

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.

You can listen to past episodes at www.TheFutureOrganization.com/future-work-podcast/. To learn more about Jacob and the work he is doing please visit www.TheFutureOrganization.com. You can also subscribe to Jacob's [YouTube](#) channel, follow him on [Twitter](#), or visit him on [Facebook](#).

Jacob Morgan: Hello everyone, welcome to another episode of The Future of Work Podcast. My guest today is Beth Comstock, former CMO and Vice-Chair at GE and author of a brand new book called Imagine It Forward: Courage, Creativity, and the Power of Change. Beth, thank you for joining me.

Beth Comstock: Thanks, Jacob. Fun to be ... To have a chance to talk to you.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. We've talked a little bit on Twitter, exchanged a couple of DMs. So I'm glad that we were finally able to make this happen. Well, first, congrats on the brand new book. It's not quite out yet, right? Isn't it coming out in like a week or two?

Beth Comstock: In a couple of weeks, yeah. It comes out September 18th.

Jacob Morgan: September 18th, yes. And I had the opportunity to read an advance copy, so I have lots of questions for you about that. But before we jump into all of this stuff, maybe we can just start with some background information about you?

Beth Comstock: Okay.

Jacob Morgan: And how you got involved with all the stuff that you're doing, how you got involved with GE. Just kind of a high-level overview for people that maybe don't know who you are?

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Well, I've spent all of my career working in companies. But I started out wanting to be a science reporter and worked very briefly as a reporter. I was not very good nor very confident. So pretty quickly, working behind the scenes became my calling. And I got into the promotion and marketing channel. Really ... And eventually working my way into NBC. Worked for a number of different media companies, doing communications promotion and marketing. And from there I ended up at GE. And I took my marketing title incredibly seriously. To me it was about living in the market. So marketing's about living in the market and going to where change is happening. And from there it became about innovation and what's new and what's next.

Jacob Morgan: Okay. Simple enough. And then you did a lot of really interesting work at GE. And what are you doing now? What's a day like in the life of Beth Comstock?

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Well, my day is incredibly busy. What I've learned ... I left GE at the end of December. And then I threw myself into this book. I had been working on the book for a while. It's taken me ... I had a co-writer ... But it took me a couple of years 'cause I had a job. But kind of poured myself into finishing up the book and working on all that needs to happen to launch it. I also increasing ... Trying to spend time doing more writing. Doing more ... I do some advising of startups and leadership teams that are trying to navigate their way forward in change. So right now I'm in my discovery mode.

Jacob Morgan: And what does a usual day like for you? So for example, are you up early? Are you going right to the gym in the morning? Do you meditate? Like, what's your kind of routine to get started?

Beth Comstock: Yeah. I'm a very early riser. I usually get up at 5 AM. I'm just a morning person, I always have been. I get up and the first thing I do is I write. That's the habit that I've adopted, especially in this past year. And I get up and I write. You know, usually I spend about an hour writing. These are things that just kind of partly downloading my brain, kind of my dream brain. And then focusing on comments or points of view I want to get out on paper. And then I start my day in a business sense. You know, have breakfast, then I'll sort of catch up on emails, planning things, organizing content I want to put together. A ton of meetings throughout the day.

And then usually I'll squeeze in some exercise in the course of the day. I'm big on ... The things I like to do, I'm big on walking, you know? I do power walks. I often do meetings while walking, it's one of the things I love to do. And then, you know, I sort of ... I'm an early bed kind of person. My kids are grown, it's my husband and I. So we tend to have ... We tend to be early birds.

Jacob Morgan: Alright. Well, I love that you're up at five in the morning. I wish I could get up at 5 AM, but I'm around the 7 AM ... But it's interesting, 'cause I lot of the executives that I've interviewed on the podcast, I find that one of the very common things I notice of all of them is they are all up super early. At five, 5:15, 5:30. So I don't know if that's just like a thing that successful executives do, but it's a very common pattern that keeps showing up.

So why write the book? You mentioned it took you a couple of years to write. And I went through it and there's a lot of stuff in there. So I'm excited for people to read it. But why did you decide to put it together?

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Well, I had been thinking about it for a couple of reasons. One, I ... Especially my time certainly in the digital phase at NBC and the transitions I saw in the companies that GE represented. The transition in energy and healthcare and the digitization of industry. And just the crazy chaotic time and the change

business had to go through. I felt it needed documenting in some way. I'm a storyteller, so that was important for me to just kind of document it.

And then secondly, and I think really at the heart of it is I worked with a lot of people who were midway in their career. Often mid-managers or mid-career, and they wanted to make change happen. They wanted to influence and affect change and either needed encouragement or felt stymied. And these are the people I most liked working with when I was at GE and at NBC. And so I felt like, "Well, okay, maybe I can help in some way by sharing lessons learned. Creating some practical applications for how I had to get comfortable with navigating forward with unlocking my imagination. And kind of just going for it as opposed to waiting for permission.

So that was why I wrote it. And hopefully people will find that it delivers on that kind of part inspiration, part kind of kick in the butt in practical application.

Jacob Morgan:

And I think in the book you wrote that this is basically kind of the stuff you wish you had when you were embarking on your journey during your career. And you talked about five ... I don't know if I'd call them principles or criteria or characteristics ... But basically it's ... The book is broken down into five kind of areas that people should embrace in order to be able to grow and succeed. And these are Give Yourself Permission, Discovery, Agitated Inquiry, Storycraft, and Creating a New OS.

And so why don't we start with the first one briefly, and just kind of do an overview of these? The first one is Give Yourself Permission, and I thought that was a great place to start. So what was kind of the overview of giving yourself permission?

Beth Comstock:

Well, I think too often everywhere I've gone ... No matter what company, not just where I worked, but customer/partner companies, big companies or small ... There's always some reason why you can't move forward. You don't have enough budget. The boss won't let you. My colleagues won't do it. The investors won't let us. The Board won't let us. You know, on and on. And you soon start to realize, maybe those are true, but you still have to figure a way around it. There were always gatekeepers in organizations. The people who want to hold you back. But first what I learned was some of it was just getting out of your own way. Giving yourself permission as an individual to kind of take a risk. If you see a better way you have to do it.

