were packed this Outlook calendar with packed and everyone could type into each other's calendar and book meetings and stuff like that and then I realized when I went to the offices people had a second calendar one in paper I said, Why do you have a second one? He said well isn't the first calendar is the one which we show to the world. That's how busy I am. And then I had my real calendar, where I really booked my own meetings as I want them to be and I have space for myself and that's literally one of the largest organizations on this planet with literally a working with two calendars. Because having a basic calendar shows to the world how popular and and the other one is really the real time I'm using not that I'm not see but allow time for myself, but I can't say that to the world.

Jacob 44:53
Yeah, that's crazy. I mean, I've I've had to take a lot of steps for myself, you know, like I try not to have any meetings on Mondays when And Fridays I don't have any email or social media notifications on my phone. Like I'm, I'm not trying to be busy. You know, I don't want to have a lot of people complain about inbox zero for example, like, I have no problem getting rid of all my email every day because I have a team I work with and I let them handle a lot of things that come up. So I agree I mean, being busy and showing the world how busy you are. It's that's not a cool thing. That's that's a problem. That's not like something that we should be trying to do.

Martin 45:30
Yeah, but but and you're so right about that. The issue is, what do we then do as human beings? And I think the issue is, today's become the currency of popularity that is, the more busy I am, the better I am. I mean, I cannot count the number of times I've been standing in an elevator and people have seen each other. How are you doing? I'm surviving or how are you doing? I'm hanging in there. These are the comments we have. I'm so busy is the typical mix. Citizens come Other people's mouth, because we are seen as popular but but I'll tell you about an experiment I'm talking about in the book, which is the entity business experiment, really asked people for a year not to reflect back and say how busy I am and not use any sentences whatsoever to talk about how busy you were. And the study really showed that the less you talk about it, the less busy you become. Because talking about how busy you

are, makes you feel very busy. And that just makes you become more stressed. If you don't talk about it, you actually less busy. So I think when we are in the world is that we need to change that currency. And one of the reasons why I wrote the Minister of common sense really, to say to the world to know what what we're doing right now is just not common sense anymore. It's wholly ballooning quite often. And we need to pause for a second now and ask ourselves, is this really worth it? Or do we need to get rid of all these red tape because it's just not fun to go to work anymore

Jacob 46:57
Yeah, no, I totally agree. Well, the next one Have I Oh, man, a lot of people can relate to this one is meetings and PowerPoints. And a lot of times we have meetings to talk about meetings. So what, how is this killing common sense?

Martin 47:12
It's killing common sense because there's multiple gauges going on. I mean, if I just put the technology aspects aside, there is this whole aspect of our people saying something for the sake of saying something, no agendas in the meeting rooms. Or guess what we all set one hour aside for a meeting some for some miraculous reason, the meeting lasts for one hour and 10 minutes. It's very rare. You have 20 minute meetings, because you can't be productive in 20 minutes. But what I realized is you actually can change things quite a lot. Now. First of all, what's the issues? point number one issue is everyone has multiple agendas. Everyone want to be heard in different ways in order to position themselves. I've tried quite often in these meetings as well that people are on the phones on the computers at the same time. They're all sitting nodding for the realities that they're preparing for the next meeting. And so they're sitting there with all the PowerPoint decks, preparing it for this really important meeting happening in two hours. And that basic just not present in the first meeting. So we are sitting with people in meetings was not in meetings, if it makes sense. And then you have all the technology coming on top of it, where we can't get online, we can't connect things. And by the way, we take people through these endless decks, attempt to say one of the chapters in my book is how big is your deck? Yeah, because it really comes down to the size of the deck right? Now I have a 262 slide deck with amazing graphs and statistics. And people are just saying, Oh my god, she's really prepared. That's pretty amazing. My take is only 15 slides, that's pretty embarrassing. So we pump up the stuff. And suddenly the goal is no longer to six problem is more to show off somehow. So one of the things I'm talking a lot about in the book is how to change that culture. And one of the Nice, you need to have a clock ticking in the room and the clock is really set based on what the cost is of running this meeting. I think we forget it quite often a meeting would cost 20 or $30,000. an hour's to run. So why don't you put up and money clock, which is counting down? And then second, why don't you run the meeting in 20 minutes instead? And third, why don't you have a person, which only role is to stop people when they go back and revisit the same problem that just did 10 minutes ago? Because they want to push their agendas. So there is a person with a red card. So there's different structures. I'm introducing the book, which will help you to optimize meetings, because, as you say, right, so meetings are now becoming meetings for the sake of meetings, producing more meetings, and we're not getting really anywhere. So it's a huge problem. Because what happens in the end of the day is that we all stopped in these meetings. And if I look at a daily life of a person today, we know And the average person is receiving between 350 and 400 emails a day, if you just use one minute per email, that's more than five hours. And then we also know we spending an average three and a half to four hours of meetings every day.

