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:	Hello everyone, welcome to another episode of the future of work podcast. My guest today is Morten Hansen, author of a brand new book called "Great At Work: How Top Performers Do Less, Work Better And Achieve More." He's also a management professor at the University of California Berkeley. And prior to that he was a professor at Insead and at Harvard. He also wrote a book called "Collaboration," which is when I first came in contact with Morten's book.
	And he also wrote a book with Jim Collins called "Great By Choice." Which became very, very popular. So, Morten, thank you for taking time out of your day to speak with me.
Morten:	Yeah, it's a pleasure.
Jacob:	So people that are listening to this, they don't know that we're actually recording some of this again because the audio quality wasn't that great. So that's how dedicated Morten is to getting this information across. We're actually rerecording the first fifteen minutes. So Morten, I appreciate you doing that.
Morten:	Sure.
Jacob:	So I first came across your work 2009. So almost a decade, and you've definitely done quite a bit of work since then. And your new book that just came out last week is called "Great At Work," so that's obviously what we're gonna be talking about. But, as usual, guests really like to know, the audience really likes to know about guests. So give us a little bit of information about you. Where you're from, how you got into the space that you're in now.
Morten:	Yeah, I grew up in Oslo, in Norway, and I first started working as a management consultant at the Boston Consulting Group. And then I wanted to become an academic. And I felt the most exciting place to be was United States. So I came here to study at Stanford. And then afterwords I went on to the faculty at Harvard Business School.
	And so I've been an academic ever since. And I'm fascinated by management and work. And that's what I study.

Jacob:	It's a cool topic. And being in the Bay Area, it's hard to beat that for some of the cool stuff that's going on here.
Morten:	I think there's so much happening, and it's a great time to be a student of these things, and try to understand what's changing, and what's a better way to work and to perform.
Jacob:	And so you're also teaching at Apple University, I understand?
Morten:	Yeah. I have a part-time role where I teach leadership at Apple University. So I split my time between Berkeley, and Apple and other things that I'm doing. So I drive around in the Bay Area, commute quite a bit.
Jacob:	So what is Apple University, for people who are not familiar with it? And are you going to the new campus that they just opened up?
Morten:	[00:21:30] Well our part is not ... Apple University is the internal leadership and executive development arm of Apple. So many companies, they do exec ed, they work with business schools and so on. And Apple has its own organizational unit. And so I teach there part-time and it's super interesting.
Jacob:	Very cool. I'm sure a lot of people didn't even know Apple had its own university there. So you're definitely busy with a lot of the stuff that you're doing. I'm assuming you're also probably giving talks and traveling, and doing stuff like that for the new book as well?
Morten:	Yes. Absolutely. On the road quite a bit.
Jacob:	Yeah. Well, getting started talking about work and your new book, what do you think about work today? So what are your general observations about work in 2018?
Morten:	So, I think that the way that we're working isn't working. Productivity is quite flat, and we are stressed out. People are, have low engagement, we're burnt out. Many people are. Yet we're putting in hours like we never have. And so, we need to change the way we work, and that's what this book is about. And of course there are many changes that are going on. Of course including technology that is altering working in many ways. The future of work is going to be different. But there are also other things that we need to do. But fundamentally I think that we just [00:23:00] need to change the approach to work.
Jacob:	It's interesting that you mention engagement. You know, this is a huge topic, obviously. I'm sure most people listening to this, their companies measure engagement, probably on a yearly basis, and this has been going around for a couple decades now. And I don't know about you, but it seems like a lot of companies have been investing money in these employee engagement programs, but there's not a lot of return. Like you said, the scores are still low. In some cases even [00:23:30] lower.

So why do you think that that is? Personally, on my end, I find that when companies think of engagement, they try and do, like, short term things to get employees to be happy. Free food, bring your dog to work. Like, they do these short term perks to try to temporarily boost satisfaction. But they don't do anything deeper inside the company.

Morten: Right. I completely agree. That's like treating the symptom as opposed to the cause. And what is the cause? The [00:24:00] cause is the way in which we work. And I think the fundamental problem with the way we work now is what I call the "do more" paradigm of work. We believe that doing more is the way to succeed in having better results. More hours. More projects, more activities, more features in a products. And so on.

So we are piling on work. And then people are stressed out by trying to accomplish all of these things. But it doesn't necessarily lead to better work. It leads people to be stressed out. And then these perks are not gonna really change that very much. And I think that's where we're gonna go back to the root cause of the work itself to change that.

Jacob: How do you think we even got to this point of overworking employees? Did we just start piling things on top of them year after year? Was it always like this?

Morten: I'm not quite sure. No, I saw a historical account on this, and apparently to the 1970's, like, say, professions like banking and consulting, they weren't piling on work. There wasn't these crazy hours. And something changed in the seventies or eighties. That became the kind of way of working. And I'm not quite sure why, but that happened. And ever since it has been this idea that working crazy hard, and that's the ethic that he have, is a good thing, is a right thing, and is the one that leads to success.

My new book now, in my studies, the reality is the opposite. So we just need to confront it. It will take a long time, I think. But I'm seeing areas where things are changing.

Jacob: Yeah, hopefully. Change is good. And we were talking about this before I had to rerecord, this notion of being busy as kind of a badge of honor. I'm sure you know a lot of people like this. I certainly do. And I'm sure people listening to this know people like this, where when you ask them how they're doing, they don't actually tell you how they're doing. They immediately turn to how many tasks they have, how many projects they have, how many unread emails they're doing.

And it's kind of become, unfortunately for some people, sort of like a badge of honor. How they identify themselves as being important. "I have so many emails I couldn't get to. So many meetings." It's kind of crazy.

Morten: It is. And if you think about it, it's silly, because busyness is not an accomplishment. How many meetings, and emails, and business trips, and frequent flyer miles I have is not an accomplishment. These are volumes of activity. [00:26:30] And in the workplace we often have the wrong metrics. We measure the wrong things. And I talk about this in the book. We really focus on volume metrics.

For example, a medical doctor measures productivity in terms of the number of patients seen in the office in a day. Whereas what they really should be measuring is the number of times they got the right diagnosis and the right treatment. That's a value metric. That's a benefit that you bring to people who are dependent on the output of your work. But [00:27:00] it's completely different from this volume metric.

And that's where we get stuck in this busyness being a measure of accomplishment, when in reality it is not.

Jacob: It seems as though this notion of changing work and re-thinking work, it's not new, right? It's been around for a while. There have been a lot of books that have been written about this. So it seems like at least over the past couple years, there's been a general shift towards understanding, like, okay, there's new stuff happening [00:27:30] and we should get on board with it.

Why do you think companies aren't changing? Why, with all of these books, and the Ted Talks, and the speakers that are out there, and the research that's being published all over the place, around lack of engagement and being overworked, or burned out ... Why are companies still ... It almost looks like they're turning the other way and ignoring, like, everything that's happening. Why do you think that's the case?

Morten: It's a great question. I don't have a full answer [00:28:00] to it. I think one part is just old habits die hard, and conventions are very hard to change. Now, I think we are seeing change, or things that were unthinkable to change before. I mean, for example, take the annual performance review. Every company put that in place, and they put in place a 360 degree system on an annual basis.