So at a very basic level, how do you give yourself permission? And then at a broader level as a team leader, whether you're leading one person or a team of hundreds, your job as a leader is to be a coach, a vision setter, and to allow your team the freedom ... Give them the permission ... The freedom to kind of figure it out and make things happen. I'm convinced that's how good work happens.

Jacob Morgan:

Do you have a story from your career where you were basically told you couldn't move forward and you just kind of gave yourself permission and did it anyway? And what was the outcome of that? Did you get in a lot of trouble for it? Or what happened?

Beth Comstock:

Well, I think it ... You know from having read the book I share a lot of those stories. I worry a little bit it might be repetitive. I feel like every story is that story, where it's like, "Ugh, they said no. But I wouldn't take no." And so one of the themes I put in there is this idea that no is not yet. And, you know, I talk about early some of the gatekeepers I had to work with. And I remember gatekeeper I worked with I dubbed him in the book J.R. And J.R. was just one of these bosses that doled out the answers, but kind of never gave us room to figure it out or, you know, have our ideas encouraged.

And I am a shy, reserved person. I especially was then. And I kind of summoned up my courage and wrote him a whole outline of how we had to change. And he basically said, "No, I don't believe anything you're saying. Sorry, everything's great here." And I promptly decided to leave. And I left the company and ended up coming back. But what I ended up learning is that there are always these gatekeepers.

And what you have to do is figure out the parts that you can do without asking permission. And the parts, you know, that you can hopefully ... In some respects you're always gonna work ... There are always opportunities ... There are always people that are gonna be tough managers. But what I came to realize through that example was it was also changing my mindset. And there were things I could have done without asking for permission.

And I shared the story of how I then came back and went to work at NBC again with a guy named Bob Wright who was the President. And when I pitched this ... So by then I'd gotten more confidence. I left, I came back. And I pitched an idea for a new business that I was so excited about. It was called The NBC Experience Store and it was really about getting ... Having visitors and tourists be able to experience NBC. Go behind the scenes. We created a retail experience. And when I pitched Bob the first time he said, "No." I had to go back and work the idea more. I pitched him a second time he said, "No." And by the third time I got the yes, and moved forward.

And I remember Bob saying, "You know, I wanted to say no. I tried to say no. You made it so darn hard to say no. I had no choice but to say yes 'cause you made it work." And it was one of those moments where, how many times have I seen people who the first times the boss says no, they walk away and they never come back again? And he was making me better. He was making our team's idea better. He was making the strategy better. And it was just a really good illustration to me of what you have to do to just ... No is not yet. You just have to keep coming back. So gatekeepers can be your best friend if you know how to work with them. Not all of them, but most of them.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, and I love that quote that no is not yet. But I think the important thing, though, isn't ... It's not that you just kept bugging him, but you kept improving and making changes and sort of like evolving what you were asking for. Which I think is very different than just saying, "Hey, now? Can you do it now? Can you do it now?" So you were constantly it seems like evolving and kind of upgrading this idea up until he finally said yes. Because like you said, he just couldn't say no.

Beth Comstock: No, that's exactly it. And I think that is the thing. It's taking that feedback. "Okay, he said no. Alright, do we just walk away and go, 'Well, see it was a dumb idea?' Or do you go, 'No, we have this vision for this experience we wanted to create. Okay, well, we didn't articulate it well enough.'" Sometimes in the early days, your story's not even that clear. You're not even clear yourself what you're pitching often. So you have to take that feedback, which I think is tough. You have to take the reality of the situation. You know, the Finance Leader was like, "No, the ROI on this barely meets our threshold." So then we had to go back and calculate other ways to think about ROI. Other ways to look at the budget. Other ways to find financing.

So every step along the way is feedback to test two things. Is your idea that good? Is it time? Those two things are important. And I think what's also happening is it's testing your resolve. And your resolve to make the idea better and your resolve for the passion. So your point, if it was just like, "No, like you gotta do this idea", but we didn't take any chance to make it better, it would have been doing just to continually get a no. But we took the feedback and made it better.

Jacob Morgan: And ... It reminds me a lot of ... So Carol Dweck wrote a book called Mindset. And, you know, it's on this popular concept of the growth mindset. And, you know, she always talks about it's not just about doing the same thing or doing new things, but sometimes it's about taking this thing that you've been doing and trying to do it in a new way. So if somebody in finance says there's no ROI, you look for other ways to do it instead of just kind of beating your head against a wall. And that's to me is like the ultimate example of what a growth mindset looks like.

Beth Comstock: Yeah. No, I'm a big fan of Carol Dweck's work. I think the growth mindset is really a good framework. And I forget how she proposes it, but I think you can learn to be that way. I mean, sure certainly ... There are certain characteristics of some people's brains versus others, but I think you can learn to be more open and adaptable. And I'm big on feedback to help you learn.

Jacob Morgan: I love it. Alright, let's jump to the second one, which is Discovery. So what is Discovery about? And how do we start to practice that?

Beth Comstock: Yeah. So this is perhaps my favorite chapter or section, series of chapters in the book. It's at the heart of what I think why I've loved my business experience. And frankly, what makes me tick as a person and the people who consider

themselves curious. It's about using the world as a classroom for discovery. And what I ... Experiencing businesses often, you know, it's the tension between just the super hyper-focused and the efficiency and productivity we all strive in our day versus the meandering getting out of the office, looking for patterns. Picking your head up and going to places that are unusual, even weird, to see new things.

And so to me, I don't know how you can not do both. And I think in business we often forget the discovery part. Or we outsource it to other people and haven't internalized some of those learnings. So to me discovery is just getting out in the world. Starting to look for patterns. Unusual connections. It's where new ideas, partnerships ... And you can, I believe, meet change early. Meaning you see things before they become a disruptor or some sort of threat to you.

Jacob Morgan: I hear this notion of curiosity also come up a lot from executives that I interview. Do you think you can teach curiosity? Or is it something you just have to have? And if you can teach it, like, how would you go about encouraging curiosity in people?

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Well, I want to believe as humans we're innately curious. And yes, some of us have it more than others. So I do think that there ... By nature some of us are more prone to be curious. But I do believe, like being creative, I believe people can be encouraged to tap into that curiosity that they have. Simple things you can do. One, just break up your pattern. If you drive to work the same way, drive a different route. See what you noticed. Then when you go back to that old route, I bet you'll find things you didn't notice existed before. You know, if you ever had it happen. You go away on vacation, you come back, you go, "Huh. I'm on this same route and I never noticed that mailbox was there." Or something like that.

