

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. Welcome to another episode of The Future of Work Podcast. My guest today is Trynka Shineman, the CEO of a company that you have probably likely used, Vistaprint. Trynka, thanks for joining me.

Trynka: Hey, thanks for having me. I'm excited about the conversation.

Jacob: My wife actually just got her brand new business cards from Vistaprint.

Trynka: How did it go?

Jacob: It went very well. In fact, I think she even made a mistake during her order and she forgot to get the proper stock, [00:00:30] and I think the customer service team basically said, "Don't worry about it. We'll take care of it for you." She was very, very happy with that experience.

Trynka: I always love when people use Vistaprint, but I always secretly hope they have an opportunity to call customer service, because that team does do an amazing job, so that's great to hear.

Jacob: Yeah. I guess before we talk about Vistaprint, I want to start with you because you've been at the company for a while. How did you get involved with Vistaprint, and what does a typical day [00:01:00] look like for you?

Trynka: I joined Vistaprint in 2004, so I've been here now almost 15 years. It's interesting because we've changed so much as an organization since that period of time. I joined, we were about 150 employees. We were less than \$50 million in revenue, and for me what was really intriguing is to be at a company that was focused on business owners.

Both my parents are business owners. I grew up really understanding just the joy, [00:01:30] but also the trial and the struggle of owning a business and I think this ability to go to a company that's focused on that segment of the market was really intriguing to me, so I was really excited to join and obviously I've seen a lot of change since then. I mean, we're over 7,000 employees today. We're well over a billion in revenue, so I've seen a significant transformation of course since I joined. I'm sorry, you wanted to go ...

I know you were asking a little bit about a typical [00:02:00] day. I'm not sure that there's a typical day now and then, but I travel quite a bit. We're very global, so we have more than 20 locations around the globe in North America, but also Europe, Asia, Australia. I spend about a third of my time on the road really communicating and providing context on the strategy, but also getting feedback from the organization on what they're proud of, what questions they have, what work they're doing, how they're working, and [00:02:30] can form those connections and really learn and see patterns around the organization that help us make decisions, but also collectively be better as we move forward.

I spend a fair amount of my time on the road meeting with employees, team members, and understanding a bit about what they're experiencing and what questions they have. When I'm not traveling, I'm here. I'm based out of Boston, so I spend a lot of time with our technology team, that's our technology team, it's largely a Boston [00:03:00] based.

Some of our go to market teams and talk a lot about how we're working, what are the types of things that we need to do to build the right culture. I meet a lot with teams and listen to stories. I do Q&A sessions, things like that. I'm communicating quite a bit, helping to resolve issues between the seams of the organization, helping to clarify and set context for folks as they're doing the job that they need to do.

Jacob: I [00:03:30] know this is kind of a weird question, but what time are you up in the morning? How do you begin and then start your day?

Trynka: I have three kids. When I'm not on the road, I tend to start my day with them, so we're all getting ready together. I'm getting ready, my daughter might come in and ask me to do her hair or is her outfit okay, or how might she prepare for the school presentation.

Jacob: I have a soon-to-be two-year-old, so my wife is actually [00:04:00] in Wisconsin right now, so for the past 24, 36 hours, I've been doing her hair myself, not coming out great I'll say, but I'm learning how to do the ponytails and little, I don't even know what they're called, the little buns. She looks a little disheveled when mom is gone, but I'm getting the hang of it.

Trynka: Yeah, my husband is a stay-at-home dad, and we would say that our kids do not have the fanciest hairstyles, but my gosh, they have the best [00:04:30] science projects, science fair projects you've ever seen.

Jacob: That counts for something for sure. Sorry, go ahead. You were carrying on.

Trynka: Yeah. I was just saying that I start my day with them when I'm not traveling, I try really hard to be there in the morning and to be part of that routine and that's really important to me. It helps to center me, to ground me. We're all just living our life and making sure that it all fits together. That's quite important for me in terms of [00:05:00] my routine.