And now we're seeing companies like Accentra, they're scrapping it in favor of something that makes a lot more sense, which is [00:28:30] quick informal feedback as you work every day, every week. Because that's really beneficial. An annual process that is bureaucratic takes a lot of time, it's not beneficial.

and that's a fifty year old system. And now we're seeing people say, "Wait a minute. Why are we doing it?" And I think this is gonna accelerate, because I think companies are under pressure to increase results and productivity, and they need to confront all of the [00:29:00] extra stuff, or the old stuff, all the clutter that have come about in companies, and they need to confront that and cut it out.

Jacob: I know, it's sort of like talking to myself almost, because I agree so much with everything that you wrote in your book. It makes complete sense. And listeners to this podcast I'm sure are probably all listening to this, hopefully nodding their heads too, because this is a big theme that we always look at.

[00:29:30] So I want to kind of change gears a little bit and actually start talking about some of the concepts in your book, which was broken down into a couple neat sections. And the first one was mastering your own work, and the section under that, the first, I

guess you would call it a piece of advice, was Do Less And Obsess. So, what does that actually mean, and how do we apply that into our jobs and our lives?

Morten: We studied 5,000 people, low performers, high performers, mid performers, and we tried to understand [00:30:00] what is it that these top performers do? And one of the key practices is do less, then obsess. Which is really a two-punch strategy. The first one is to be hyper-focused, is a matter of choice. Choosing a set of priorities, very, very few priorities. And then comes the second part, which is to obsess over those few priorities in order to excel and to do excellent work. And that obsession part is really important. Because in our study there were some people who were good at setting priorities, [00:30:30] choosing a few priorities. But they sort of then applied kind of average effort to those. And that's not good enough. You've got to have that obsession part as well. And the top performers really do these two things. And maybe 50% or so were doing them, and that's about it. And that's kind of what made the difference.

Jacob: Now, one of the [00:31:00] stories that you share in your book is this notion of "Jiro Dreams of Sushi," which was a Netflix documentary, a great story. And I think in your book you talk about how he massages octopus for forty to fifty minutes before he serves it, which is a really cool story, but for most of us-

Morten: Yeah and it ... Yeah?

Jacob: No, go ahead, please.

Morten: And it's a story about, you have the best octopus, you're gonna serve that sushi, and, and it's gonna be the best. [00:31:30] And he figured out, it needs that kind of massage, for forty minutes. It sounds extreme, but it is the difference between the best sushi in the world and not the best sushi in the world.

Jacob: Yeah, I suppose it's one happy octopus getting lots of massages. But for a lot of us it's probably hard for us to know when we're doing too much. Whether you have a full-time job, or whether you're working for yourself. So how do you know when you should be doing less, when another [00:32:00] project is too much? Is there a way that you can kind of gauge that?

Morten: Yeah, I mean, there are some warning signals when you're feeling that you're doing too many things, you're spread too thin. So here is one. The quality of the work is not as good as you would have liked it to be. Your presentation slides aren't as crisp. You would have liked the preparation for a meeting to be better. So the quality is not there. Second, you're [00:32:30] missing deadlines. Third, error rate go up. So there is a problem in your spreadsheet that you should have caught.

So these are some warning signals. You start dropping things, juggling too many things and you start dropping in between. And if you're a boss and you're seeing employees having these kind of problems, that's a warning signal. And also if you are self-employed, or you are an individual, and you're seeing these warning signals, that's when

you have to say, "Wait a minute, [00:33:00] I'm not able to do excellent work in all the things that are in my portfolio activities."

And it's time to really then try to scrutinize that and narrow the scope.

Jacob: Sounds like you also need a little bit of self awareness to kind of know yourself, your strengths, what you're good at, and then things might be too much for you. Because some people might just keep piling things on, and just like, you know, I'm gonna do as much as I can, and then it all falls apart.

Morten: But that's exactly the way it works. We sort of say, [00:33:30] given the amount of time I have, how much can I do?

Jacob: Yeah.

Morten: How about the other way around, and saying, given the amount of time, how few things can I do in order to excel? And the answer to that question would be different depending on situation. Sometimes that's just to do one thing. Other times it is to do twenty different things. I need to handle twenty customer accounts. That's doing few things in a particular situation. So it's all situation dependent. But you've got to ask the question, how few things [00:34:00] can I do in order to excel, as opposed to how much can I do. It's a totally different way of approaching work.

Jacob: Yeah, no, it's a very different way of looking at ... Kind of it's like the same problem but a different way to frame it, which I think makes a lot of sense. But what if you have a full-time job? Because for some people that are self-employed it's kind of, you know, maybe a little bit easier. But if you have a boss that's always coming over to you that's piling on work, that's trying to give you more all the time, how do you ... I [00:34:30] don't want to say get out of work, but how do you do less in that situation, what advice can you give to kind of like, say no to your boss?

Morten: Right, so the first starting point here is to really communicate and be aware of why you're saying no. You're saying no because you believe focusing on a few things is gonna be the best way to perform. Not because you're a slacker and you don't want to do more work. So, that's very important to communicate. The way to do this, one tactic that works [00:35:00] is to put the burden back on your boss. So if you're working on two projects, and your boss comes, he'll say, "Hey, can you do a third?" And you believe that by taking on that third project you're gonna spread yourself too thin, and it's not gonna be the quality that it needs to be. Then put the burden back on the boss and say, "Okay, what should I do first, what is the most important priority here?" And that's a totally fair question. Because the job of a manager is to [00:35:30] prioritize. That is what they're getting paid for. Now, of course, your boss might say, "Hey, can't you do all three?" It's back on you now.

And again you have to have a dialogue. We say, "Well, if I'm gonna do all three it's not gonna be the quality because we don't have the resources, and time and staff to do that. So, again, what should I do first? What is the most important thing here?" And

people don't do this to the extent that they should, because they are fearful that if they do this they would become seen [00:36:00] as a low-quality worker, somebody who is a naysayer, or dragging their feet, or don't want to work, like a difficult person.

Whereas the opposite is true. And if you say yes too many times, it's gonna come back to hurt you, because your quality is not gonna be what it should be, and your boss will notice that. And other people will notice that. So being able to say no in the right way I think is gonna be one of the most important professional [00:36:30] skills going forward in the workplace.

Jacob: Yeah. And I think the main part of that is being able to say no in the right way. As opposed to just saying no. Or, "I don't want to." Or, "I'm too busy." I think that's a very, very key distinction that you make in there, which is very crucial. Now, but, listening to you talk about that, I'm kind of wondering ... You know, in the Bay Area, and you teach Apple as well, and I'm sure you've been to Google, and Facebook, and LinkedIn [00:37:00] ... A lot of these companies, not even just in the Bay Area, but all over the world, I wonder if their corporate culture focuses on working more? Because you have free breakfast, free lunch, free dinner. You can take a nap at work.

It's sort of like we encourage and we want people to be there 24/7 to work. And you know, some companies when I interview them they say, "No, no, that's not what we're trying to do. We're really just trying to create a safe space for employees to get their personal [00:37:30] needs taken care of."

But it's easy to see how it can be misinterpreted in another way. So I'm curious, what's your take on all of these things that may or may not encourage employees to just burn out?

Morten: Yeah, of course it can be taken in the wrong way, and they can be used in that direction of saying, "Okay, I can be here 24/7 here now, because all my needs are taken care of. I can get my dry [00:38:00] cleaning done at work so I don't have to go home and do that." And so we gotta be careful. The fundamental question I come back to is, how can people perform better? And what my data shows is that the best way to perform is to actually limit the number of things you do and to do them well.

