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: Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of the Future of Work podcast. My guest today is Dean Seavers, the President of National Grid in the United States. Dean, thanks for joining me.

Dean: Thank you, thanks for having me.

Jacob: So, why don't we start with a little bit of background information about you, and what a typical day looks like for you, and how you became President of the National Grid in the United States.

Dean: Wow, those are very different things. I've been President of US business [00:00:30] here for about three and a half years. But my background was not utility, this is probably the fourth company that I've run. Most of my businesses I've run have been in the fire and security industry, which the similarities are they're heavily tied to construction, heavily focused on customers and have a component of technology in them. From that standpoint, they're similar. From a National Grid standpoint, I guess that's the first time in a utility business, and it's just an interesting transition in terms of where the industry is and where the company's going.

            The second thing you asked was, what's a typical day look like? I'm trying to figure out when I get to have a typical [00:00:30] day. But on a good day, I wake up early, maybe rested, and I get a workout in. But after that, my meeting schedule starts pretty early. I actually prefer to start with unplanned meetings where I get time to spend with some of the folks on my leadership team. If I'm in our office, I get a chance to walk around and get the pulse of the business. Because after that, [00:01:00] the meetings come fast and furious because we have a real rhythm in terms of how we run our operation so that we're taking care of customers and a rhythm around how we run our strategic planning process. Those come fast and heavy, and it's usually meetings or VCs or conference calls.

            Ultimately, though that's what we would call a blue sky day where it's well planned out. In our business, lots of things happen. We've got a lot of customers. We've got 20 million people that [00:01:30] we serve, so lots of things can happen. But as you think about prioritizing, it's really prioritizing customers and prioritizing the people in our business, so as I get off schedule occasionally, it's usually because something's popped up that requires my attention from a customer or from an employee standpoint.

Jacob: I love that you said you start your day by walking around. You don't just show up to work, run into your office or wherever, close the door, and just kind of shut down. I love that you spend some time kind of [00:02:00] walking around, talking to people. Do you have a specific routine around that? Because I actually think, although it sounds simple, it's actually probably something that most leaders don't do a good enough job of. Most people, I think they just show up to work and lock themselves away. You only see them when you need to see them.

Dean: Yeah. I try to be somewhat unpredictable about it, but you talk about going in and locking my door, I don't have any doors in my office. About a year and a half ago, [00:02:30] I moved outside of an office, and I sit basically in an open cubicle area, which is right next to one of our customer hubs. From that standpoint, not only walking around, I get people that'll walk up because there's no walls, and there's no door there.

I think, for me, what I try to do is, even though there's a coffee machine right by my office, I get it there only when I'm really, really pressed for time. But I'll walk to different areas of the business [00:03:00] to grab a cup of coffee, sometimes in the cafeteria, sometimes in the break room. I try to make sure, when my knees are feeling good, that I take the stairs, so I run into people.

Occasionally, what I'll try to do is we have what we call hubs around here, where some of the functions will start their day off at a hub, where they're showing the progress they've made in their business or their function. I'll pop into some hubs occasionally, just to get a pulse for how things are going.

Jacob: [00:03:30] All right. Well, I have a lot of questions about that, about a couple things you just said. Before we jump into that, maybe you can give people some background information about the National Grid because we didn't actually talk about the company, what you guys do, how big you are.

Dean: Yeah. We are a publicly traded regulated utility. We have a sister business in the U.K., where it was started, but I run the U.S. portion of that. We are across New York, Massachusetts, [00:04:00] and Rhode Island on a transmission business. We're also across New Hampshire, but the reality is we've got 20 million customers, about eight million households that we serve, households and commercial businesses.

We are an electric distribution company, we're a gas distribution company, and we're an electric transmission company. We're a pretty big business. Like I said, 20 million people we serve. We've got 16,000 employees in our business [00:04:30] here, but really proud of the work that we're doing for our customers and the communities that we serve.

Jacob: I'm sure a lot of people listening to this have the assumption that utility companies, energy companies are outdated. They're conservative. They're kind of the last to adapt any of these concepts. But you already said that you don't even have an office. You have kind of an open layout. It sounds like you guys are very much thinking about a lot of these trends that we're seeing [00:05:00] in the world of work, which I think is fantastic.

Maybe you can talk a little bit about how are you guys thinking about work. Maybe we can start with the office, for example, and why you decided to make those changes.

Dean: Yeah. I think the office thing, for me, I mean, I thrive on sort of the energy around me. It's hard to feel that or thrive on it when you're sitting with the door closed [00:05:30] and four walls around you. It doesn't always lend itself to quiet thinking. But a lot of people have offices, and they think they need privacy. The reality is there really aren't that many secrets in our business, so I think part of it was being around the pulse of the business. The other part was sort of walking the talk, honestly, and just saying, if we want to have an open, transparent organization, I wanted to have an open, [00:06:00] transparent office.

Funny though, that you talk about people's perceptions of utilities. That was probably mine four years ago because I'd been a utility customer but never had worked at a utility. We are, as a business and as an industry, straddling both sides of the fence, which is we've got a very core business that has a very long history to it, but yet our aspirations [00:06:30] are to be sort of a model business of the future. We have to protect the core because we're, by nature, you said conservative. In certain aspects of our business, we're very conservative. We're very conservative around safety. We're very conservative around reliability, the products we supply for our customers. We're very conservative around compliance in our regulatory frameworks.

However, we aspire to be innovative when it comes [00:07:00] to technology, innovative when it comes to how we interface with our customers and where our customers need us to be in the future. Quite frankly, we're innovative when it comes to the things we put in place for our employees. We have to do both, and I think a number of industries do that. I think it's really true here where you've got this great core business, but you know you need to evolve for the future.

Jacob: Let's talk about some of the things that you guys are doing on the employee side.

Dean: Yeah.

Jacob: I guess [00:07:30] the office ... just judging from the way that you describe it, it sounds like it would be something that you might see here in the Bay Area, kind of open. Is it different kind of floor layouts and floor plans that employees have, or is it just all open like a big warehouse?