I think there are simple things you can do. I think there are questions you can start to ask people. As opposed to when you meet people for the first time, you know, "Hi, Jacob, what do you do?" Well, "How are you? What do you do?" tend to be our standard go-to questions. Maybe you do that. And then your next question is, "What's interesting to you these days? What insights or new trends are you seeing in your particular industry?" So you're just constantly ... Any new engagement with someone is an opportunity to learn.

And that would be my last thing. I think curious to me is about learning. It's about being open to not just what you know, but what you don't know. And so one of the things I ... Kind of a practical recommendation I make in the book is that everyone needs to make room for discovery in their lives. And people always say, "I don't have time. Are you kidding? I have like eight million emails. I've got all these meetings. Let someone else do that." Or, you know, it's for someone else.

I believe everybody ... Certainly in a business context ... Has 10% of their time that can be reallocated to discovering things that are new and unusual and may

not be in the full realm of what their daily job is. You have 10% of your time that's in meetings about things you already know. 10% of your time, you know, just doing things the way you've always done them that you can free up to go learn something new. Ask questions of a customer or a competitor. Or just be out in the world learning about new patterns that are emerging. So I believe anybody can make that kind of time to discover.

Jacob Morgan: And today with technology, I suppose it's never been easier, right? I mean, you watch TED Talks, you can discover all sorts of things online. So there's kind of no excuse for why we shouldn't be kind of just playing around a little bit and just seeing what we might find and then uncover, like you said. I [crosstalk 00:18:32]-

Beth Comstock: Yeah. The only other thing I would add to that ... I think you're absolutely right. I mean, what an amazing time we live in with the access we all have. But I also encourage people, "Yeah, watch the TED Talk." I'm a huge fan of those. But there's nothing like going and seeing for yourself. So when you can, get out there. Understand a customer problem or whatever the business situation is. Or if you just want to know, go see for yourself. Don't let someone else tell you, go see.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. And that very much ties into your first point about giving yourself permission. So they fit very well together. Okay, let's jump to the third one, which is Agitated Inquiry, which is a little bit of a provocative name. So what's that one about?

Beth Comstock: Well, I think ... Especially as you're driving to kind of what's new and next ... So you've given yourself permission. You're out in the world. You're getting these patterns. You've developed a hypothesis by now. And you have to make sure there's something there. So it's all about conflict. It's about sort of understanding what you see. Can you do it? Should you do it? What's the right way to do it? And I say this as somebody who doesn't like conflict. Has considered myself more of a diplomat in my business career than I have a ... I avoid conflict. But really it's about beating up the idea. It's about getting all kinds of, you know, input into it to make sure you wanna go forth. So that's what I mean by agitated inquiry.

And I also think in company cultures, this is the hardest part of business. It's where we don't agree. It's where we get into our tribal dimensions. It's where difference really scares us. So if you get out and you're discovering things that are weird or different, we want to discount them because they conflict with our worldview. And we often miss things by doing that. Or miss out on people who can contribute to what we're doing.

Jacob Morgan: Is there a way to practice this inside of a company that kind of sort of borders the line ... You know, agitated inquiry, but without making people angry or upset? Because like you said, this isn't something that a lot of people are

comfortable with. So how do you do about actually practicing this without crossing the line?

Beth Comstock: Well, I think sometimes you may have to cross the line. I'm a big believer in one, getting teams together to go back to the last discussion, last section about Discovery. I think the more you can go discover things as a team ... So you're all dealing with the same kind of input together ... So you're able to react to what you've seen ... One, you have a shared experience. But ... So I think that's a good place that you're kind of all in the same mission. So that would be where I'd start. Do you all agree that the mission is clear? Okay, yes, that's a good place to ground you. Well, then how are we going to get there? And encourage conflict.

One of the just sort of basic things I love in ... And it's like a military analogy ... Is kind of red team, blue team exercises. Where you just deliberately saying to people, "Okay, you're going to be pro and you're going to be con. For or against this issue. And we're going to facilitate a debate. We're gonna give people their say, and then the team leader has to decide, 'Okay, we've heard it. We're gonna take that and now we're gonna go forth and do this based on what we've heard.'" So we're allowing for the dissension, but then you decide and move forward. I think those are the ways that effective teams work. I shared in the book some examples of not-so-effective ... I chose to talk about the time I was at NBC in the first kind of digital wave. And YouTube was emerging at the time and people were afraid. They were frightened by cats playing videos. First it was like dismissive of it. "That's so, you know, so silly." And then it was like, "Oh my gosh, what if we don't know how to produce cats that play video." And so then people have to fight and debate and decide. And what often happens is you don't take action. You know, what we should have done more was create more of these small labs and learning experiences. You know, we had a small creator's lab, for example, at NBC that was creating video shorts. And we tended to dismiss them and say, "Ugh, they don't know what they're doing." As opposed to saying, "What can we learn from that? Huh, what did people like about that?" So I think our first impulse is to try to kill these things as opposed to give them some breath and air and learn from them.

Jacob Morgan: Then you can't kill them, right? Because this is where innovation happens. So if you-

Beth Comstock: Exactly. Exactly.

Jacob Morgan: If you don't have that, it sounds like it's pretty hard to innovate and do things differently. So you gotta have that in there. And I think that ties very well next to the last two, Storycraft and Creating A New OS. So let's jump into Storycraft, because I know you're very passionate about that. I've seen several talks that you've given and articles that you have written specifically about storytelling. So what is it about the story aspect that you find so compelling?

Beth Comstock: Well, I think to me story is everything. I think we, again, underwhelm this in business. We tend to think it's what we do at the end ... You know, like

technology's so great it will sell itself. I've had people say that to me. And maybe that's in a rare case true, but the story is, "Why does this technology exist? What's it going to do for me as the user to make my life better? My experience better? Why do I want this? Why do I need this?" And that's the story for how you as the user are going to live your life differently. And I think any good innovation has started with a vision of, "Here's what we need and here's where we're going and follow me."