And so if that's the premise, we need to have a workplace, a culture management system that is rewarding that, and not just overburdening people. And the problem [00:38:30] with also all these things that you have to do, and being somewhere all the time is that people work on things that are not the most important. So you can cut away a lot of things and focus on that which creates the most value.

And the other thing is that what my data show, and I'm not the first to show this, there are other academic research that shows this too, is that beyond a certain threshold, adding more hours is not leading to a lot more productivity, and at some point it is [00:39:00] declining. So we're actually working worse.

So in my data, basically the way it works is from 30 to 50 hours it makes sense to increase the number of hours. But if you're working 30 at a full-time job, that's not a lot. So you need to go to 50. But at 50 to 65 hours per week on average, it flattens out a lot. You're not getting a lot of bang for the buck.

And at 65 hours it starts declining. So when you have workers here in Silicon Valley sitting in [inaudible 00:39:30] coding, [00:39:30] or marketing, or whatever they do, and they're piling on 60, 70, 80 hours a week, it is a fair chance that what they're doing is actually decreasing their performance. For example, like, their error rates are going up. And you're sitting there, and late at night, and it's just not good what you're doing.

Jacob: Which is completely understandable. Makes a lot of sense. Which is interesting, because if you look at most job descriptions, they say that, you know, full-time, 40 hours, but nobody ends up working 40 hours. People [00:40:00] are there 50 hours, 55 hours. So kind of-

Morten: In Europe they do, in France they do.

Jacob: Yeah, in Europe it's very different, right? And that's actually a very interesting point. Do you find that in Europe, the way that it's structured it is indeed 40 hours and Americans are just working more than anybody else?

Morten: Yeah, there might be other countries that are working even more. But what we should be after is results and productivity. And 50 [00:40:30] hours is sort of the guideline, I think, in America, and that's working hard. Fifty hours, you're not slacking. You're hard. The question is what are you doing with those 50 hours that count?

Think about people sitting around, and how they can easily waste two or three hours at work. You start looking at your emails, you go on the internet, you do a few things, you chat in the hallway, and before you know it, two hours have gone by and you have done nothing. That's what we need to get away from, that kind of waste of the time.

Now, in Europe I think there is a bit of a different problem. [00:41:00] I think people sometimes are working too little. So when I say, you know, do less, I don't mean work as few hours as you can. I just saw, this week there was a union deal in Germany, where the union workers now can work 28 hours per week. I mean, let's face it, if you're putting in 28 hours, you're not gonna be a top performer.

It's just too little. So we've got to have sort of ... The ethic of "work hard" is good. What I object to, and what my data suggests is this "working harder is the better way." [00:41:30] Right? If I want to be a top performer I need to worker harder than everybody else.

Jacob: And-

Morten: That's the ethic we need to get away from.

Jacob:	And it's important that you're stressing top performer. So this isn't just about being an employee, this is about if you want to be a top performer at your company and go above and beyond everybody else, that's ... I want people to make sure that that's the context of what we're talking about. So you're not saying, for example, that everybody should work 50 hours a week instead of 40. You're saying that if [00:42:00] you want to be a top performer, this is on average, kind of like, what they're doing.
Morten:	Yeah, if you want to perform better and rise to the top, and do a lot better than you're already doing ... It's a rough guideline in my data. It depends on your role, situation, industry you're in, but it's sort of 50 hours. The idea is more this curve that you need to work hard, put in hours, and then beyond that it sort of flattens out. And then if you think ... If you want [00:42:30] to be a really top performer, you're putting in 70 hours a week, you're probably doing something wrong.
Jacob:	Yeah.
Morten:	It's not the way to become a top performer. And it's an easy trap to fall into. Look, I did that when I started out in my own career, when I joined the Boston Consulting Group in London. I thought the way I'm gonna be a top performer is to put in crazy hours. I did exactly that for two to three years. It was a ridiculous strategy, in hindsight. But I did it. So I've been there.
Jacob:	Do you think technology in any way is a part of the problem, because [00:43:00] ... And not just even with social media, where we're constantly connected and staring at screens, but even for work now, right? It's so easy for us to check email anywhere, we check email when we're on vacation, when we're about to go to bed. We assume that just because we're connected we always need to become available.

And I always like to say connectivity doesn't mean availability. So is part of the issue that we need to learn to disconnect? |
| Morten: | Yeah. I think we need to learn that. So we, in our data we asked people [00:43:30] who couldn't focus what are the problems. And there are different buckets, right? One is that you have a boss that is giving you too much. But another one is interruptions and distractions. And we need to learn. Technology also is wonderful. It allows us to do things that we couldn't even dream of doing before.

And we have communications that we couldn't have before. So there are all these wonderful things, but of course if it's used in the wrong way, and we feel like we have to sit at the dinner table, or when we are in a baseball game, [00:44:00] or we're out at dinner and we look at our phones all the time, we are getting addicted to it.

Then we're not doing it in the right way. So we've got to learn how to kind of create this shield around us. And that's key. I also think there is another problem, is work itself kind of encroaches in our private times because we are working in the wrong way. |

It's back to this thing about saying yes to too many things. So I said yes to that project, and [00:44:30] guess what, there's now a conference call for that project at 9:00 on Sunday night, and I have to be on that call. So you've got to control the amount of work, but also alleviate this problem.

Jacob: So it sounds like instead of letting work and all these things control you, you need to put yourself in the driver's seat and be little bit more proactive and active in your work life, and shaping it instead of letting it shape you.

Morten: Absolutely. And that goes with the technology, and the use of it. Because it's wonderful to have it, but you don't have to sit [00:45:00] and check your texts, and your email messages from work when you're out at a restaurant with your friends, underneath the table, every ten minutes.

Jacob: All right. Some of the other concepts that you talk about in this section: Redesign Work; Don't Just Learn, Loop; and Passion and Purpose. So maybe we can just spend a couple minutes on those three, starting with Redesign Work, and then I have some actually, and maybe we'll go a little bit deeper on the Passion and Purpose one. So, let's start with Redesign Work. [00:45:30] What do you mean by that?

Morten: I think that's a very, very important part of how we work and how we can change it. Basically it means that the top performers in our study, they changed the way that they worked. And lots of people are just taking a given job description, a set of objectives, a set of targets, a set of metrics, and they work hard to accomplish all of that.

             But the top performers, they do something different. They say, "How can I do this role better? Can I change it?" To give [00:46:00] an example, there's a high school principal who is still running a high school in Detroit, just outside of Detroit. And the school was failing. Completely failing. They tried everything. But he paused and asked a crucial question, "Why do we sent the kids home with homework that they aren't doing?" The faculty looked at him and said, "Wait a minute, what do you mean? That's what we do. That's what teaching is." And he said, "Well, that model is not working, is it?"

             And that led to a whole set of changes, [00:46:30] where they actually flipped the process. Now the kids are doing homework at school, problem-solving with the aid of the teacher. And at home they're watching lectures via video clips. In other words, the opposite of what it used to be. So he changed the way that they teach.

             And it has completely changed the results. Now the school is thriving. Kids are graduating. They're not failing and so on. But he dared to change the very model [00:47:00] that is actually a 300 year old model of sending kids home with homework.