Now, guess what, at this stage, we haven't done any work at all. We're still sitting in meetings, right? So how can we be productive? And that's where frustrations comes in. That's where people really are worn worn down and not giving up, right?

Jacob 50:28
Yeah, yeah. No, I mean, that's great. I didn't actually even know those statistics. And yeah, I mean, that's more than eight hours, just emails and meetings and your day is done.

Martin 50:37
Yes, no. Most people are starting to do the work on Saturdays. Now, with the economy started with workday. They're doing it after hours. And when we went through the whole COVID-19 crisis, know that the whole world messed up private and worked in one big blow where a lot of people aren't talking to me now is expected to go to work at 11 o'clock in the night because they don't have These routines anymore. So now everything is one big blur. It's not a healthy, we need to separate these things because we basically are burning our candles in both ends.

Jacob 51:10
Yeah. The next one rules, regulations and policies, which I think, well, the last two that you talked about are rules, regulations and policies and compliance and legal which, you know, I think everybody can relate to those, but maybe we could just spend one or two minutes on those.

Martin 51:24
Yeah, absolutely. So rules and regulations. I think they're super tricky, because no one will not would like to say no to legal or to compliance, and they become almost like these function rooms where I'm in offices on companies where they become Don't get me wrong, but kind of God and if they say, I guess that's how it is here. And we like to spend time with a comedy The other day, which is again in the pharma industry, and where compliance is incredible powerful, because they are here to protect the patients and make sure this company is not been fingers. But what we did was we said to the teams, the compliance teams, Hey, you guys, you have gotten who your customer is now said to them, who is your customer? Well, our customer is really regulatory businesses. I said, No, it's not your customer is the patients. If you produce an amazing piece of work, and it makes the patients happy, and it's safe, then you've done your job. It's not a regulatory issues necessarily. And that was a huge change in their mindset. And then what we did was we redid the entire process together with compliance and made them become a service function within the organization. And by service function. I'm not saying that they will say yes to everything of the please everyone. But we basically said Your role is not just to say no, for the sake of saying no. So we basically redesigned compliance, which I know is super tricky to do, but it really helps. What I'm saying here is when legal and compliance and other function get this much power, it really can destroy a company and how it evolves, you have to find the right balance and treat them as where their service function and make sure that of course to take all the right boxes in order to stay safe or healthy. But they also start to be service minded within the organization. And once you do that, you will notice that the numbers of rules being established, the guidelines and the principles and the conduct and all this stuff being established, is starting to be more sensible. And I want to give you one example of conduct. If you take NBC, NBC when they had the Matt Lauer crisis, you know, the former anchor of the today's show, when he had the sexual harassment claim, NBC

immediately placed the HR office on the main floor of the editorial floor, so people could see it. Now that sounds pretty clever. At first, they wanted to be present, but I don't need to tell you if you want to do a sexual harassment claim, and would you really go into this office was in the middle of the desert floor, wherever One can see you walked in there and five minutes later whole new rule comes out. Not really. And then they not even that they introduced another rule, which is the Hawk and the release rule. It is where you're talking people and release within one or two seconds, that no one is talking that way. And so they create these things with good intentions. But the problem is, it's detached from reality. And I think that reality check needs to become part of compliance and part of the rule setting and the legal entity. It's not it's become such a holy grail that you don't even dare to question anymore.

Jacob 54:32
Yeah, no, I couldn't, couldn't agree more. And you're right. I mean, a lot of people do view compliance. And legal is, you know, you can't argue with them. You can't disappoint them, they kind of set the rules. So maybe for people listening who are in compliance and legal, I suppose it goes back to your concept of empathy and just being grounded in reality before you start to you know, push these policies and rules and make them something that everybody needs to follow.