And so if you're a leader, you have to start with the story. Yeah, you can start with your numbers and, you know, "We're gonna grow 10 percent, we're gonna do that", but most people don't want to follow numbers. You want to follow a vision. And a vision is a story. And a strategy is a story. So that's why I'm so passionate about unlocking that story. "Why do you come to work? Why do you work at this company? Why does this company exist? Why should your customers care about you?" Those are all opportunities to tell stories about the founding of your company, the aspirations of your company, what you get right and what you get wrong. That's also what often happens. Stories about conflict, it's about, "We tried and this didn't work. But we overcame it and we got this great thing."

So to me, maybe because I'm a storyteller, but I think so much of business is about story. Actually so much of life is about story.

Jacob Morgan: Do you have any examples of how you've used storytelling either at GE or any of your previous companies? Or even in your personal life for that matter?

Beth Comstock: Well, I think just first I would say ... You know, people talk about their personal brand. I don't relate to that as much as, "What's your story?" I mean, you're Jacob. You've chosen to talk about the future of work. I think of you as somebody who's looking to guide people. You're a guide for the future, telling people how do you navigate the change that's happening and I want ... Hopefully people are continue this ... I still want to work in the future. So how do I do that? What's my story for working?

So I think that's, you know, just where you start. For the kind of work I did at GE, we tried to unlock stories about technology that was invisible. So people often take for granted things like electricity or the fact that you're flying in a jet from A to B. We take for granted this amazing, miraculous technology. But we believed if we could make it more visible by talking about the story behind it, by understanding the story at the science, in fun ways ... Slow motion videos that show you how nanoparticles collide. Explaining hydraulic braking through the use of dropping big objects into vats of jello.

Just interesting ways that connect people with an insight or a story that makes them appreciate something that otherwise might seem boring. It could be as simple ... And I think you're seeing this in the marketplace now ... Of, "Where did that vegetable come from? Who grew it? What was the farmer like? What

was his or her motive?" I think people want to understand where things came from, why they exist in the world, and where they're going.

Jacob Morgan:

I love it. It's ... I try to tell stories as well. Try to take ideas that some people might believe are complex or hard to understand and make them easy to understand. And it's one of the reasons why I love doing these podcasts is because you get to hear so many stories from people. And I think it really connects with people. So I totally agree on everything that you said for Storycraft.

Let's jump into the last one, Creating A New OS.

Beth Comstock:

So this to me ... OS meaning operating system ... And this is very much I think trying to get over ... Especially in larger organizations ... But I think most organizations as they start to scale go through this. That they just get more complex and mechanistic. I mean, there are processes and procedures and formulas. And especially in our digital age with the data feedback that on your path to scale you often forget that you were once small. And you have to really ... It's about the culture. It's about the stories you tell each other. And it's about the way you kind of give yourself space to test and learn and experiment so that you're making sure that the risks you're taking are more manageable as opposed to waiting until they're too big and they cause jeopardy for the whole company.

So this part to me was really about getting the whole culture together and kind of accepting that, yes, you're gonna fail. Yes, you're gonna make mistakes. But you're going to do it in a way that tries to test things in an earlier way. Testing ... Putting more ideas through the pipeline. Funding things with a less amount of money. To learn things before you just go all-in and scale things before they're ready.

So this was really about getting a whole culture. It's kind of this living lab of change that's taking action. So you've envisioned the future. You've imagined it. When I say imagine forward, now you've got to take the steps to make it happen. You can't just go, "Okay, well, here we go." You've gotta experiment your way forward. And that's what I'm trying to encourage people to do. Especially in big companies where they think everything has to be with checklist efficiency and that there's no room for failure.

Jacob Morgan:

Yeah, I always say that, you know, if you think of how often we upgrade our phones, the different software that's out there, how many times we upgrade apps, we also need to upgrade ourselves much the same way. With learning and trying to understand new things. So I think it very much ties into all the different concepts that you've been talking about for the book.

I know we spent the first 30 minutes sort of looking at the five main components of your book. But I want to shift gears a little bit and talk more

about how you decide to do certain things. And just kind of what your thought process was like during the course of your career. So the first question that I have for you on that is, what was the hardest business decision that you ever had to make? And how did you make it?

Beth Comstock: Well, I think the hardest business decision I had to make was, you know, basically killing ideas that were past ... They were past their viability or seeing ideas fail and trying to assess out of it what were the learnings. So, you know, in the book I shared this example of backing a company that we partnered with and created products with called Quirky and it ended up going bankrupt. And, you know, I had to back an idea that ultimately failed on a huge colossal scale.

So, you know, one, making that decision to go after an idea that wasn't a sure bet thing with a lot of people saying, "Yeah, but why should we be doing this? Why should we put that much money into this idea?" So I had to have a good strategy and I worked like crazy to make it happen. And as it was starting to fall apart, also fighting to make sure there wasn't any possible solution out of it. And then when it finally did fail, to be able to own up to the failure and say, "We tried." Take some time, suck my thumb, say, "Ugh, that didn't work so well."

So I don't know. That one comes to mind as a big one which was risky but in the end, a lot of good came out of it. We seeded a whole new model of manufacturing and inventing and prototyping. And things that never would have come out of it.

Jacob Morgan: And for those people not familiar with Quirky, I remember reading about this actually as well. And I know a lot of people were talking about Quirky. There was a lot of media attention around it. And just to give people a sense of when you say colossal failure, how big of a failure are we talking about?

Beth Comstock: Well, I mean, it was a separate company and it was a company that was about open innovation, taking ideas from an inventor community, making the products, and getting them into the market. And we entered into them with a partnership. We invested with them and also a partnership to create small consumer-connected things. Probably the best one was a connected air conditioner that would allow you to not only, you know, turn it on and off remotely, but better economize how much energy you use. And, you know, I think altogether Quirky raised \$185 million. Now all of that wasn't from GE, we ... You know, ours was pretty well known. I think we invested \$30-plus million in it. And it all, you know, it all went bankrupt.

Jacob Morgan: When it did go bankrupt, how ... I guess what was your reaction? And how did the team at GE react? You know, some companies would say, "Oh my God, that messed up. You're fired." But what was the sort of the reaction and aftermath after Quirky failed? I mean, did you get like a stern talking to? Where you almost let go? Was it just sort of like, "It's okay, it happens. Let's move on to the next thing"? Or how was the ... Just kind of the general impression of that?