             And it wasn't working for them, and he changed that. That's what I mean by redesign. And you can do redesigns without adding resources. And that's the power of it. We can increase results to an incredible extent if we just look at what we're doing and saying, "There is a better way of doing it. Let's just challenge the status quo."

And you don't even need technology to do that. You can do without technology. [00:47:30] And example of that is in the book as well. All the technology is incredibly simple. These were scrappy videos they were watching at home, these kids. You don't need fancy technology.

Jacob: How would some of this apply in the workplace, for example, like, redesigning work? So, let's say you have a company called Hansen Incorporated. You have 10,000 employees. I'm a new employed that just started working there. I'm in marketing. And I was given a job description and I'm doing [00:48:00] what I'm told, and I want to, I read your book, I want to redesign my work. How as an employee do you kind of go through that step? Where do you start? How do you do it?

Morten: So there are starting points. One is you can hunt for pain points. You look around, saying, "Where is the pain?" Where people are complaining, they're yelling, they're screaming, it's not working. And a number of them are, and we say, "Well, that's just a source of frustration." It actually is feedback for free.

            [00:48:30] So as an example in the book, somebody working in that area, and there was a lot of complaint from insurance agents in this insurance company about some process forms that they had to go through. And finally this person got so fed up and said, "You know, everybody is yelling about this, I'm gonna do something about it."

            And she reached out to some software coders in the IT department, said, "Hey, can we create a simple kind of step [by 00:48:53] process on the webpage for all these people who keep calling me about this problem?" And they did, and they solved the problem. It was outside [00:49:00] of her job description. She reached out to these people, they put together something really fast. And they solved the problem. That is like saying, "Okay, I'm gonna hunt down pain points." Because redesign is about value creation.

            Where can I create benefits for people? In this case, you know, internal employees. It could have been for customers too. And that's a really good way to start. It's not the only place. The other place to start is to ask dumb questions. Really dumb questions that are challenging [00:49:30] the status quo. For example, why do we have receptions in hotels?

Jacob: I have no idea.

Morten: Well, we have them. There was a process that was put in place, that you have to stand in line in reception. It used to be that at airports too, right? Now we can actually print the boarding passes at home, before we couldn't. That's not so long ago. Why do the kids have two months of summer vacation? Why do we run schools that way?

            Do you know the answer to the question by the way? Why that is?

Jacob: I have no idea.

Morten: [00:50:00] It turns out it is because in way back, these kids were working on farms. And on those farms they had to stop schooling to help with the farm, for harvesting. And that's why we have two months of summer vacation across the world. It's not because of a better way of teaching or educating kids. Why should they have two months doing nothing? I mean, no schooling. It's just a convention that was born out of a different era.

              And we keep on doing it. And the workplaces are full of things like this.

Jacob: I had no idea about the [00:50:30] two months.

Morten: I didn't either. I was just starting studying schools because of this high school principal, [inaudible 00:50:37], why are things done this way?. It's so hard, because we are part of it-

Jacob: Yeah.

Morten: Within these conventions. We take them for granted. It's almost hard to see them.

Jacob: It sounds like part of this is you kind of need to think a little bit like an entrepreneur. And learning ... Not asking for permission to solve a problem, but coming up with your own ideas for how to solve a problem and kind of go out [00:51:00] and do it.

Morten: Exactly. I think it's a great way of thinking about it. We need sort of ... You're an entrepreneur of changing the way you work inside of your department, whatever you're doing in marketing, or it could be anywhere. Is there a better way, is there a different way?

Jacob: What about Don't Just Learn, Loop?

Morten: That goes to this idea that, how do we continuously improve? Because the way you perform is that you have a set of skills. Some of them are technical, depending on a job, but a lot of them are kind of soft skills. [00:51:30] How are you able to prioritize? How do you lead meetings, and so on. And we are on autopilot. Most people are not further improving those skills. Take an example, I usually ask a manager, "How many meetings do you run a day?" And they usually say maybe two. Okay, so that's ten a week. That's 500 in a year, 1,500 in three years. That's a lot of meetings. Okay. Are you continuously improving how you run meetings? Most people say no. "I'm pretty good at it, I'm competent, [00:52:00] so I just do it one way."

              And so they're not improving. And if you think of meetings being one of the most important ways that work gets done these days, it means we're not trying to improve on that fundamental method. And that's where this learning loop comes in. We are doing mindless repetition. Meeting after meeting. As opposed to a quality learning loop where we're trying to fix one thing, measure the outcome, get feedback and modify behavior. It's like a classic learning loop, or behavior of learning.

[00:52:30] So take meetings. If I want to run debates and meetings, how good am I at orchestrating debates if I'm leading those meetings? Well, debates start with some particular tactics, like asking an open-ended question that gets the debate going. Well, how good am I at asking those questions? Okay, I ask a question, I can get some feedback, I can ask a better question next meeting, and so on. That's the learning loop.

And there's an example of a book, of a supervisor in a [00:53:00] hospital who did that. And she was not particularly good in the beginning. But after 14 months she got her department to really improve performance because she was able to lead meetings in a different way.

Jacob: Yeah. Meetings are a huge topic inside of companies. And even this notion of learning to learn, I'm sure you've heard that phrase being echoed quite a bit. So I'm wondering, is that similar?

Morten: [00:53:30] Exactly, this is a learning method. This is a method of learning that you can apply to any skill at work. It could be delivering a sales pitch. It could be feedback to an employee. All the skills that come close to your overarching capability. That's what we're talking about.

Jacob: Perpetual learning. So don't-

Morten: Yeah, exactly.

Jacob: Okay.

Morten: You have a method of learning that you can apply to everything in life, and you learn to learn now, and that's a very powerful tool to have.

Jacob: Yeah, and it's [00:54:00] also great not just to be successful at work, but as we'll talk about in a few minutes when we talk about AI, but to future-proof your career. Because you're always kind of improving and aware of what's happening to your job and your career, and your industry, and so you'll always be kind of one step ahead of the game. I think that's a lot of great advice. So the next one is passion and purpose. This, of course, is a huge one. It gets brought up at pretty much every conference everywhere in the world.

Somebody always talks about passion and purpose. And so, [00:54:30] I'll ask my question after you maybe give us kind of the brief overview of passion and purpose, and what is it, and what do you mean by that?

Morten: So what we've found is that if you want to be a top performer, don't follow your passion. And what I mean by that, to follow your passion really means that you should let passion dictate what you're doing, regardless of all the consideration. Because the moment you let other pragmatic consideration matter, you're not really following [00:55:00] your passion anymore. So the problem with that is that it may lead to

unemployment and ruin because you're really following something that excites you, but you don't know if that's gonna provide any value, contribution to others.

So you know, you can go and ask a lot of unemployed actresses and actors in Hollywood, who work in restaurants, how it's going for them, following their passion. It's problematic. It's problematic because also the people who tell [00:55:30] us that we should follow passion are commencement speakers at graduation ceremonies in colleges. And those are people who are, maybe they were very passionate about what they did, and super successful, and they go up on the podium and they say, "Follow your passion, because I did, and look what that brought me."

It's what we academics call a selection bias. Where selecting on the outcome, success, because we don't hear from people who followed their passion but they failed. They don't get invited up on the podium at [00:56:00] Stanford and Cal.

Jacob: That would be quite a commencement speech, wouldn't it?