Martin 54:57
Absolutely, and I think that no What's interesting when we work with people from legally compliant and we do that every day, we engage them in innovation processes today. Now, it sounds crazy what I'm telling you, but let me give you an example. So, for Nestle in in India, we were involved in developing whole new lines of food. And there is a rule in India to government in India was upset this rule that you are as a CFO, personal liable for any lawsuits. So if there's a lawsuit going against an accompany, you actually are liable yourself with your money. So I don't need to tell you the CFO and legal of really, really sensitive to any new innovation. So that's the reason why they have huge problems innovating in India because no one dared to step out and do courageous things. So we engage them in the innovation process that were part of innovating great new products. And what was fantastic about this was that as they did that, they saw the world from The consumers point of view and in fact, that bought into the Kool Aid Oh drinking of the kool aid, and started to get a more reasonable view of the world rather than just saying no for the sake of saying no. And as a consequence of this, Nestle in India really became a super innovative, but they never were never sued, by the way, and the legal functions and the CFO became very comfortable about no stepping outside of their comfort zone. So what I'm saying here is not a matter about them. And also, it's a matter about engaging the functions. And quite often, they're not seen as people you want to engage in innovation. But quite often, I have to say, some of the most innovative ideas I've seen. I'm not kidding you. It's actually from the finance and the legal functions.

Jacob 56:41
Wow. All right. Well, there you go. So a nice little plug for people in finance and legal in compliance. Thankfully, I know we only have a couple minutes left, and we didn't even talk about some of the solutions that you propose in your book. I think you provide five steps for kind of getting to that common sense. I don't know if you You can maybe just give a sentence about each one. But it would be great for people to understand. So we talked about what some of these barriers are. And I'm sure a lot of

people listening to this are kind of nodding their heads going, yes, that makes sense. How do we start to bring common sense back? What steps can people take?

Martin 57:18
I think the most important thing you can do is to acknowledge there's a problem. And I think you acknowledge that by talking to other people. So if I should go back to some of the hints I've given you before, the first thing that I would do is, first of all, acknowledge these and issue number two, to map down what the issues are. And the best way you can do that is to look around in your office everyday, take photos and map this down. Then the third thing is then to categorize it. The fourth thing is to create a whole new business model around it. So you actually are both earning money while you're fixing the problem at the same time. And the fifth issue I would suggest, is really to celebrate this whole thing internally. And now this sounds crazy, but but let me just give you an example. And from a completely different industry or world. And some years ago, we were part of doing experiments with chickens. It was for science.

Jacob 58:10
I read about that in the book.

Martin 58:12
It and and really the idea was very simple. We had chicken stocked in a cage for half a year. And one day we opened the gates to this beautiful green grass, the sun was shining, the bird was singing, and the chickens went out. And guess what happened within 30 seconds. They went straight back in again back to the cage. And we call that the chicken cage syndrome. And the chicken cage syndrome is really the idea of that. We want to change change, but we don't dare to change. And so the question is, how do you make a change having an organization where we say we want to change, but really we're not changing? Well, I want to ask you that question. So imagine this. Imagine you're seeing four chicken cages from above. And there's Stuck in their inner circle. So they're all pointing towards a center like this town square. Now, if I open all these chicken cages and I want the chickens to go out and you have some corn, where would you place the corn in order to get the chickens out of those chicken cages.

Jacob 59:18
Okay, so they're all arranged in a circle. Yes. Okay, so obviously the most tempting thing and I'm sure what most people say is you put the corn in the center, but I haven't Yeah, that's not the correct answer. Would you put the corn?

Martin 59:33
This is the chess player in action. I can feel it.

Jacob 59:36
Yeah. So they get bigger. I mean, would you put it just right in front of their each individual X

Martin 59:42

You're spot on. And the reason why I'm sure you're gathered is because when I pick up corn straight out of my checking case, which is easy and safe to pick, first of all, it gives me a satisfaction. The second thing is I'll look at all the other chickens and they'll do the same so I feel safe. And that means if I place a next call a little bit further into the center, and the next corner next corn, I'm slowly being dragged out of the chicken case, but I feel safe at the same time, that little piece of corn just outside the chicken case, I call a 90 day intervention. These are short lived, very quick changes you make in the organization. And what you do is whenever you succeed, you're celebrating that throughout the organization. And the celebration is really important, because if you celebrate when picking up the first corn, all the other chickens are looking around, and they feel Wow, I want to feel that too. And it kind of justifies or verifies, or at least in somehow tells the world this is the right thing. And it changes the culture as a consequence of that. And if you continue having these small wins, Time after time, certainly it's solidified the fact that we are on the right path, and that's where you have a transformation of a culture happening. So really what I'm saying here is it's super important for you not to have these long term goal and talk about what's happening five years from now is the goal is fine. But you have to break it down to small bite sized things and celebrate it every time. And I think the key problem in organizations today is that companies are setting those small goals sometimes, but they're not celebrating the success of them the big trees, and that's just as important as fulfilling them.