Dean: Yeah, I wouldn't say like a warehouse. Our building here is lead-certified, so I'm proud of that, in terms of how environmentally friendly we are. I think the [00:08:00] building I'm in, and we have a number of buildings around the northeastern part of the United States, as well as in the U.K., I think they're an evolution in terms of development. But I think the aspiration is for it to be open and collaborative.

I think, as we look to re-plan the building, it's less about which functions sit together because traditionally, you have communications sitting with communications, [00:08:30] customers sitting with customer groups, engineering sitting with engineering,

and operations siting with operations. The reality is, if you take a customer-centric perspective, it's teams that work together. Putting some of those teams together is really the theme that we want to get to, so that it isn't that you have to always schedule a formal meeting and bring in various functions together. Those teams sort of sit and cohabit and bump into each other and have great water cooler coffee conversations [00:09:00] that help drive the business forward.

That's the aspiration. Again, we've got a lot of employees, so we're managing towards that aspiration, but a year and a half ago, when I did it, I wanted to basically emulate what it is we aspire to.

Jacob: It sounds like your teams are mixed up a little bit, like marketing might sit with operations, for example.

Dean: Yeah, that's what we're moving to. But I think the other thing is, it isn't just when they sit together. [00:09:30] One of the things I think really works well here is the video conferencing capability and what we call our collaboration rooms, so you can sit in Syracuse, or you can sit in Boston, or you can sit in Brooklyn, or you can sit in London. But the way those rooms are set up, they look like offices, so when you're sitting on one side, the other side looks like it's sitting on the other side of the table from you. We use that quite a bit because I think that there's plenty of opportunities for people to collaborate [00:10:00] throughout the day, throughout the week without jumping on a plane and really working together as a team. We're also trying to use technology as a way to drive better collaboration.

Jacob: Aside from the space, which we talked about, what are some of the other things that you guys are doing internally around employees? Do you have unique programs, how you guys think about leadership, anything else that you're doing that's particularly unique that you want to highlight?

Dean: Yeah, there's a lot there. I think, first of all, [00:10:30] from an employee standpoint, I didn't make this up. This existed before I got here, but I'm really proud of National Grid globally, in terms of our perspectives on inclusion and diversity. We absolutely believe that we need to represent in our employee and management ranks the customer bases that we serve. We've got a very diverse customer population. Like I said, there's 20 [00:11:00] million folks that depend on us.

In addition to saying we believe in that, we've got what we call employee resource groups. Those groups ... Ironically we've got a function coming up in another week or so, where we sit with a number of the leaders of those groups that represent the diversity of the organization. But I think those groups, in addition to providing a resource for the folks that belong to those groups, they're actually a resource for the organization to [00:11:30] understand what some of the issues are, what's some of the things we can do better, whether it's around ethnicity, whether it's around gender, whether it's around sexual preference. It's all those things that we're really lined up to support. Not just inside the company, we actually are pretty vocal about the things that we think are good for society when the laws change. I'm actually really proud of that stance.

I think the other thing that we do is, as you think about [00:12:00] our population as a country, but then as a company, in terms of we've got a fairly senior workforce. This is an industry and a business where people stay a long time, the number of people that are approaching retirement age. As we think about the next couple of generations that are coming in, we recognize that it will have to be a different environment, keeping the things that have worked really well but evolving the environment so that it is a great place for [00:12:30] everyone, which, to me, is really what diversity is about, which is basically creating an environment where people can bring their whole and their best selves to work and feel comfortable doing it every single day.

We had a ... I'm going to screw the title up, but it is a parental bonding lead that we introduced, so whether it's new mothers, new fathers can take a substantial amount of time [00:13:00] off. I think it's up to 12 weeks. But anyway, they can take time off and really bond with their new family members. It has been wildly popular in our organization. Occasionally, it creates management issues because we have a lot of people here that have gotten married, so you have two people taking off at the same time. But it has been hugely popular and hugely and wildly seen as National Grid [00:13:30] doing the right thing for its employees.

The other things that we've done have to do with student loans. You think about how expensive college is. We're having programs where people that have been here ... I'm thinking they have to have been here a handful of months, but you're able to participate and have us help you pay back some of your student loans. Again, as you think about people that are thinking about getting married, thinking about people that want to buy homes and whatnot, student loans are a big burden, so that's one of the things that has been wildly [00:14:00] popular in the organization as well.

Jacob: You talked about ... it sounded like different generations of workers, so you have a lot of older workers there, it sounds like, that are retiring, some new workers that are entering the workforce. What does your workforce demographic look like? Is it mainly skewed towards older workers? Are you seeing a lot of millennials and younger employees applying there as well?

Dean: Yeah, I see both. I don't want to call them older. I think the reality is we've got a number of people that come here, have been here 20- [00:14:30] some-odd years, but they might only be mid-40s. I think, at the end of the day, we've got a lot of experienced people in the organization, which we're proud of that. Part of what we're trying to figure out is how we leverage that experience while they're still here, transition in obviously a new group of employees that we hope will stay here 20 years as well.

Statistics say that millennials are going to change jobs 10, 11, 12, 13 [00:15:00] times in their career. I don't want to fight against statistics. I think people will change jobs. But I think we've got a pretty interesting, complex, evolving business that I hope we can get people to stay a lot longer than two or three years.

Jacob: Yeah, very cool, so you don't subscribe to the mentality of the alliance instead of the family? Because there's some notion, I think it was started here in the Bay Area, in Silicon Valley, where we should structure [00:15:30] our companies more like an

alliance, where we acknowledge that employees will only be here for a few years, and then they're going to move on, and we should basically structure everything around that assumption. But not everybody agrees with that. A lot of people-

Dean: Yeah.

Jacob: Yeah, curious what you think.

Dean: Yeah, I mean, look, I think it could be broadly true, but, if you take a step back from it, it isn't just personality-driven, I think, or generationally-driven. I think what are people leaving for? Are they leaving for a new experience? [00:16:00] I actually think we can create the organization that yes, is prepared for that to happen, but also an organization that is prepared to fight against that trend by giving the right sort of career progression, the right sort of experience.