Morten: Yes, exactly, "I graduated here from Cal, and I spent 20 years, and now I have done nothing but failure, but I followed my passion, and here I am to tell you the wisdom of my career." We don't hear from them. So, what I found though, is not ... The opposite, of course, is not very nice either. You ignore your passion, essentially. Meaning you find a safe employment, you've studied something that you're not particularly excited [00:56:30] about and you get a career that is not something that excites you. It's not so great either.

So what's the alternative? There's a third way to think about this. And that's what I call matching. Is to match passion with purpose. Now, passion is what excites you. It's an hedonistic quality. It's about what the world can give you. Purpose is the opposite, purpose is what contributions do you make? And they can be [00:57:00] pretty mundane in some respect. As long as I'm creating value for my organization and for the customers, that's purpose.

What I do is valued by someone else. That's purpose. And the combination of the two is what really drive top performance. Because now if you excitement in the service of something that is beyond yourself, to some contribution you make. And these people have more energy. [00:57:30] They have more effort per hour of work. And that's really the key to success.

And I would also say that if you think about purpose in this way, it is really a way of preventing you from losing your job. Because if you bring value, you're gonna be not the first one to go. People looking at your job and says, "You know, I think we can get rid of that job." Then you are gonna be going early. But if you're providing value because you're always thinking about, "What's my contribution here? How [00:58:00] can I increase my contributions?"

Then that is a way of being valuable. And hence, people will retain you.

Jacob: I love that you said don't follow your passion. Because I spoke in Greece recently for TED Academy. And one of my three points in how to future proof your career, one of them was don't follow your passion, instead, bring your passion with you.

Morten: I love that, yeah.

Jacob: I couldn't agree more. We always hear these things about follow your passion. I wanted to be an actor when I was younger. That was my passion. [00:58:30] I thought for a long time I was gonna end up, as I'm sure everybody in LA right, everybody wants to be an actor ... Didn't work out, right? And I'm so happy that I did not stick with it, and I instead went somewhere else, otherwise who knows where I would have ended up?

Morten: You'd be working at a restaurant down there perhaps. Or maybe a breakthrough, but-

Jacob: Yeah, you never know.

Morten: Yeah.

Jacob: For a lot of companies today, they always say, "We want passionate employees, we want to give them a [00:59:00] sense of purpose." So kind of the big question around this is who is responsible for passion and purpose? Is it the organization's job to help you feel like you are, like you have a sense of purpose? Is it the organization's job to give you work that you're passionate about? Or is it your job as an employee to bring your passion, and to identify your purpose? Who's job is that, to figure that out?

Morten: I think it falls [00:59:30] on two people. First of all, it falls on yourself. In today's workplace, you should not just assume that others will bring you that. You've gotta do it yourself. And I talk about it in the book, and some people have done that, they've taken upon themselves a kind of enlarging their passion and purpose at the job.

            And the good news is that oftentimes you don't have to quit your job, or quit your organization, or find a different profession. You can find passion and purpose in many different roles. So it falls on you as well. You've got to be the agent of your own life. You can't just tell people, [01:00:00] "Give it to me."

            I would say for managers, in particular middle managers, it's the job of middle managers to connect daily work to purpose. Because the organization might have an overarching purpose, or they might have a mission, or you can craft that for your department, but you need to connect that to daily work. And that's ... Because daily work can be a grind. People lose sight of how they're there, and what we're trying to accomplish.

            And that's also for a manager to do that. And there are techniques we can use to get that [01:00:30] done.

Jacob: Maybe you can give us one or two quick techniques before we move on to the next topic?

Morten: Yeah, so if you're a manager, one thing you can do is try to understand what kind of benefits does this work bring to customers? For example, there's an example in the book of an executive at [Adeline 01:00:49], the high tech company in the peninsula. They create electronic instruments that are used in scientific labs to create [01:01:00] targeted therapy for cancer that then the patients benefits from. Their work, being these engineers sitting in these labs at Adeline are far removed from the beneficiary, the patients.

                 And I was attending this Top 100 conference in Adeline, and I'm sitting in the back of the room waiting for my time to speak. And there was an executive up on the podium who was going through all these dense slides. And then he was gonna finish up and he said, "Let me finish by showing you a small video clip of [01:01:30] what kind of impact we have." And he ran a very small video clip that he had taken from a Forbes healthcare conference, of a young woman who had been stricken by lung cancer, but he was cancer-free thanks to targeted therapy. And it ran for two minutes, then he stopped. And then he said, "Her treatment would not have been possible without our instruments." And you can just see a giant sort of speech bubble hanging over the room saying, "Now, [01:02:00] that's why we come to work."

                 That was so impactful, they spoke about it six months later. In other words, a very small technique, it took him two minutes, using a video clip he had gotten from a conference, to make that connection. So we found people who do this all the time. And it doesn't take much. But you've got to think through how you're supposed to be doing it.

Jacob: Telling stories I think is the crucial [01:02:30] element.

Morten: Yes.

Jacob: [crosstalk 01:02:34] good storytellers to help employees understand how the work they're doing has an impact on the customers of the world. So I love that story. All right, so the next section of the book, where you talked about three additional things, was mastering working with others. And you had a couple things there. One of them was forceful champions.

                 So what is this notion of being a forceful champion? Because I like [01:03:00] the word forceful in there.

Morten: It's an important part. So if you look at today's workplaces, you can't just manage or function in a hierarchy, in other words, issues commands up and down. A lot of it is going across. Working with colleagues and others, over whom you have no formal authority. That's kind of the modern workplace today.

                 So how do you succeed in that. You need to be able to convince other people to support your plans and help you succeed. You [01:03:30] need the resources, you need the buy-in, you need decisions from them, and so on. That means you've got to be good at two things.

Number one, you need to be able to excite them, to inspire them. In other words, to invoke emotions in them in the right way, so they get excited about what you're trying to accomplish. The second thing you need to be good at is persuasion. And that's being a little bit of a politician, or a political maneuvering. Understanding why people might oppose you, why they might have different agendas [01:04:00] from yours, and being willing and able to compromise, or to navigate that political landscape in many organizations to get things done. And those are two sort of separate skills. But both of them combine to what I call a forceful champion.

Jacob: I'm glad you brought that up, because when I ... And I share this story a lot. So I interviewed the chief human resource officer of Unilever, Leena Nair, not too long ago, and one of the questions I always get at conferences is, "Oh, [01:04:30] you know, we're in HR, and we're trying to get our company to change, and nobody's listening to us."

And so I asked Leena, I said, "How do you deal with this? How do you deal with this complaint or issue when people say nobody listens to them?" She says, "What are you talking about? That's part of your job. Your job is to convince people, and to be that champion, and to kind of move forward. And if you can't do that, you can't do your job."

And it was a very, like, tough love approach [01:05:00] that she was trying to give, where ... She was echoing this exact statement of you need to be the forceful champion inside of your company. There's no, like, "Nobody's listening to me. I can't get my things approved." Like, be that forceful champion. So I love that kind of, that piece of advice. I think it's very important.

Morten: Yeah, and I think it's hard if you're in HR, you're support function, you don't have sort of the authority in a business unit to just go down and say, "Do things." You've go to convince [01:05:30] all the time. And it's that dual play of inspiring people and also being persuasive. And it's a skill that you have to learn.