Beth Comstock: A little bit of all of those things. I mean, one, you know, you go through your own like, "Did I do everything that I possibly could?" And in something like that, you realize it's not just up to you. There were a lot of people in that. Yeah, I had a lot of people like, you know, this ... "We can't tolerate this kind of loss." My boss was ultimately like, "We have to try things. This was a bet worth taking because we got some good out of it. It changed a new way of working for us. It created a whole new viability in a certain set of products we made for our appliances division."

So that became very successful. And you need sometimes time to look back on these things. You need a bit of time. And then even for the teams I worked with, it became a way to ... What we started saying, we used it as an example for almost like a ... We called it our Failure Convention. We would use that as an example and ask other people to share failures they had that were not nearly as big as that. And I would say to the teams I worked with, "You probably can't fail as big as that. So what have you done? How have you dealt with it? What have we learned?" So it really became a learning example. And oh, by the way, I did get promoted after that.

So I always use that as an example internally to say, you know, "See, there's good that can come out of these things." Now, you don't want to do that all the time, or you will get fired.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. I would imagine if there's a couple of those in a row, then it's probably ... Something bad's going to happen. But yeah, I love that you shared that you actually got promoted afterwards. Which I think is great. What was the most difficult challenge you had to overcome? And I don't know if this would be the same as Quirky? It could [crosstalk 00:35:06]-

Beth Comstock: No. Yeah, I think for me just my own nature, I am ... It doesn't sound like now ... But I am a reserved, shy, introverted person. And my nature is to withdraw. To be more of a quiet person. And business is a very extroverted game. And I had to overcome that. Plus, I think especially early in my career, a bit of a lack of confidence. And those two things worked against my ability to move forward one-on-one and in a broader career sense. And that's what I try to share a little bit of how I summoned social courage. Just small steps forward to not let my nature get in the way of ... You know, not let my nature hold me back.

Jacob Morgan: Can you share the story of ... 'Cause I think it very much relates to this, you talk about it in the book ... On how you met Ted Turner?

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Well, I worked at Turner Broadcasting for a couple of years as part of my media career. And I was in the ... Running the New York Publicity Department and part of my job was to represent Ted Turner and be his PR person. And he got a lot of awards. And once, you know, I ... He'd show up and he didn't know my name because I never gave him a reason to know my name. I don't think I ever introduced myself. I'd stand virtually like a wallflower. I even remember once wearing a dress where I think it was flowers and I was against wallpaper

that was flowers. And I thought to myself, "You know what? I ... Could you even see my head here? I am totally immersed in this." And so I'm like, "I'm gonna go introduce myself." Okay, but I know I'd worked for him for a while, so this is weird. Awkward.

And I walk up and I put my ... I get ready to talk to him and he's coming out of the men's room. You know, zipping his fly and I reach out my hand, and he's got this wet hand and he shakes my hand. I go, "Hi, I'm Beth." And it was so awkward. And he's like, "Yeah, okay." And I kind of slunk away like, "Okay, like that was so awkward." But, you know, I said to myself, "I did it. I made sure he knew what my name was. I made sure he knew who I was as awkward as it was." So it's kind of the point I'm trying to share that often times we just have to work to get out of our own nature sometimes. As awkward or embarrassing as it may be.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. I love that story. Because ... I mean, you did it, right? I mean, you-

Beth Comstock: I did it.

Jacob Morgan: Exactly.

Beth Comstock: And I set these little challenges for myself. To go to ... You know, maybe it's ... You know, in a meeting, you just ... As the quiet one, I go to a meeting with lots of ideas and I leave not having said anything. And it's like, "Well, why was I in that meeting? I'm sure people were thinking, 'Well, why is she here?'" And, you know, some meetings you can't get a word in. But mostly I could have. And so I'd go back next time and I'd go, "Okay, you're gonna do your homework. You're just gonna ask one good question this time. Or you're gonna have one idea that you're gonna put out." And I would do it and it was like I had run a marathon or something. I'd say, "You see, you did it. You can do it." The next time it would be two. It's small steps like that are what you need to kind of push yourself forward.

Jacob Morgan: It's kind of like gamification for your life. And-

Beth Comstock: Yeah, exactly. That's a good way to put it, Jacob.

Jacob Morgan: So you kind of ... Yeah. I mean, that's just ... Hearing you describe it, it basically sounds like you made a little game out of it. You would give yourself little challenges when you can do something. And you just ... And they're little things, right? Go say hi. Speak up. Ask a question. And then gradually you kind of get more points and build up your character. And over time, you know, look at the great success you've had. So-

Beth Comstock: No. But it's also the ... What I realize happens is we all have these internal monologues where we're telling ourselves like, "Oh my gosh, I could, you know ... It's too late. Ted Turner doesn't know my name. It's too late. I'll never ... He'll

never know my name. Well, okay. I gotta do something." Or you just ... You think people are ... You know, you're imagining what they're imagining. And meanwhile, they're imagining what you're imagining. So just stop it. Just take steps. Take action. Because many of us overthink things. And that's some of what ... It's just sort of giving yourself these little tiny pockets of courage. Just dig in, just take a little bit of that courage in your pocket and push yourself forward. Whatever it is you're afraid to do.

Jacob Morgan: How do you deal with no? I know we talked about earlier this idea of no means not yet. But is that usually how you deal with anytime you get a no?

Beth Comstock: Well, I mean, it's different, you know, over the course of my career earlier versus later. But I think usually ... Or, and early on to what we said earlier, no, I'd probably go away. But to me, no is sort of this invitation to keep going. And partly because I'm curious. Like, "Why did you say no? Was my idea not good? Was I not clear?" So to me when I hear no I have a lot of questions that aren't answered. And I want to understand it. And it's also a test of like how much do you want to do that? Do you really care about that? If you do, then you gotta keep going.

So it to me it's also a bit of when you hear a no it's a bit of a test of your commitment to something. And so when I'm really committed, I keep going back. One, to perfect the idea as we said earlier. Two, to show my passion. And three, it's not just about my idea, I think that's what people get wrong. It's like, "I'm gonna fight my idea to the finish." It's not my idea. If I believe there's a better way, you gotta be building a coalition. You gotta be getting other people who think it's a good idea or they have a better way to make the idea go forward. And it becomes their idea.