Like I said, our global headquarters is in the U.K. We can give international experience. We have a number of partners that we work with, so letting people go off and do other things. [00:16:30] We just opened up an office in Silicon Valley to focus on technology. Again, I think, in the traditional sense, I could see where people, the new millennials might want to come into a utility and leave, but I think, as we evolve the business, do people stay 30 years like we've seen in the past? I don't know. But I think if we don't provide the right experience, we will absolutely play into the broader perspective of people having the lead to get a different experience or different opportunities. [00:17:00] I think we can do better than that.

Jacob: It sounds like the right approach then is to be prepared in case they only stay for a little while, but not to encourage them to only stay for a little while.

Dean: Yeah.

Jacob: You want them to stay longer, but if they do leave sooner, then you are prepared for what you need to do if that actually happens.

Dean: Yeah, I think that's right.

Jacob: What is the employee base structure like? Because I'm assuming you have back office. You also have a lot of people that are out on client sites. From the 16,000 [00:17:30] employees that you have, what would that mix be like, as far as people that are in corporate versus people that are constantly out on customer and client sites?

Dean: Yeah, again, we're a utility, so I think a lot of our work happens in what we call the field. 10,000 of our employees are ... I don't want to call them field-based, but I'd say more customer-facing, whether it's operations, whether it's our call centers, some of our back [00:18:00] office operations where they don't have customer interaction, but what you do has a direct impact on the customer.

And then probably the other 5,000, 6,000 are what we call management, but at various levels in the organization. But, again, we're spread out across three states, so spread out across a number of offices in the three states where we operate.

Jacob: I want to switch gears a little bit, and then we'll jump back to talking about more of what you guys are doing internally. [00:18:30] But I wanted to talk a little bit broadly just about energy because everybody listening to this podcast uses gas, they use electricity. We all use energy. There's been a lot of debate and discussion around what that's going to look like in the future. I think, as you've said before, the traditional utility model is about keeping the lights on, simply just about giving power, giving gas energy to homes and businesses.

But it sounds like a lot [00:19:00] of that is starting to change. I thought maybe we could talk about how you see energy evolving and what this might mean for organizations or even us as individuals.

Dean: Yeah, I'll start with the core business. You're right, the core business is about keeping the lights on and keeping the gas flowing. But it really is about energy and about power for customers, right? You think about the industries that are considered [00:19:30] sexy, if you will, whether it's Apple and its trillion-dollar valuation, Google and those companies like that. But the reality is, without power, none of those businesses work, and we see it when the power goes out.

In addition to having 99.99% reliability in terms of power flowing across our footprint, the reality is, when storms happen or things like that, we do a fantastic job of getting out [00:20:00] there in some really bad conditions and getting the power flowing back to our customers. So, that's the core business and one that we can't take for granted. We have to make sure we get better and better at that every single day, as well as replacing the assets and taking care of the assets that allow us to do that.

That is the core business. Those 16,000 employees, the vast majority of them are focused on that. I'd say, Jake, that we've done a good job [00:20:30] of making that relatively easy. As a customer, when you walk into a room, you flick the light switch, you don't think about crossing my fingers and see if it's going to turn on. Or you change your thermostat, whether you walk over to it or it's done automatically through a Nest product, you don't think, "Is the temperature going to go up or go down?" You sort of count on that.

There's a lot of work that happens behind that, but we've made that fairly seamless for customers. I think we need to do that in other aspects [00:21:00] of the business, where customers have to interact with us because the changing nature of it is really driven by customers, whether it's about customers wanting more choice, customers being more technically savvy. Now, we're obviously moving to a sort of decentralized generation with solar and offshore wind and those types of products.

And then our customers, particularly in the Northeast, just like they are in California, are really concerned about [00:21:30] it being cleaner and being decarbonized. I think, from

our standpoint, that's the transition from just traditional customers that pay their utility bill and just expect it to come on, while that will still be assumed, customers want to be more involved in their energy decision-making. They understand technology, and they want to leverage it more. We need to help them do that. Clearly, when you look at decentralization, customers want to be involved in that, so [00:22:00] we're evolving to be able to provide those kind of choices for our customers.

Jacob: Do you think, in the future, if you were to look out like five, 10 years, do you think the way that organizations are consuming energy will change and the type of energy that we're consuming will change?

Dean: I hope so. We are, again, in the Northeast. Let's take a step back and say customers because, as you segment your customer [00:22:30] base, the reality is the responsibility we have in the territories where we are, we service all customers. In other businesses I've been in, you'd segment a customer base to figure out which customers you want to serve. We segment our customer base to figure out how we can serve those segments better because we serve all of them.

Part of that is also affordability and making sure, as we develop programs, that it's for not just commercial accounts, not just upper-middle class, [00:23:00] but it's also for individuals and families that might not have all the means as other families do. Make sure we have programs to satisfy all those different customer bases.

That's part of the responsibility we have as a utility, but then, as we think about clean energy, yeah, we do think, to get to the 80 by '50 goals that we all have [00:23:30] from a greenhouse gas reductions perspective, you're going to have more distributors. There's going to have to be more solar. There's going to have to be more hydro and more wind in our generation. We're a big proponent of driving that in the Northeast and across the country.

Jacob: What workforce trends are you paying attention to? When you think about the future of work and where things are going, are there a particular set of trends that you are [00:24:00] keeping your eye on?

Dean: Yeah. I talked about clean energy, but I think technology-wise, we're all going to have to continue to be more technically savvy. For us, when you think about all the different touchpoints that we could have as a business, we want to drive better efficiency, better productivity because we believe that's better for customers. Part of that will be data analytics. Part of it will be automation.

[00:24:30] But a lot of people think, when you talk about bots and automation, we're talking about replacing workers. What you're trying to do is take the things that are routine, that you do all the time, automate those, but then migrate your workforce to be able to do more value-added work for customers, more value-added work for the people that serve customers. We're paying a lot of attention to that.