Jacob: I actually read something that I think you were doing a Q&A with somebody and I don't know if this is still the case, but I read somewhere that you and your husband still do a weekly date night. Is that still true? Are you guys still doing that?

Trynka: You know, I have to say we have not been as good this year at our date night. We have been doing that religiously since my son was born, and he's now 12 and a half. This year, we've actually done a little less of that, but we try at least I'd say [00:05:30] once a month to get out.

Jacob: Yeah, it's not easy.

Trynka: No, it's not.

Jacob: My wife and I try to do that and definitely not easy, even with one kid. So with three, I can even imagine. Did you know that you wanted to be CEO when you were younger? Did you have this idea even when you started at Vistaprint that you would one day become a CEO, or was your growth and gradual rise unexpected and unplanned?

Trynka: Yeah, I am not someone that's ever had a [00:06:00] five year plan or a master plan for my life. I take things a little bit more in one or two year increments. I didn't join Vistaprint thinking, "Oh, I'm going to join," I joined in a marketing role, "And I'm going to work my way up to be CEO." That certainly wasn't something I even contemplated.

I thought about it and I said, "You know, this company serves a segment of customers that I really am passionate about. It's like really smart people." We have a great founder. [00:06:30] I saw the ability to have an impact, so I thought, I like the strategy and the business, the customers. It felt like I could learn, liked the people I worked with, and for me that's essentially how I make decisions in my career.

I look ahead and I say, still do I feel like I can have an impact? Do I like the people I'm working with? Does this impact? Is it meaningful to me? Does it resonate for me on a personal level? Essentially, if things meet that criteria, I just carry on and continue on, [00:07:00] but always with that one to two year horizon. I don't really think further than that. Life changes too quickly. I think you can spend a lot of energy thinking through your five year plan, but it will change every year. I think that's similar to also just work overall, so you think about how work environments have changed.

Jacob: It's really interesting, because I know that doing this five year plan or even 10 year plans I've heard of, it used to be pretty common. A lot of executives I speak with nowadays are like, "Yeah, we don't do five year plans anymore. We try [00:07:30] to get through the year, through the quarter," and things are changing so quickly that doing a five year plan is just a waste of time and resources. It sounds like you're finding that to be the same case as well, right? Things just change too quickly.

Trynka: Yeah, things change quickly, and again, I'm not sitting there thinking about the quarter. I definitely am thinking about multiple years, but five years for me is a bit long. I talk to people who are early in their career, who are just getting started, and I think it's

interesting for them to take a look at [00:08:00] the organization and look at leaders around the organization and think about, "Well, whose job right now do I think would be kind of interesting maybe longer term in my career?"

Then just have a general sense of direction and then think about, what are types of things I might want to focus on to be able to get there? I think people need to have a bit of an orientation, but not spend too much time planning more than the next year or two in terms of what that might mean.

Jacob: Today [00:08:30] we're going to be looking at this theme of modernizing the organization and some of the cool stuff you guys have been doing at Vistaprint. For the few people that are not familiar with Vistaprint, maybe you can give us a bit of context around who you guys are.

Trynka: Yeah. Vistaprint focuses on helping business owners essentially market themselves or put their best foot forward. It's businesses, we talk about businesses of less than 10 employees. What makes Vistaprint so special is I think [00:09:00] why I joined the organization, why I continue to be so passionate about this company is the fact that it really is on that very, very small business.

A lot of people talk about small businesses, but they mean businesses of 50, 250, 500 employees. We're really in this very early stage, early niche of the market, this less than 10 employees. We do that with everything from helping people create their brand identity and graphic design and then producing that our marketing [00:09:30] materials and make sense for them.

People of course have heard of business cards. I think a lot of people think of Vistaprint and business cards, but we're so much more than that, everything from fitting a store to advertising for a trade show or an event, outfitting your employees, advertising in the market. Those are all the types of products and services that we offer the business owner.