So to me the hearing no is, "How do I enlist other people who share the passion I have? And how can we make this change happen?" That's what it's all about. It's not about my idea, it's about, how do we create some momentum here?

Jacob Morgan: Who was your greatest coach or mentor? And what did they do that made them such a great coach or mentor?

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Well, I have so many different mentors. And I'd say one, I just ... I'm a big believer in having as many advisors as you can. You know, the kind of Board of Advisors model as opposed to an individual mentor or coach. I have so many. I mean, there are two stories I share in the book. I mean, Jeff Immelt was an incredible coach to me over the course of a career at GE in that he ... When I ... I mentioned earlier about sort of struggling with confidence, he once called me in and he said, "Look, like, what's your problem? I need you to put it out and you show up to these meetings and you're not expressing a point of view. Like, where are you? I need you to get out there." And he also recognized in my quiet way that he needed to pull that out. So if I hadn't spoken up in a meeting, he'd say, "Beth, what is your point of view? What do you think?" And he'd follow back afterwards and he'd say, "You could have done this or that."

So I've appreciated people like that who kind of understood what I needed to be developed and helped do that. So that's one example I could give you.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, that's a great one. And I think we all need coaches and mentors ... Probably several of them ... During the course of our careers. What was the most valuable business lesson ... Or it could even be a life lesson I suppose ... That you've ever learned?

Beth Comstock: I think my most valuable business lesson is that because I consider myself somebody is attracted to change ... I call myself a changemaker ... But really, I don't like a lot of change. I've just learned how to navigate it. But you can't make people change. You just can't. You can't tell ... Command people to change and they will automatically change. In rare cases maybe it works. But mostly you have to create the surround sound, the environment where people can make room for it themselves. And that's something I'm passionate about. That's why I think teams need to go out and discover things on their own.

I'll give you an example. I remember working with a group of leaders and we were talking about non-hierarchical leadership and using the Israeli military as an example. Well, I could tell them that. I could maybe even bring in a general from the Israeli Army, or I could send them to Israel and have them go to Israeli boot camp and sleep in tents and try to operate that way. And they'd have a much different experience and figure out how to take those learnings and change their leadership style. So that's how I found change happens, is that you have to expose people to those dimensions. And then they have to incorporate it and make the change real for themselves.

Jacob Morgan: How do you ... Kind of building on that ... I know that a lot of people describe you as a changemaker. I think you even talked about that in the book several times. And one of the common things that a lot of people as me is, "How do you become the changemaker in a organization or in an environment that's not ready to change?" So for example, you see better ways to do things, but your manager doesn't agree. Your team doesn't agree. And you feel like you're the only one that is, you know, trying to move things forward whereas as everyone around you is stuck in quicksand. Like, how do you ... I mean, what do you do in that kind of a situation?

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Well, I think there are realistic situations and unrealistic situations. Let's talk about the realistic ones first. Where partly you're sort of summoning up a resilience and a grit that you're just gonna keep pushing forward. So there's an energy that's required. And not everybody wants to make that investment in energy. And again, it's back to finding ways to allow people to understand the issue. Do you create a newsletter on trends or email on trends that you share with your colleagues? Do you bring in an outside speaker? Or send them a TED Talk on this idea?

You're just finding ways to introduce a different perspective. I think if you happen to be able to bring in resources or hire additional people on the team,

bringing in people with different points of view are a great way to start to bring that perspective. Bring the outside in. Can you bring customers? Can you bring in customers that help highlight some of the problems you are trying to articulate. So that's often a good way. Getting other people to team with you, right? If it's just you fighting for it, you're probably not gonna be as effective as if you can get a couple of other people on the team to start to work toward the same goal. So back to what we said earlier, you're building a coalition. You're building movement.

Let's talk about the unrealistic situations. There are always jerks. There are always companies that don't want to change. And once you feel like you've exhausted all your options, you may have to leave. And that's often tough, too. I think part of the change journey is knowing when to exit if you can. If you can't, I'm a big believer in trying to at least craft your job to include some parts of what you want to do that are gonna allow you to work on some of those challenges that you see. Can you craft your experience for your job just a little bit differently so maybe you can work more with customers solving that problem? Or maybe you want to bring a design aesthetic to the way your company's doing data. Can you just do that in small ways so that you're starting to at least feel fulfilled from that perspective? So change what you can I guess is that message.

Jacob Morgan: What if you're a relatively entry level employee? You don't have the resources and you're, you know, maybe you're relatively new in your career. Do you just kind of bite your tongue? Or can you still start doing things inside of an organization without being seen as kind of like the annoying person?

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Well, I think being seen as the annoying person is never helpful. And so if you're just starting out, you're new to a company, you're new in your career ... You know, one, I think you just have to be a good sponge and listen first. That's all you ... You know, understand. Do you really understand what people are saying? How do you know? So ask yourself, "Are you just eager to make your mark? Or do you really think you understand?" How do you understand? You ask people. You spend time getting to know them one-on-one. You don't just bring the issue to a staff meeting or a small meeting with your team. You go and ask people, "What's the problem? What would it take for this to change? What have you tried in the past?" So I think you become very good at asking questions.

And then I think also you're trying to introduce new ideas in any way you can. Back to what I said earlier. Maybe you're just sending around a weekly email to your colleagues saying, "Hey, here's three things on this topic that I think you might find interesting. What do you think?" Those are I think ways people can start to establish a point of view and bring in some thinking that isn't just about themselves.

Jacob Morgan: How do you deal with fear? So if you're ... And maybe you can even talk about a time where you were actually scared at work. Maybe somebody gave you a project or a task and it just terrified you. How do you deal with it?

Beth Comstock: Well, I think the first is I think it's one of the biggest issues holding people back at work is that we all bring our fears to work. We pretend like we don't have them. And that brings out the bad behavior. We're afraid of the change. We're afraid of the competitor. We're afraid that the customer won't like what we're doing. So the first thing is I think you as an individual can say to your colleagues ... It takes a lot of courage to do this ... But, "I'm afraid of this. I'm afraid. And here's why and here's what I think I need to do. So can you do that?"