As I talk about in that chapter, there are techniques, and very specific techniques that you can actually deploy. You don't have to be sort of a master politician who's a great networker. There's certain things you can do. For example, a lot of people, they just rely on emails, and spreadsheet, and rational arguments.

And I talk [01:06:00] about show, not tell. And it's one of my favorites in the book, it's a very small example. So there's this guy who was in a company, and he was stuck with this utterly boring project converting paper forms to electronic files. Just imagine how boring that is.

Jacob: I don't even want to think about that.

Morten: Right. So that was the project, and nobody wanted to give him any support, right? So this is like, nobody wanted to help him. So then he heard that the CEO was actually going to visit the office building he was in, in a conference room. So he booked the conference room next [01:06:30] to where the CEO was going to be. And then in a break he sort of got the CEO to come into his conference room. And there what the CEO saw

was a huge conference table, and a mountain of paper. Up to the ceiling. And the CEO said, "Holy cow, what am I looking at here?"

And he says, "These are all the paper forms that we use in this company." And I spoke to the CEO and the CEO said, "I had no idea we were using that much. And I couldn't believe it. But I saw it in front of me." [01:07:00] And after that day he got enough support to finish his project. Show, not tell. He could have sent a spreadsheet with a tally of the forms. It would just have not had the same impact. Sometimes we need to show and not just tell. And we can actually get the excitement, or the support that we need.

Jacob: I love that. You know, looking at a lot of these skills that you talk about, I know we still have a couple others, I'm wondering, like, [01:07:30] if this, under a broader bucket, what this would fit under? Because it seems like you almost need to be a little bit more of a, you need to be a politician, you need to be a performer, you need to be a storyteller. I'm not sure what to call all these things, but it's very different than being the traditional robot or the cog that we're used to inside of our organizations. Maybe just being more human at work. Maybe that's the way that you explain it. But these are nontraditional skills, right?

Morten: [01:08:00] They are. Some people are maybe good at them, others are not, these sort of things we need to learn. That's ... I use the forceful champion. I think entrepreneurs have used them, maybe salespeople vis a vis customers have used some of this. And you need to kind of have these influencing skills that are required. Robert Cialdini has written about this in several books.

             We need to be better at these skills. And to get work done inside of organizations, because they're quite complex today, and [01:08:30] you work across, you don't just work within your department. You work with many other people, in many different areas. And you need to be able to convince them to support your work.

Jacob: Yeah. Maybe a good way to think of it is cross discipline skills, like you're part marketing, you're part sales-

Morten: Good term, yeah.

Jacob: Part entrepreneur. You take a little bit of the organization and learn the key skills from each one of those areas, which I think is great. All right, and last two. Fight and unite. What is that one [01:09:00] about?

Morten: So that is about fixing meetings. People hate meetings because most meetings are bad, and because they are bad we have more follow-up meetings. And that's the curse in today's modern workplace. And Microsoft, for example, had a survey where 69% of people said they went to unproductive meetings.

             So this is a real problem. Now, meetings can be very effective. So, meetings should be about one thing and one thing only. To have a debate. [01:09:30] That's why you bring

in five, ten people into the room. To draw upon the collective wisdom, to come up with better ideas and better decisions. Now, if all you're doing is a status update, and sharing information, you can put that in an email.

I really love that mug that said, "I survived another meeting that should have been an email." That's ... A lot of meetings are like that. We need to get away from that. But if it's about debate, then we need to know how to have a great debate [01:10:00] in meetings. And that's a fight and unite principle. The fighting is having a good fight. A fight where you are debating alternatives. You're coming up with ideas.

Minority views get heard, dissenting opinions get drawn out. And you're having the best idea, the best decision emerge, and then you have to unite. So very importantly, fighting doesn't mean driving for consensus. Consensus can be a killer, because you are not trying to [01:10:30] reach the best decisions and having an argument. You're trying just to get along, and that's not going to work. So ... But you need to unite. Once you have had a debate, and you had a consensus, or the [seated 01:10:44] person has called a decision, you need to unite and implement what you decided. You can't leave the room and then start undermining what you were talking about, or not trying to be fully committed to the decision that was made.

That's the fight and unite principle. [01:11:00] And I believe, and we see this now with data. The better people can do that in meetings, they will make better decisions, and they will implement them better, and the results will be far better.

Jacob: How do you get ... And this is a question that I've been asked a few times ... How do you get people to unite if you don't have consensus? And the other aspect of this is, how do you get people to collaborate when you don't have consensus? Because as you said, to get everybody to agree is [01:11:30] very tedious and time consuming, if not impossible. But at the same time, if you just tell everybody what should be done, and people don't agree with it, then they might sabotage you, or they might not want to unite.

So how do you balance consensus with uniting, with collaboration, with the fighting? How does that all fit together?

Morten: Yeah, it's not an easy thing to accomplish, but there are techniques you can use. And first of all, and this is what we saw in the data, if you don't have a [01:12:00] sharp kind of team goal that unites people in the team, then in the absence of a team goal that is convincing, then people are just gonna look at their own agendas. And they're not gonna be necessarily going along with what you decided.

So that's one thing you can fix. Second, the people who are undermining you, call them out. Just not sort of accept it. If you know people are undermining, then call them out. Or if you have the power, you know, you should perhaps fire them. It's unacceptable [01:12:30] to sort of drag your feet then not implement something that was decided. So that's another thing you can do. [Fear 01:12:39] process is a third thing. It turns out a lot of research shows that if you let people actually have solid input in meetings, that they

felt that their voice was heard properly, it turns out that they will be far more willing to go along with the decision even if it is not what they fought.

So you've got to make [01:13:00] sure people are heard. Another thing that we know from research is that if you're using offensive language in a debate, and people are feeling very defensive, and they're feeling called out, they're gonna say, you know, "There's no way I'm gonna be supporting that." So how you conduct a meeting actually helps you unite as well. I'm not suggesting they go all the way to repair that problem. But these are some techniques that managers can use to get more unity. And then there is another thing which is the implementation schedule, [01:13:30] which is it's your job to communicate very clearly why what you decided, and why you decided it, and what the next steps are, and what each person is responsible for doing.

So it's the clarity. You're supposed to call that customer, and get that order, and, "Can you get that done in two weeks?" Clear marching order as a result. Then it's far more difficult for a person to hide, to not do the [01:14:00] work, because it's very clear what he's supposed to be doing. So these are some techniques that people put in place.

Jacob: I think those are great. So, for employees that don't agree, so again, going back to the situation, let's say I work for Hansen Incorporated, you ran a meeting, and me and maybe Bob or Erico over there, we don't agree. You don't have our consensus to do whatever, your strategic [01:14:30] plan that you wanted to do. And we've told you about that. Is it up to the manager to say, like, "Well, I decided based on what everybody else agreed to, and this is what we're doing, and you have to do it."

Or how do you get those people that don't agree with you to still unite and move in that direction that you've kind of set forward? And can you do it in a way that doesn't, I guess, upset or offend them? Or make them feel like you're just telling them what to do? Because, again, in this [01:15:00] world of transparency, and collaboration, and you know, breaking down hierarchy, some people might say it's counterintuitive. "We don't want hierarchy, yet you're telling me what to do."

So have you ever faced that?