But, secondly, we're paying a lot of attention to ... and going back to the clean energy piece, [00:25:00] we've published a couple of pieces, but the reality is, I think, from a generation standpoint, we've cleaned up that fleet a lot, and a lot of that has to do with the proliferation of natural gas. But, when you think about heating, we can do a lot more in terms of cleaning up heating. In the Northeast, amazingly, there's still a lot of people that use heating oil, so converting that into natural gas, to the extent that it makes sense, that it's affordable, into electricity, that would be a [00:25:30] great transition.

Then, while we are a utility to the homes, we're also paying attention to transportation. For us to get to the goals that we want, that we need to get to by 2030 and by 2050, we know transportation has to be cleaned up, so we're a big proponent of electric vehicles as well.

Jacob: Interesting. It sounds like you guys have quite a few trends that you're paying attention, and two of them ... I think you mentioned people analytics. Was that the first one you mentioned?

Dean: [00:26:00] Yeah, I mean, if you think about having 20 million people that depend on us, we have a lot of data that we collect. I think being able to use data in a way that helps customers make better decisions, be predictive about their energy usage so that they can lower their energy usage and lower their costs, I think we can do a lot more with that. When I say "data analytics," [00:26:30] leveraging it that way is one way to use it. Leveraging it the other way is to drive better productivity and efficiency in the workforce. Again, we lower costs for our customers. Yeah, I think there's a lot we can do with data analytics, and we're investing in that.

Jacob: I'm really curious about the employee side of this. Have you guys already started using data and people analytics in the workforce? Are you able to extract any interesting insights?

Dean: [00:27:00] Yeah. We definitely use them. When I say investing in it, I don't know, we've got some true data scientists here. I always smirk when I say it because I love that team, but they're MIT. I know I'm missing some other schools, but I'm in Boston, so I point to MIT, PhDs that are true data scientists. Every time I talk to them, I feel incredibly stupid [00:27:30] because they're just brilliant people.

Around them, we also have strong data analysis folks, so the work that they do, whether it's around being predictive in terms of storms, writing some of the bots and automation tools that we use, they're deep in the work here. I think we can just do a lot more with it in the future.

Jacob: Do you have any examples or stories that you can share about how you guys are using data analytics internally [00:28:00] on the workforce?

Dean: Yeah. I'll take a step back from data analytics. Sometimes when you think about data analytics and bots and robots, it's these overly complex constructs. But I'll give you a

couple examples. One is, when we think about our pipeline, the integrity of our gas pipelines, we have robots that now go into those pipelines to sort of do inspections, so you can see where leaks are or where [00:28:30] it might be weakening, so you can get ahead of it before there is a leak.

Jacob: And that used to be a human thing. You used to send a human in there before.

Dean: Or at least have to dig it out. Now, being able to have a robot that can actually travel throughout your pipeline is a big step for us. We've been doing that for a few years.

I mentioned storm predictability, but the other thing, and you think about it from a smaller standpoint, where we use our data analytics [00:29:00] folks, right? If you think about some of the trends that we may have, and one was parking. We had a lot of facilities which were hugely focused on safety. For most of our facilities, we drive pretty good compliance around people back-in parking because we think it's safer in the parking lot when people back-in park. We actually, in a simple way, had our data analytics people look at why don't people back-in park, and some of the things they come up [00:29:30] with are incredibly simple, but are just nudges for people to do the right thing.

One of the things they came up with was, when they really looked at it and got beyond the initial responses, sometimes people were just not comfortable doing it. In our garages, when you think about a parking garage, and you have the lines for you to park in, we took those lines and ran them not just where your wheels go but up the wall. What that does is folks that are less comfortable can actually see it in their rearview mirrors because all of us aren't comfortable [00:30:00] just using our cameras. It's small nudges like that, but there's a whole science behind that, in terms of fast and slow thinking, in terms of the nudges to help people do their ... whether it's the job, whether it's parking, small nudges like that are coming out of that team.

Jacob: That's a pretty cool example. It's something that's ... it seems so simple, yet something that is so impactful. I love that example.

All right, now I got to ask you if you have any others because that was a great one. I don't know if you have any others you can share.

Dean: Yeah, [00:30:30] look, I think some of them ... Again, that whole theory that you think about, right? If you do something every single day, it starts to become routine. If you think about doing something for the first time that's really hazardous, you slow down, and you pay attention to it. The nudges that we're coming up with are just simple tools. If you're going to set a pole, let's say, you're coming up with a nudge or saying, "Here's what we need you to do." Say something [00:31:00] every time, so that it wakes you up almost to say, "Oh, this is a hazard."

We do simple things like walk around the vehicle when you park. When you go to set a pole or dig a hole, sort of making sure you're aware of your surroundings. But if you've dug that same hole for the past 10 years, you're used to digging it the same way. What

we do, whether it's job checks, safety briefs, all those type of things, just give you the small nudge to wake up to a potential hazard, [00:31:30] so you can be safe during the job that you're performing.

It's totally amazing because we always look for complex answers, but a lot of times it's just the slight nudge that says, "Oh, yeah, I know I've done this 100 times, but let me pay attention to these three things because the one thing may be different than the last 100 that I've done," just so that you can be safe. And usually, you work in a team, so sometimes it's really people nudging each other to [00:32:00] make sure they're aware of their surroundings.

Jacob: I guess, in the case of walking around the vehicle, what's the nudge there? How do you get people to actually practice? I don't know what the nudge is, but how do you get people to actually kind of practice whatever that nudge is encouraging them to do?

Dean: Yeah, so you think about it, most of us, you go to get in your car, you jump in your car, and you go, right? But is there a rock underneath your tire? Is there someone walking out in front of you? [00:32:30] We have this thing called Smith's Driving Training, and all of our managers are required to take it. I took the class, and there's a couple of hours of classroom, and then you go get in a vehicle with an instructor, and two other people that took the class.

In the classroom, they're telling you all the things to be aware of, but then, when you get in the car, and you're driving, you have to say all those things out loud. There's so many things you should be paying attention to, [00:33:00] by the way. But saying them out loud, taking the training was a huge awareness in terms of how much you take for granted when you're driving. Part of that is training.