For myself, I mentioned earlier just some of the fears of just even being afraid of putting an idea out there. I've had so many instances where I was afraid of doing something. I share in the book ... And it's a simple one, but it was important at the time ... Doing an ad, an advertisement in the aftermath of 9/11 when no one was advertising and taking a very bold stand with my company and putting an ad out there at a time in 9/11 where people were confused. And no one thought it was good idea. And I was afraid but I thought it was the right thing to do. So we did it. And I stayed up half the night convinced I was gonna get fired or the company was gonna look stupid. And the next day employees liked it and people connected. And it sent a sentiment that they wanted. It wasn't about us, it was about a mood at the time that people wanted to connect with.

So each of those small things start to give you a little bit of reminder next time you feel fear, remember you did that before. You felt bad. How did it work out? What did you learn? So I think you have to tackle those fears just one step at a time.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, everyone has fears all the time. What was the greatest lesson you learned working with Jack Welch?

Beth Comstock: Well, what I loved about working with Jack, Jack was all about performance. Which is really important, obviously. You have to perform. But he also let you know where you stand. And I am forever grateful for his really radical candor. He had this line, you were either a pig or a prince. Never a princess. And you knew where you stood. And if you were doing really well, you were a prince. You know, he'd say you were a prince in that. This was amazing. You'd get a note. Maybe you'd get a bonus. Or, this was horrible.

I remember once, you know, he like came to my office and I looked up and he'd never been to my office. And it wasn't a chit chat let me just see how you're doing. It was, "You're a pig today. I don't like the way you handled this. And here's why. And I need you to fix it." But I knew where I stood. So from there I feel like I ... As a team leader, I've always tried to be candid, not blunt. I think there's difference. Candid in a helpful way, right? "Here's what you could have

done better and how I think it would help." Not just, "You messed up." So that's how ... The lesson I took away from working with him.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. I know. That's a great one. And it's funny because I find that when Jack's name comes up, there are people who, you know, love him or they hate him. And I know he was often times criticized for the stack ranking and a lot of those methodologies. And a lot of companies have since kind of moved on from that. But he also was kind of a very visionary and a great leader. And a lot of people that worked with him have wonderful things to say about Jack and the way that he was able to lead GE.

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Well, he was right for his time. And I think that's really the point. And I think that's the point in general about change and progress. Often times people want to go back and recount the glory days. Well, those days are over. You can't bring that back, but you can take pieces of that and bring the pieces and apply them for what's right for now. And I think we often lose sight of that.

And also, leaders are not ... They're not all beings. They're not all perfect. I mean, leaders are about the team. And if we put all of our faith just in the leader, what does that say about the team? And so leaders can be great and also tough and make bad mistakes. And we have to recognize that they aren't all one or the other. They're a really mixed up blend of all of those.

Jacob Morgan: What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishment?

Beth Comstock: For me, I think it would be just being able to work with an amazing team of people and unleash their creativity. And we did amazing work together. And sort of my contract with the teams I worked with is, "I don't know how long we're gonna work together. I hope it's a long time, but I commit to you that together we're gonna do our best work. And that means we have to be honest, candid, and creative. We've gotta go for it. And you gotta do things you never thought you'd be able to do before." And I'm proud that I was part of teams that we did that. And I'm really proud of the work we did. And we couldn't have done it without each other and without that kind of just trust in each other and trust in our kind of human creativity and imagination if you will.

Jacob Morgan: Well, I could keep asking you questions all day, but some people online also wanted me to ask you their questions.

Beth Comstock: Okay.

Jacob Morgan: So I took three of them and I thought I would ask you those. The first one is from Sarah. She's a partner at PWC ... Digital Talent Leader I should say at PWC and a partner. And she said, "I would love to know Beth's views on nurturing creativity through organizational culture and how it can be taught or enhanced. She's well-known as an advocate for the importance of storytelling skills which is

such a critical leadership skill. I hope she has advice on how others can champion creativity through storytelling."

Beth Comstock: Yeah. And I'm totally with her on that perspective. One, I think just do it. Right? Don't wait for the permission. You're at PWC, can you turn your great advice to a client into a story? Just do it. Use story and how you work and people will follow you. And I do think the best leaders are the ones that paint a vision for the future and allow people the space to follow it. So don't just say, "We're gonna grow the business 10%." Why? How? What? How are we gonna get there? Make it exciting. Tell us what it's gonna look like when we get there.

So I would ... Wherever you are in an organization, you can ask for someone to put it in a story. Start with just your team. Have everybody explain their stories. It can be you're a team of three people. Have everybody say, "What's your story?" Like, "Where did you come from? Why are you here? Where are you trying to go? What's our customers' story?" Every customer has a journey that can be put into some kind of story or segments of customers can be turned into stories that allow the whole organization to understand.

So those are the simple things I would do to start. And I guarantee you it's like a virus. More people will start to follow that.

Jacob Morgan: A good virus. A good happy virus.

Beth Comstock: A good virus.

Jacob Morgan: The next question-

Beth Comstock: A story virus.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, exactly. Next one is from Allen Smithson. He says, "What are the top three skills we need to teach youth to prepare them for the future of work we can't comprehend yet?"

Beth Comstock: Oh, this is such my favorite question. I ... Actually, Jacob, for Allen and everyone, I mean, I love as you do this like a great followup social discussion would be ... Let's start to accumulate those and understand like, where do people go to learn more? I'm big on ... Certainly, I've been studying a lot of philosophy. I mean, I studied science, but I think this idea of just ethics and critical thinking and judgment and just being, you know, understanding on this hand, on that hand. But yes, let's make a decision.

So to me that's part of what when people say critical thinking, I often go, "What do you mean?" To me, that's what I mean. Can you consider things and then make a decision based on input? And I think we need to do more of that with debates and a bit of history and philosophy. So those are some of the skills I would put in there. I think this sort of opening up and allowing people to wallow

in ambiguity, to not have the answers ... You know, I don't know, I don't want to just give kids ... Don't give kids all the checklists things that they have to do it exactly this way. Say, "Here's what I want you to accomplish. And I'm gonna let you figure out how to do it."