Morten: Yeah, I mean, there's a great example in the book about the company called Reckitt Benckiser out of the U.K., and it's a top 1% performing company in the world. And when I did a case study of them, discovered that they had this kind of secret sauce, [01:15:30] which is exactly how they run these fight and unite meetings. So they have this heated debate. But then they have this other rule which is if you can't get to consensus after the appropriate length of debate, the senior person in the room calls it. And it's that decision of that person. That's hierarchy coming in, right?

It's to say, okay, I'm gonna make a decision here. At that point in time, it's executed, demanded, of everyone to fall in line. Even if they don't [01:16:00] agree with it, because by the very definition they don't agree, because they couldn't come to consensus. And I think we have to allow for that possibility, that hierarchy plays a certain role. If you want to have debate, which has wonderful kind of outcomes, you

also have to realize that we cannot always come to consensus, and therefore we need to have somebody to cut in and say, "Gotta make a decision here."

Jacob: Got it. I think that's great, because that's something a lot of people struggle with. So I think knowing that [01:16:30] it's okay to do that is a good thing.

Morten: And I think it's [inaudible 01:16:35] that the manager says, "This is how we run it."

Jacob: Yeah.

Morten: So I was taking over a new department or something, that's kind of the [inaudible 01:16:42] we'd start setting. It's something you can signal.

Jacob: Yeah, setting those expectations up front I think is crucial. And of course, the last one is two sins of collaboration. Of course you had to go back to the roots from your very first book, "The Two Sins of Collaboration." So, let's talk about [01:17:00] that for a minute.

Morten: I put in a chapter on collaboration because as you know, as well as I do, that collaboration is such an important facet of the workplace today. And really, in my data, observe two kind of problems. One is under collaboration. We have too many silos, obviously. But have the opposite problem too now, which is too much collaboration. People are over collaborating, because it's become a modern buzzword. [01:17:30] Everywhere you turn there's collaboration now.

           So we got this two sins as I call them. What is then the golden rule is what I call disciplined collaboration. You need to be selective about which collaboration activities. And then again go all in and make the best of those. That's really what this is. And I take issue with this idea of busting silos. That metaphor is sort of like, if you but the silos too much I think you get the opposite problem. You get over collaboration.

           [01:18:00] So we need to be somewhat calibrated. You and I have written about this, and I think ... In some part I think maybe you and I have been very successful in promoting the idea of collaboration over the years, and others two, and there's always a danger of overdoing it.

Jacob: So for people that are listening that are wondering when they might be overdoing it ... Like when is too much collaboration? And by the way, people should [01:18:30] definitely grab your book from 2009, because you talk about that in there as well. So for people that are wondering, "Okay, that makes sense. I totally agree with Morten. How do I know when I should be collaborating, when it's too much?" How do you find that balance?

Morten: So I think there are two guidelines I would give. So the first one is, one warning signal is that each of these collaboration activities are under resourced, they're half baked, they're nighttime [01:19:00] shift, and they're not getting the traction that they should be getting. And if you get to that level, then basically what that tells you is we're doing too many of this for the resources that we have.

So that's kind of one guideline. That's a red flag. And I see this all the time in companies. Then there is another guideline which is, okay, when should you collaborate? When should you, if you're sitting in a team, and you're thinking about putting together a marketing proposal, and you have all the marketing [01:19:30] areas in the company, and geography, different geographies, how do you sort of, like, ask them to help you, for example? One very rough guideline is ask yourself the question, "Do I, or does my team have the required expertise to pull this off?" And if the answer is yes, you don't need to collaborate. You don't need to reach out.

You don't need to bring in other voices. Now very often we do, because we think that's more comfortable, or because we're told to do so, or because we think it's great [01:20:00] to hear two or three different viewpoints. But if you really have the expertise, there is no need.

There is a time to collaborate, there is a time not to collaborate. And I think that's a good guideline.

Jacob: I also think that, so, collaboration's also one of those words that's kind of become synonymous with, like, just asking people questions.

Morten: Yeah, it is, input, right?

Jacob: Exactly. So it's sort of like, if I just want to ask somebody a question, or get feedback, is that collaboration? But it seems like what you're talking about in terms of collaboration [01:20:30] is more like, do I not have the skills do be able to do something? And do I need to bring people in to actually do this with me? As opposed to, "Hey, can I ask you a question for a minute?"

Morten: I think asking a brief question doesn't amount to collaboration. It goes beyond that. But if you're asking somebody to come and spend a few days with you on your project because you need their help, that to me would be collaboration.

Jacob: Got it.

Morten: So there's a bit of a significance to that.

Jacob: [01:21:00] Yes.

Morten: And then, of course, join projects and so on. But I'd be curious, you're looked a lot on collaboration. What's your take on this? Where do you see effective collaboration happening or not happening?

Jacob: Oh my goodness. That's tough. That's something that a lot of organizations are struggling with. So, for me, the big thing that I see, it's very simple. It's just in general that teams and departments that should be talking to each other and working together don't.

So simple example of where we see this inside of a lot of companies [01:21:30] is customer experience with employee experience. Teams that have been involved with customer experience have spent decades building journey maps, studying customers, collecting data, and now we're seeing these new teams inside of companies do employee experience, starting from scratch, that have no connection or relationship with customer experience, and they're redoing everything.

And so to me that's a very classic example of where there should be collaboration, because those skills don't exist internally, but they clearly exist inside [01:22:00] the company. And so, I think for me it also heavily relies on a manager. A manager should clearly be able to understand where the different strengths and skill sets are within different departments, and be able to make suggestions around who should be talking to who, and who should be working with who, and why. So I think it's a very, it's almost a human thing of a manager being intuitive and aware of what's going on, and to be able to bring those people [01:22:30] together I think is a great place for them to start.

Morten: I like this idea of managers being sort of a connector.

Jacob: Yeah.

Morten: In the larger company, and bringing people together, and working silos, they find it difficult.

Jacob: Yeah.

Morten: They may not know, but the manager should know.

Jacob: Exactly. Because if you're a disconnected manager, and you're just kind of, you know, I don't want to know, just do your job. I don't care. That's probably where you might have a lot of over collaboration. Because people don't know, and they're just like, I need help, I don't know, should I do this? Should I do that? [01:23:00] But if you have a manager that's aware of what's going on, he can say, "Look, you guys have the skills to do this, I'm confident in you, go for it." Or for another project he can say, "Look, I know this might be a little bit outside of your core comfort zone, which is why I want to introduce you to, you know, Jessica who works in marketing. She has some of these skills, she can assist you with these areas where you probably don't have those skills."

            So, I think that's really important for managers, and for leaders of companies, hopefully

Morten: Absolutely, yeah.

Jacob: All right, so, [01:23:30] sort of the last ... I guess two last things. One, of course I have to ask you about AI, and artificial intelligence, and jobs, and work because there's so much attention being drawn to this. Where do you stand on this? Are you optimistic? Are you pessimistic, do you think we're hyping up artificial intelligence and technology too much?

Morten: Yeah, I'm not an expert on that, per se. I think that we tried to forecast a number of jobs that are gonna be lost. [01:24:00] And so [inaudible 01:24:01], that's gonna be very difficult to forecast. And I've seen all these numbers of new jobs, and new things we might not even think are gonna be there. So, I'm fundamentally optimistic. One thing I would say, where I think we are preoccupied with the role of technology in taking away our jobs is that we need to look at the way we work, and we can make so much more progress in terms of productivity and results, if we work differently. I think that's one of the key takeaway from my book. [01:24:30] If we apply this principle and work differently, our results can be far, far better. And so that is a more, a safer and more [inaudible 01:24:43] root to better performance and productivity.