The other part is, now when you're working with teams, most of our field crews, first of all, they have to put chalk blocks in front of their trucks to keep the wheels from rolling. But when they get to their truck, it's usually one of them that will remind the other and then help the other one, stand outside the vehicle and help them [00:33:30] pull out. That safety piece, we remind each other of that as a team. Our supervisor reminds each other of it. We have it on the job briefs that they check off that say have they done those safety checks?

In some ways, it's sort of like what an airplane pilot would do, even though they know the plane's probably safe, even though they've flown it. They might have just landed that plane. Doing those safety checks every time is hugely important for us.

Jacob: You said this comes from the people analytics team, as far as maybe how to create [00:34:00] these nudges and what those nudges should be. Would they, for example, guide you on ... I don't know, the things that you should do when walking around the vehicle or how to get people to practice that behavior. Would you work with them around that?

Dean:	Yeah, so let's say you're having specific incidents in certain areas, and you can't quite figure out why. The data analytics people would look at the data. We've got an operation that we do, and we do this [00:34:30] operation probably 100,000 times a year. We might make mistakes on it 30 times a year, so we're trying to figure out, do you ever get to perfection? I don't know. But you're trying to figure out how to get those other 30 right.
	They would look at the data and say ... because you would think it's all when there's really bad weather or an inexperienced crew. None of those things are true. What it is is human behavior, so [00:35:00] in this action that we take, I'm trying not to be too specific, but in this action that we take, it's basically saying, even though you do the vast majority correctly, here are a couple of things to put in as triggers, so that you can actually get to the next level of performance and reduce the 30 incidents that we see every year.
	And I think it's those type of things because now you're talking about going [00:35:30] from really, really good performance to great performance. But the reason you want to do it is not because you just want to be perfect, but because it leads to better safety for employees.
Jacob:	Yeah. I would imagine, in your case, these issues can actually harm people if the safety protocols aren't followed, so it does, for sure, make a difference.
Dean:	Yeah.
Jacob:	You also mentioned bots, and I know that is a huge area of concern for so many people, jobs, bots, automation, all that sort of stuff. [00:36:00] You mentioned one really cool example of how you are using bots now to check for leaks in pipelines. I thought maybe you could share a couple other examples of how you're using bots or automation inside of the National Grid. And then what impact did that have on jobs inside the National Grid? Did you fire all those people? What happened to those people that used to do those jobs?
Dean:	No, I mean, I know there is a ... and I'll come back to [00:36:30] self-driving vehicles in a second because I do want to talk about that in terms of automation. But when you think about bots, I think there is this fear factor around it. But, for us, and it really is just trying to automate the routine things that you do. If you do that, and I look at a business ... like I said, we got 16,000 employees, and we're growing and hiring, so the reality is we're not really displacing [00:37:00] anyone because of that. People can go do other things.
	But the reality is, I think, when you spend 80% of your time doing routine things, you don't have the time to always focus on the things that truly add value for customers. I look at it as a way to free up capacity by the employees that we have. Maybe there's some upscaling in terms of training them, but if you think about analytic work, not the data analytics I talked about, but if you spend all your time processing paperwork, [00:37:30] automating some of those routines will free those individuals up. Maybe it's just to have better, more thorough interactions with customers.

The more sophisticated answer I would give you is ... most of our customers, they can contact us a variety of ways, whether they call the call centers or whether they're online or whatever. To me, if you've got the right automation, if you call in from a number I recognize, and I'm tied into my system in terms of [00:38:00] what's going on a network, I should almost get to the point where I already know what you're calling me about. I should already know who you are and what you're calling me about, so that, from a customer standpoint, I can answer the call quicker, I can get to your problem quicker, and I can fix your problem quicker.

The better step, once we do that, is to actually call you before you even know you have a problem. To me, that's what automation does. It still requires people, but it's using technology to provide better, more efficient service [00:38:30] for our customers. You don't have to displace people. The way I look at it is, again, you can upscale people, so they can do more value-added work for our customers.

Jacob: When you see all those reports, and there have been so many of them, that say tens of millions of people are going to be replaced, that 47% of jobs could be automated over the coming decades. When you see all those reports coming out, what pops into your mind? Because it sounds like you don't panic. It sounds like you are not worried so much about that. What pops into your mind [00:39:00] when you see all those studies keep coming out?

Dean: Look, I'm not worried about it. I guess, in some ways, I'm excited about it. I look at my son and daughter, and they've got a chance to sort of have a job, sit at their computer, wait for the phone to ring. That's one job they could have. But if I [00:39:30] take that same job and automate most of it, now they're proactively reaching out to customers to let them know a storm is coming. They're proactively reaching out to a customer to say, "Hey, here's a couple of things that we can offer you that will lower your energy bills."

To me, that second one is more exciting. Both are important, but I think the second one is more exciting, but the second one is made more possible by automating some of the more routine things that we do. I actually get excited about the possibilities of it.

Jacob: Well, I-

Dean: [00:40:00] People have this vision of this robots taking over the world thing. But I was just in Pittsburgh, touring a site that deals with basically automation. They've been tied to Carnegie Mellon, and they've been doing this for a few decades. The reality is most of the automation work they've done, whether it's in the automotive industry or whatever, has not displaced that many people. It's actually taken away some of the hazards that went on in assembly lines by [00:40:30] having robots work with humans, not displace them, but work with humans to make the human jobs safer and to make it more efficient.

Jacob: I love the optimism. I agree. I think that tends to be a pretty strong consensus for a lot of the people that I've been interviewing. But I wanted to go back to these examples of how you guys are using bots and software.

Dean: Right.

Jacob: Aside from having [00:41:00] bots that check a gas leak for example, how else are you using either bots or automation for the National Grid?

Dean: Yeah, I guess maybe we should talk about why we mean by bots because, again, I've had conversations with some family members, and when I say bots, they think I mean robots. But the reality is there are pieces of software and code that you write. When we look at the tools [00:41:30] that our technicians use out in the field ...

You think about our systems, we have multiple systems inside the company that one would have to interface with sometimes to get the information you need. Writing a piece of software that allows you to interface with those systems more quickly, in a more holistic way, in some ways, a more comprehensive way than just one human would do speeds up the effectiveness of the technician, speeds [00:42:00] up how quickly they can take care of a customer. It's those type of things that we're writing every day.