Jacob 61:22
Hmm. Yeah. I mean, I think that's wonderful advice to end on. And the other thing I noticed is, a lot of your solutions are not, I don't want to say extreme, but they're like very, they're unique, right? I mean, how you design a happy meal, how you think about a cruise ship and getting people to wear spacesuits like their, I guess you could say there, it's required to have a little bit of out of the box thinking a little bit of storytelling, a little bit of creating experiences in there, as opposed to just kind of telling people the information. So maybe whenever possible, is get people to experience it, use stories and try to think a little bit creatively because it sounds like do a lot of that.

Martin 62:01
 Absolutely. Listen, let's be realistic. The only thing we have been around on planet earth for thousands of years is religion. And religion was and still is intact to some extent, because you have a Bible or the Quran or you have some holy write up words have been transported from generation to generation using storytelling, and storytelling still sticks to our mind. And it still gives us to some extent, a sense of purpose. And we need a purpose in organizations. And there's not a lot of purpose anymore, because companies are busy earning money, but they're not busy necessarily making us all smile. So storytelling is an incredible, powerful tool. And what I've learned is as soon as you put up a PowerPoint deck with millions of graphs and statistics, people tune out. It's almost like they get this urge to check the emails straightaway. But if you tell an amazing story, it engages people, and through that engagement, you can create a movement and then the end of the day Culture transformation is all about creating internal movement with people who believe in things. And I think we desperately need that in our world right now. So yes, you're right, you need to have a creative aspect to this, to surprise people and to entertain people, because we have no attention span anymore. And you know what I mean? I'm pretty sure if I could look through the screen right now and see what you're doing. You checking your emails, as I'm talking right?

Jacob 63:23
Now, I only, I only check email once a day at four o'clock, we would be in 3 minutes.

Martin 63:28
Okay. Oh, we are close to the realities that we have no attention span. And that means that you need to do something which is so engaging, that people actually want to listen to you, and that drop everything else they have in their hands. And I fundamentally believe you can only do that through creative thinking as you call it out of the box. And through amazing storytelling, and using metaphors in particular, and I'm talking a lot about how to use metaphors in the way you do and run. leadership's in organizations because that's the way you engage people. To believe and change and move on.

Jacob 64:02
Yeah. Well, I love your stories. I love your advice. I mean, we even went over the hour a little bit. And for people that want to learn more, I mean, that's why they should grab your book, The Ministry of common sense. But where can people go to learn more about you some of the stuff that you talk about, I mean, anything that you want to share for people to check out, please feel free to do so.

Martin 64:25
Well, thank you. Listen, you can find me everywhere I was. So you just go into Martin Lindstrom calm was my site, of course. But you can also check me out on LinkedIn, which is Lindstrom company or even go to and also to different channels like Twitter, or snap or Instagram, where I'm posting new messages every day, some is typically a new article every second day about what's going on in this world, about what's going on in companies and how you have to change it. So hopefully, that can give you inspiration. In addition, of course to to hopefully my poking can provoke you enough to ask yourself If you want to set up ministry inside of common sense.

Jacob 65:04
Yeah, I mean, as they say common sense is not that common. So I hope after, after listening to this and reading your book, we'll be able to bring more more common sense back to organizations around the world. To me to Martin, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me. I really appreciate it.

Martin 65:21
You're welcome. And next time, I hope we'll get a chance to meet them in person and I'll beat you on chess. I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding.

Jacob 65:29
Well, you know, I did see on your Instagram, you actually had a little chess. One of your things was a little chess piece. So I was like, Oh, I can tell. Well, thank thanks again. I really appreciate it. And thank you, everybody, for tuning in. My guest this week, Martin Lindstrom, please make sure to go check out his new book, which I had a chance to read called the Ministry of common sense, and bring back some common sense to your organization. I'll see you all