And then we can let sort of the artificial intelligence, and the robots kind of play out. But we've got to sort of focus on both parts to this. And I think we are over ... In that sense we are hyping the [01:25:00] artificial intelligence too much.

Jacob: We're sort of neglecting what's right in front of us as far as how we work now.

Morten: You know, many technologies, if you look at when were they sort of hyped and when did they actually happen, I think the speech recognition software was hyped in 1980's, it took about two decade before we got Siri and other things. And it's still not where it needs to be.

Jacob: Anybody that uses [01:25:30] Siri knows that it can be a little bit stupid sometimes.

Morten: It's not perfect. It has incredible progress, all of these kinds of speech recognition. But this started in sort of 1980's, and now they might, you know, some of this might happen faster than we think. But let's focus what is right, as you said, it's right in front of us. How can I do my job better? And then being open to bringing some of these new technologies that can augment my job. I think that's the other way [01:26:00] to look at it.

Jacob: Yep. Well, before we wrap up and I ask you for your advice for leaders and managers, two people ... Well, a few people asked questions on LinkedIn, but I picked some of them that I was gonna ask you. One of them is from somebody named Perry Bressett, Perry, hopefully I'm saying your last name correctly.

He said, "Professor Hansen was, I believe, way ahead of the curve when he wrote his classic book entitled 'Collaboration' in 2009. I'd be curious what his thoughts are today on how collaboration in the modern workplace [01:26:30] has evolved since then, and whether he feels he would rethink some of his insights on collaboration since then, and how he envisions collaboration changing in the light of digital transformation, AI, machine learning, etc." So a very nice compliment and praise.

And he basically is wondering, anything different today in this new world of work, and AI, and technology versus when you wrote the book almost a decade ago?

Morten: Right, that was a great question. I think the role of technology [01:27:00] has become far more important in collaboration than it was ten years ago. And because of that I think we will have a [inaudible 01:27:13] revolution in collaboration. Better tools, better video conferencing. A lot of things that allow us to do it better. But I also think that has presented itself with a new problem.

It's that we need effective use of those tools. And I fear that we have a lot of ineffective use of these [01:27:30] tools. Let me give an example. I think the software tool Slack is wonderful. It's a very, very compelling one. But it's also sometimes overused. I worked with a company where people are on this thing all the time. It interrupts people, it prevents people from focusing.

And so it's misused in some ways. So we've got to learn how to use these powerful tools. But I think that has really changed. I think the one thing that I foresaw with [01:28:00] the book was this problem of over collaboration that oftentimes we collaborate on the wrong things. And we're not very good at ... Too much of a good thing, essentially.

And I think that has become an even bigger problem today. And we have the overextended company basically. I think that's a nice term. I didn't coin it, it comes from a Harvard Business Review article. But I think it's a very good way of thinking about it. I think that's become a big [01:28:30] problem.

Jacob: Yep, completely agree there. Next question is from Carlos Diaz, which actually ties very nicely into this question. He says ... You kind of talked about this in your book, but it was around, "What are the steps to better get into the zone while working in an office from 9:00 to 5:00, and to consistently get some kind of peak performance?"

I don't know if you have any data on research specifically on that, but if you do, Carlos would love to hear it.

Morten: Right, so, [01:29:00] I'm not a flow or zone expert. There are other books out there on that. But what we saw though, in the data is this idea, how can you apply more energy to every hour you work? That's really the key here. And the way to do that, at least from our data, is that you need to infuse your work with more passion and purpose.

So I have this chapter about some tactics you can use to get, enlarge your passion circle, and climb the purpose pyramid. That's kind of two tools I put in the book. And what it does is that each of these tools allows [01:29:30] you to kind of infuse more sense of passion in every hour, and sense of purpose.

And when you have those two, people apply more energy per hour. They're paying more attention. They're more excited about what they are doing. They're more dedicated to what they are doing, and three hours of dedicated work where there are no interruptions can go by. And you say, "Wow, I'm in the zone."

That's one technique, I think, that you can deploy and really get more of that.

Jacob:	And of course, Carlos, you should grab the book. [01:30:00] So, to wrap up, what would be your advice for leaders listening to this podcast on things that they could do to create this kind of a great workplace, and to engage and inspire their employees, and to create great work. So these are people in positions of power. They have authority. They can make change happen. What should they be doing right after they listen to this podcast and hopefully read your book?
Morten:	So I think that there are a few things that they can [01:30:30] do to improve the results and performance in the organization that they lead. One clear thing is to look very, very hard at the key priorities, and say, "Are we really zoomed in enough on the key priorities that matter, or are we actually a little to fat, too many things going on that we can actually cut out?"
	And I'm working with an organization that has started something that I think is a wonderful project, it's called a subtraction project. What is it we can take away that is [01:31:00] just clutter ... That was maybe good ten years ago, no longer is ... To improve performance. Many companies and many leaders are not as clear with the priorities as they need to be. I think what this research tells us, we gotta be better at that.
	And it's a short term fix. Because the moment you start taking away things that are not needed, it means that people are putting their resource and effort on to things that are really moving the needle. And you will see the results. I think it's a thing, within six months or three months you can see the results coming.
Jacob:	[01:31:30] I love that notion of taking things away. I think that would make work a lot simpler for a lot of people. And what about for employees? So, not in a position of power, maybe new to the company, or maybe been there for a couple years, but oftentimes these are people that say they feel powerless, they can't get their managers or their leaders to change. Is there anything that they can do inside of their companies?
Morten:	I think it is to redesign work, focus and value. And you can tweak things. "How can I make my contributions [01:32:00] a little better? What is it I'm doing that is not such value creating, and what is it that I can do?" Ask yourself that question. What is the value I can bring? And how can I do it a little better? And it can be just a little tweak. Maybe do one more thing and take away one thing. I think that's ... It's subtle but it can make a big difference. It will foolproof your ... Not foolproof, but it would make your job security better.
	Because [01:32:30] the more value you provide the more secure you will be.
Jacob:	I like it. Nice and simple. Well, Morten, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me. We went well over an hour. But where can people go to find you. I know you're on LinkedIn. Where can people grab your book? Anything you want to mention for people to connect with you?
Morten:	Yeah, go to my website, we have some resources there. In fact we have a quiz that you can take to benchmark yourself on these seven principles that are in the book to see

how you stack [01:33:00] up against our sample of 5,000 people. It's a very brief quiz that is there for you.

Jacob: What's the website for that?

Morten: The website is Mortenhansen.com. And let me spell that. M-O-R-T-E-N H-A-N-S-E-N.com.

Jacob: Perfect. And then people can get in touch with you there. And I had a chance to read the book. I got a review copy. It was great. Lots of really useful data and research. And the research appendix, that alone I have tons [01:33:30] of followup reading I have to do now after reading this book. Great job, and congrats on the book. And thanks for taking time out of your day to speak with me.

Morten: It's been a true pleasure. Thank you for having me.

Jacob: My pleasure, and thanks, everyone, for tuning in to this week's episode of the podcast. My guest, again, has been Morten Hansen, make sure to check out his brand new book, "Great At Work: How Top Performers Do Less, Work Better, and Achieve More." And I will see all of you next week.