Similarly, when it comes down to our purchasing department, something that comes down to our shared services, writing small pieces of software that you can replicate what they do over time, speeds up our technicians, our [inaudible 00:42:20] ability to get information, ability to run purchasing options. All those type of things, I think, makes us [00:42:30] a more efficient organization.

I guess I want to ... from my perspective, I don't see it as this hugely mysterious thing. I think it is using small pieces of software to make the [inaudible 00:42:43] more efficient. We see it across the board. I see requests coming in all the time. People are looking to use this more and more because the ones that have used it have seen the benefit of it. They're not code writers, so they're looking for people to assist them in doing it. Whether it's in our fleet, whether it's in our purchasing, whether it's in our shared services, whether it's with [00:43:00] our technicians, we're seeing it across the board in terms of them being able to use it.

Jacob: You mentioned that you also wanted to talk about the self-driving cars. I don't know if you had anything you wanted to add to that, but it sounded like that was an area you're paying attention to.

Dean: Well, I am. I was skeptical at first, but there's a couple reasons I'm a believer. I did visit one of the foremost developers of autonomous vehicles in Pittsburgh as well because it comes [00:43:30] out of Carnegie Mellon. I think they're backed by Ford Motor Company.

But if you go back to the Smiths Training that I mentioned, and you go through this classroom, it has all these things you're supposed to look at, rearview mirror, side view mirrors, what's on the horizon. Who's out there that might pull out in front of you? All these things you're supposed to be looking at. It occurred to me when I was talking this class that a vehicle can do all of that all the time. At that point, I became a believer.

It's funny because you think [00:44:00] about autonomous vehicles, people think about the lifestyle changes that it would portend. You could commute to work and read a newspaper. You could commute to work and take a nap. Those are all true, and I think they'll have implications for how we live and where we live, but the reality is, at some point, I think there's a tipping point. There's a tipping point where, when you got enough autonomous vehicles out there ... and they said this to me when I was in Pittsburgh is that it's the next safety frontier because, at some point, [00:44:30] when you reach that tipping point, it's actually the least safe, least predictable person on the road is the human. I find that ... look, I don't know when it's going to happen, but I find that, when you take that and you couple it with ride-sharing, I think it would truly be revolutionary for our society.

Jacob: Yeah, it'll be quite exciting. We see all those tests happening. In the coming years, we'll see some interesting stuff.

Dean: Yeah.

Jacob: You were talking about upscaling. I was really curious how that [00:45:00] works for you guys at the National Grid. For example, if there is a particular task or job that you guys are looking to automate or replace with a bot or software, how do you upscale those employees? How does the program work? Is it something that they do or do you do it? Anything you can share about that would be great.

Dean: Yeah. No, I think it's probably both. From a standpoint of ... let's just say the individual development. We invest a lot in [00:45:30] employees in terms of training. We've got tuition reimbursement programs. As folks go into new jobs, as they progress throughout their career, we try to make sure they get the right development, whether it's inside the company or outside the company. I think that exists already.

As we think about skills of the future, I think that's truly evolving, I would say. But the reality is, as we spend a fair amount of time talking about data analytics, [00:46:00] but I think, and I mentioned the process of trying to ... I keep trying to read this book about humans and machines. The reality is-

Jacob: Which book?

Dean: I think it's called "Human Plus Machine." I'm trying to read it. I keep getting interrupted every time I start it.

Jacob: Oh, he was a podcast guest. I think that's the CTO of Accenture that wrote that.

Dean: Exactly. The Accenture guys gave it to me.

Jacob: Yeah, Paul Daugherty, yeah.

Dean: Yeah, yeah. He signed it for me. I haven't met him yet, but a couple of the partners gave it to me.

Jacob:	Oh, okay, cool.
Dean:	[00:46:30] I'd ultimately say the perspective about thinking about them working together as opposed to it being some sort of separate thing, so therefore, when you think about the new skills, making sure you have skills that you actually ... not just that you do more value-added work, but you actually get the most out of the bot or the automation tool, that you get the most out of the machine that you can.

I mentioned Apple and their trillion-dollar valuation, [00:47:00] right? And I interned at Apple when I went to school in California, so I've been an Apple person forever, and I buy every new thing they come out with, whether it's an iPad or an iPhone. But I probably use 7% of the capability of that phone. That's fine as a consumer, I guess, if you just want to waste money, but as a company, what you want to do is get the most out of your tools.

I think a lot of the training that we need to do is sort of upscaling people so that we can [00:47:30] get the most out of the new tools that we're introducing. I think that is the benefit for the employee, but it's also a benefit for the company and our customers. |
| Jacob: | How does the upscaling work? Do you just do a series of training programs for the employees? How does that actually manifest? |
| Dean: | I think it is training, but as you're writing a bot ... Think about it this way. We are big in terms of process improvements or looking at process from the time a customer makes an order to the time the installation, [00:48:00] the service is installed, and they pay us, right? There's a myriad of steps that go along the way. The way we figure that out is by talking to the employees, the ones who actually do the work. You map all that out, and you look for ways to do it more efficiently, whether it's human efficiency and/or tool efficiency. When you do that, you clearly have to train people on the new tool.

But it's a two-way street because there's a lot of human learning that went into developing that tool, [00:48:30] but basically taking it to the other side and developing them by the people that write the tool, to say, "Hey, how do I get the most out of that tool?"

My son, this is not a National Grid story, but he's doing a four-month internship. What they're doing in this internship with a consulting firm is they're writing bots. Along with writing the bots, you write a manual that says how do you get the most out of it, and then you train your employees on that manual. We do something very similar here in terms [00:49:00] of how to get the most out of it, and some of it is just getting familiar with the tool. Some of it, depending upon someone's job, maybe going out and getting some outside training.

In some ways, it's a little bit bespoke in terms of how you do it, but again the objective is to make our employees and our colleagues as proficient as possible because then it becomes a cycle. As they get familiar with the tool, they figure out ways you can do it |

even better, and you revamp the tool. It's that kind of cycle that we're trying to put in place in terms of continuous improvement.