So I think much more of that kind of figure it out kind of scenarios and situations we can create for our kids ... Those would be a couple of examples I think that are the skills that we need not only for our youth, but also for our people at work. And within there maybe the third is just this ability to, you know, fail more often. We're seeing a lot of depression and anxiety in kids. And often it's this quest to be perfect. Which is an impossible quest.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. And I love that you said wallow in ambiguity. Because you're totally right. We're always feeling like we have to have the answer. Managers can never say, "I don't know." Everyone has to have everything figured out. All the perfect things go up on social media. And it kind of feels like we're creating this world where everyone has to be perfect and know everything all the time. And of course, we all know that's just not realistic or practical or scalable in any possible way.

Beth Comstock: Yeah. So put people in those situations where we know they don't know the answer and find the creative solutions they come up with. That is what we need more of.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. I couldn't agree more. And last question for you from online is from Sophie Proffitt who says, "What type of organizational structure should one organization adopt in order to stay competitive in a more complex world?"

Beth Comstock: I love that question, too. I'm ... I think that is the challenge of this generation of business people, is the world is ... The complexity is not going away and the speed is not going away. The world's never gonna get slower than it is right now. Never ... Unlikely to get less complex than it is right now. So the question is, you know ... Her question is, what do we need to do for our organizations? I talk a lot about ... To me, it's about leading what I call a good M.O., meaning mission objection or mindset orientation. Back to the Carol Dweck mindset kind of thing. How do you get your team in this figure it out mindset? Are there certain tasks that you need to do that are gonna be checklist efficient? A, B, C? There are others that we've never been in this situation before.

I'll give you an example. I remember at GE when Blockchain and Bitcoin and Cryptocurrency first started creeping up. "Well, why do we care? What's the reason? We don't know what to assign a team. For multiple parts of the organization your mission is to understand Cryptocurrency, Blockchain in particular, and figure out what it is, why we should care, and what we should do about it. That's it. You're got 90 days to a year even. Go figure it out." And that's what a team did. And I think increasingly we're going to need to give people more room for those kinds of missions and your job as a team leader is, "I see a problem. I have questions. I need you to figure out the answers."

Jacob Morgan: And last question for you before I just have some fun rapid fire ones. What do you think makes a great leader? So when you look at the world that we live in now, what are the most important leadership characteristics that you think that we need to possess as individuals?

Beth Comstock: I think leaders must have vision. Where are we going and why? And I think they have to have humility and vulnerability. Leaders of people, they can't get anywhere without the team. So it's not about the leader, it's about the team. And saying, "I don't know. I need help. How do we do this?" So I think those are the things leaders have to possess if they are truly to be leaders.

Jacob Morgan: Perfect. Alright. And just to wrap up, just a couple of fun questions about you so people can get to know you. And again, these are rapid fire, so feel free to answer as quickly as you want. What's the most embarrassing moment you've ever had at work?

Beth Comstock: Oh gosh. I would have to say ... This isn't fun ... But I mean, any time I've cried at work. And I have done that more than once.

Jacob Morgan: Okay. I'm sure a lot of people listening to this can relate to that. If you were a superhero, who would you be?

Beth Comstock: If I were a superhero ... I gotta bone up on my superhero-

Jacob Morgan: Or a Disney character?

Beth Comstock: Or a Disney character? That's a good one. You stumped me on that one. I would probably ... I don't know. I'm trying to think of a good superhero that I ... I would be a Transformer.

Jacob Morgan: Oh, nice. You're the only one [crosstalk 01:02:19]-

Beth Comstock: Because-

Jacob Morgan: That's ever said that, by the way.

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Because ... But I would be a good Transformer. I would be a Transformer that transformed into a more emotional, you know, sort of approachable feeling ... Emotional being. But I would be a Transformer.

Jacob Morgan: I love that one. What's a book that you recommend? Could be business book or non-business book.

Beth Comstock: Well, one of my favorite ... I call it business books back ... Just sort of keeping in the them of what we've been talking about today ... I love Twyla Tharp's The Creative Habit. It's an oldie but it's a good one. And her as a choreographer talking about both the discipline and the serendipity of creativity ... I actually

just did a quote from her today that I shared ... That I just, I love that book. And I am constantly ... It's like my little creativity Bible.

Jacob Morgan: If you were doing a different career, what do you think you would have ended up doing?

Beth Comstock: I would love to have been an anthropologist and some sort of explorer.

Jacob Morgan: If you could have dinner with anybody, who would you have dinner with?

Beth Comstock: Boy, I am so curious. There's so many people in the world I'd like to have dinner with. Hmm. I'd probably have dinner ... If I could pick it up with anyone, I would ... Past or present, right?

Jacob Morgan: Yep.

Beth Comstock: I would have dinner ... My Grandmother, who I never knew. Was my Mother's Mother and she died when my Mother was young and I just think of the influence she's had over the course of my family's life. And I would have ... I just would have loved to know her.

Jacob Morgan: If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?

Beth Comstock: Well, I live in New York. I like living in New York. The energy, the excitement. But I love visiting everywhere that I haven't been before. So there's probably some place that I would love living that I don't know 'cause I haven't lived there yet.

Jacob Morgan: Alright, I like it. Well, Beth, we are now officially out of time. Where can people go to learn more about you, the book? I know it's going to be available in a couple of weeks, but anything you want to mention for people to connect with you or the book, please do so.

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Well, thanks, Jacob. You've made this really engaging, so thank you. I am trying to be very active on social media. Probably the best place to go would be LinkedIn. It's LinkedIn ... It's Elizabeth Comstock, but you can just search for Beth Comstock or Twitter is @bethcomstock.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah. And you have a lot of great tweets that you keep putting out there. I follow your Twitter stream. So there's always-

Beth Comstock: Thank you.

Jacob Morgan: Always fun nuggets on there.

Beth Comstock: Back at you. I mean, part of what I try to do with Twitter is sort of a platform for discovery. So I try to share interesting things I'm reading or seeing.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, well, you're doing a great job.

Well, Beth, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me. I know you're very busy. And I very much appreciate it.

Beth Comstock: Thank you. Thanks for the opportunity, Jacob.

Jacob Morgan: My pleasure. And thanks everyone for tuning in. My guest again has been Beth Comstock. Make sure to check out her book coming out in a couple of weeks called *Imagine It Forward: Courage, Creativity, and the Power of Change*. And I will see all of you next week.