Jacob: One thing that [00:49:30] we didn't touch on, which I think is really important for a lot of the stuff that you mentioned, is leadership. Whether it comes to using technology or thinking about the future of work and people analytics, all these things, it seems like you need to have the right leaders in place that support and embrace a lot of these concepts. Even the design of your workspace, for example, not a lot of leaders and managers are always comfortable with something like that. Maybe you can talk a little bit about the role that leadership [00:50:00] plays in the National Grid. Do you have any particular type of leadership programs that you guys have in place to help this future leader thrive in National Grid?

Dean: Yeah. I think we're blessed to have some really strong leaders here in the organization, both in terms of their attitude and commitment but also in terms of the followership that they have because I think that's a two-way street [00:50:30] in terms of leadership. First of all, I'm blessed to have a really strong leadership team.

I think the development, if you will, and it happens at various levels, whether it's how you onboard employees, the type of upfront training you get so that people have a good experience here at National Grid. We have a number of different leadership development programs, whether it's entry level, mid-level, or advanced development where we're really talking about both our values, but also leadership skills, whether it's around providing feedback, [00:51:00] whether it's around designing work, whether it's around coaching, whether it's around performance. Different elements of that, as well as giving them projects to work on as a team when they're in leadership development, where they get exposure to senior leadership, where they work on something that's meaningful for the company.

We have a variety of those programs internally, as well as, depending upon someone's ambition, what we sort of see potentially [00:51:30] for them, outside courses that people can take as well. Some of that isn't what we do to them. Some of it is what they do to themselves. I think leadership development is something we do as an organization, but individuals also take a lot of responsibility in terms of thinking about the types of exposures and development they want and going out, whether it's in the industry, sort of industry associations, or our engineering certifications, making sure we're supportive in all those [00:52:00] areas.

Jacob: Growth and development is obviously a huge concern for a lot of people, growing, training, developing, expanding within the organization. Inside of National Grid, if employees want to grow and learn new things and develop, how does that part work? I've seen some organizations, they have apps, and employees can take things online. They use [00:52:30] assessments via these apps that help them figure out where their strengths and weaknesses are, and then they can learn new things. Other companies, like you said, they partner with external resources like [Sarah 00:52:39] or Khan Academy or U-2-Me.

But, as an employee inside of National Grid, if you wanted to grow and expand as an employee there, is it fairly easy to be able to do something like that?

Dean: Yeah. I think, as an organization, we are growing. I've been three and a half years. [00:53:00] When I came here, we were debating on whether or not we had 11,000 or 12,000 employees. We now have 16,000 employees, so just in terms of the number of opportunities. While we've grown our employee base, along the way a lot of people have been promoted and moved to different positions in the organization.

             I think, in terms of opportunities, [00:53:30] we are a very collaborative and somewhat collegial organization. We are very transparent in terms of different opportunities that exist, and anyone can raise their hand for those. That's the egalitarian way of doing it.

             I think we also have spent a lot of time, definitely since I've been here but before I got here as well, in terms of how you develop people. Aspiring to [00:54:00] your boss' job is nice, but saying what does it take to get there? And some of it isn't always a straight line. It might be lateral movements to get the right skill set to develop.

             We've got National Grid Academy as well, where people can ... as part of a leadership development. But we've mapped a lot of different skills in the organization. As you think about it, both in our ... Feedback happens at a minimum quarterly, [00:54:30] but we do formal talent reviews at my level twice a year. Part of what we're doing is looking at people's roles two and three years down the road and basically saying, if we aspire to someone to get to this level, what type of experiences and what type of skills do they need to have? And then being very mindful in terms of following up and making sure they get it, even if it means moving someone before their manager is ready for them to be moved [00:55:00] because they're doing such a great job, but moving them because we think it's in the best interest of developing that employee.

             I try to do it. When I do it, I do it at both the senior VP level with a view into our director levels, so I'm basically looking at it two and a half levels done. We're asking our leadership team to do the same thing, so that it isn't just your direct reports. It's also the folks that are one level down in the organization to make sure that we have that kind [00:55:30] of visibility into leadership development.

Jacob: And I suppose you can also use the people analytics for all this stuff as well to figure out who should be growing and where and skills. There's probably a lot that they can contribute to those discussions too.

Dean: Yeah, no, I think that's right. I didn't mention HR, but our HR organization is someone that's keen to use a lot of the data analytics as well because you can imagine, with 16,000 employees, making sure we're mapping all [00:56:00] the skill sets to all the opportunities and potential opportunities sometimes can be herculean to do.

Jacob: Yeah, for sure. Well, before we wrap up, I was going to ask you kind of a series of fun, rapid-fire questions, just about you. But I thought, before we did that, maybe we can end kind of the more serious portion, so to speak, with any advice that you might have

for organizations listening to this to think about some of these concepts because it seems like you are doing a lot, as far as changing, [00:56:30] preparing for the future, both in terms of business models and how you think about energy and how you're thinking about customers and data and even your employees.

It seems like that's a lot of work to have that ability to think about that stuff and understand that it's important to change. For companies listening to this that are thinking they need to make changes, where would you even begin? Let's say you just got hired at the National Grid, and everything [00:57:00] was outdated. Everyone say in the cubicle. None of these programs were in place. Where would you begin to start to make change?

Dean: Yeah, I guess I'd say, before I start to make change, what we did when we first got here is the first thing you got to do is listen. I never get as much opportunity as I want to either be in the field or walk around, but sort of understand there's [00:57:30] what you hear officially, which gets reported up through the organization, and then there's what you hear unofficially. The reality is listening to your employee base, and it's a tried and true statement, but it really is important to understand the pulse of the organization, understand what people are concerned about.

And then being transparent. You can't fix everything all at once. But, for us, and we had a number of things that we needed [00:58:00] to address three and a half, four years ago, but basically saying here are things that we think are most important. Here's the game plan or the strategy, if you will, to achieve those. Then basically being, like I said, transparent but in some ways relentless about going after that and trying to drive as much alignment as we can throughout the organization.

It is a never-ending process, but being open and honest about what you're seeing internally and externally. We talked a little bit [00:58:30] about technology. We talked about trends with the customers. Even as we think about the core businesses we're in, I try to challenge our team all the time to say is that just our perspective as an incumbent in the business, or is that truly the perspective of existing and future customers? I think sometimes you have to take a step back because you're so close to it, that you can't always see the things that are either opportunities or challenges for you in the future. Making sure you have that outside-in perspective, [00:59:00] I think, is really important.

And then really leaning into it and saying, we're never going to get it all the way right, but getting it directionally right, leaning into the challenges, leaning into the opportunities, and making sometimes some tough choices about which path you go on. But doing it with conviction and hopefully doing it with as much alignment in the organization as you can get because you can have 16,000 employees that show up every day, [00:59:30] but if you're really not aligned, and you get 20% out of them, you're really not getting the most of it. But as you get alignment, and you can get to getting 50, 60, 70, and at some point even the discretionary amount of energy that employees can bring to bear, both mentally and emotionally and physically, then I think you can be a world-class organization.

We've got a lot of work to do to get there, but that's my perspective about challenges and opportunities is trying to get as much alignment around them as [01:00:00] we can.

Jacob: Well, I think that's a great way to wrap up. Now I'm just going to ask you a couple rapid-fire questions, and then we'll end the podcast. First one is what's your most embarrassing moment at work?

Dean: Oh, wow. Most embarrassing moment at work. I've actually embarrassed a few people at work, but for me, what are my most embarrassing moments? As a new president, you walk into rooms, and people think you know everything. [01:00:30] You know all the answers, right? When I first got here, I'd sit in meetings, and people would be talking. I'd have to interrupt the meeting because we'd be five minutes into it, and I;'d say, "I really have no idea what you're talking about." It was laden with acronyms.

I could've been embarrassed and just sat there because I was embarrassed and just sat there and wasted the whole hour, but I literally ... they were using so many acronyms. It was so insular in terms of language, I snickered to myself. [01:01:00] I was like, "I really don't understand what we're talking about."

I guess it was embarrassing. I thought it was kind of funny as well. But yeah, I'm not opposed to being embarrassed.

Jacob: I had another executive say something very similar, so that seems to come up. If you were a superhero, who would you be?

Dean: Oh, wow. I think I'd be Superman.

Jacob: He's a good one.

Dean: Yeah, I'm fascinated [01:01:30] with flying. First thing I'd do is go gather up all the Kryptonite and take it somewhere else though.

Jacob: There you go. Smart man. What's a book that you recommend? Could be a business book or a non-business book.

Dean: Yeah, so I mentioned the one that I'm trying to read. I haven't read it, but I would recommend it, which is the "Human Plus Machine" book. I think that will be very insightful for all of us that look to progress into the future.

[01:02:00] One of my favorite books ... well, there's two. There's one that I gave to all our kids. It's called "The Precious Present." Really simple kids' book, but it's about making the most of what's right in front of you and the moments that you live in. That's one I gave my kids.

I think the other one that I would give, it was called "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life." It's kind of the same thing, which is thinking [01:02:30] out how to be yourself at work, at play, with family. Those are books that I've read more than once.

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

Dean: Does being a basketball player or a baseball player count?

Jacob: It does, for sure.

Dean: I would've definitely done those. Might I have done things a little bit differently? [01:03:00] Yes. But I'm pretty happy with the trajectory that I've been on in terms of being able to try to go in and make places better and meeting some great people and developing some good relationships. I don't think I'd change that. I might do it slightly differently and do it faster because that's just learning from mistakes. But I'm pretty happy with where I came from and where I got to.

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

Dean: [01:03:30] Living?

Jacob: Anybody at all.

Dean: Wow. Probably Nelson Mandela. I never got a chance to meet him. I toured his museum and his house and read about him for years. To me, someone that can take really challenging circumstances and still be human and lead a nation after that, yeah, I'd probably meet Nelson Mandela.

Jacob: Yeah, a couple [01:04:00] of people have mentioned him. And last three for you, if you could live anywhere in the world, where would you live?

Dean: Oh, wow. Wow. I've got a friend, a classmate, who's building a city in Costa Rica.

Jacob: Building a city?

Dean: Yeah, it's a city. It's a walkable city.

Jacob: Wow.

Dean: It looks like a town, villas and all that. I went in January. It might be there. It's close enough but far enough away [01:04:30] and tucked into nature. It's spectacular. I'm trying to get him to give me a house down there, but he wants me to pay for one.

Jacob: If he wants to give away houses, you let me know. And last two questions for you. If you could get rid of one workplace practice tomorrow, what would you get rid of?

Dean: Workplace practice ... I think if I could change one thing in the workplace here or anywhere else, I watch people [01:05:00] sit in the break room with their friends and how they act. When they get up from that break, they act differently. I'd like them to be like they are when they're at the break room with their friends and loose and fluid and

transparent and honest and unafraid. That's what I'd change in terms of what I see on a day-to-day basis.

Jacob: I like that, being your authentic self all the time.

Dean: Yeah.

Jacob: Well, that kind of answered [01:05:30] the other question I was going to ask, which is ... one was if you could get rid of one workplace practice, what would you get rid of? And if you could get add one, what would you add? But I think your response kind of covers both of those, so that works.

Dean: Yeah.

Jacob: Well, perfect. Where can people go to learn more about you and the National Grid? Anything that you want to mention, please feel free to mention.

Dean: Yeah. They don't need to know more about me, but we've got our website, nationalgrid.com, both here in the U.S. [01:06:00] and the U.K. It should have links on there for our ebook, which is about our clean energy future and things that we're working on that we're really proud of as an organization. All those things would be on there. Like I said, we're proud of them. I'm proud of them. But we're proud of them as an organization too.

Jacob: Well, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me. I definitely learned a lot, so thank you.

Dean: Thank you, Jacob. Good talking to you.

Jacob: Yes, likewise. Thanks, everyone, for tuning in. My guest [01:06:30] again has been Dean Seavers, President of the National Grid in the United States. I will see all of you guys next week.