Jacob: Very cool. I think you said you started when it was 150 people, and now you're over 7,000?

Trynka: [00:10:00] That's correct.

Jacob: That's crazy. I can't imagine the massive growth of going from 150 to 7,000.

Trynka: Yeah, it's interesting because I think as we think about changing how we work, I think about this period of time that I joined the company. I joined, as I said, in 2004 and the next five or six years, 2004, I would say I joined right at that point in time where the team, the founder knew he had the right [00:10:30] business model, we were heading down the right path. There was a lot of ... We understood that we were just going to grow and scale and there were a lot of dimensions by which we could do so.

We went through this very rapid period of scaling where we vertically integrated across our value chain, your customer service and manufacturing. We scaled globally. At the time I joined, we were literally in one location with two kind of incubated locations, and now we're well over 20, and so you have that global expansion.

[00:11:00] It's interesting because the way that we did that when we were just scaling and really getting behind this model, we describe it sometimes as holding onto the rocket ship is we had to bring people on board really quickly. We had to onboard them. We had to get them productive. In that environment, actually the way that we did that was a quite hierarchical structure. People would come in, they'd have the job that they needed to be done. They had a boss who would kind of mentor them and help them do the work [00:11:30] and kind of be a functional managers.

It was really effective for a period of time, but what's interesting is we kind of scaled, and around 2011, 2012, we were at a point where we were like, wow, we're ... I don't know, we were maybe 800 million in revenue, still growing 20% a year, but it felt like we were going slower than we thought we should, both growing slower, implementing slower. [00:12:00] Things were kind of slowing down a little bit both in terms of our growth rate, but also in terms of our productivity internally.

We went through, we say it's a little bit of a transformation or the beginning of a transformation around customer centricity and realized that we had been so focused on scaling a model that was working that we had lost a little bit of sight on how the market was changing around us, how customer expectations were changing. It had gotten a little internally focused.

[00:12:30] When you're implementing a model that's kind of, hey we know the model. We know the playbook. We know how to implement this. It's just about you have a certain way of managing and leading the organization that you can be very successful and certainly fast in that period of time, but when you're in a period of time where you're like, "Gosh, we need to be more connected to the backend and customers and trends and more adaptive," actually the ways of working don't work anymore. The feedback loops are too slow.

People might do their piece [00:13:00] of what they're doing, but we're needing to learn and experiment and adapt more and essentially someone doing their piece of that doesn't actually get the learning or that outcome fully realized. We were much global. We were much bigger, but also we needed to with that actually change and adapt more quickly.

We realized that the way we were working, the way we were organized, the expectations we had of our leaders, of our team members, actually our business processes actually would no [00:13:30] longer work as we thought about the next five years. It's interesting, as you think about that growth and how it changed some of our views around how work needed to get done.

Jacob: You were actually the chief customer officer, weren't you at Vistaprint?

Trynka: I was so. I joined at a marketing role and then in 2011 when we were looking at this change and this need to be, really build essentially a cultural change in the organization to reconnect with our customers, I was appointed chief customer officer. [00:14:00] I was at the time also leading our North American business, but responsible for building this global change. I'd say it's one of the things that I'm both most proud of, but also was probably one of the most interesting and probably most challenging roles and hindsight that I've had in my career.

Jacob: Yeah, I'm not surprised. I love that focus on customer centricity as well. That's always ... My wife, she does a lot of what I do, but she focuses on customer experience. Every time she [00:14:30] hears customer experience and all that sort of stuff, she lights up. I'm sure she'll enjoy knowing that you became CEO from a chief customer office role.

Trynka: Yeah, and it's interesting because I think it's ... Well, it was such a big change I would say that many people in the organization really lit up around this. We do serve this really amazing, inspirational segment of customers and I think people were hungry to be able to say, "Hey, we're going to listen to them more. We're going to pull them into the process. We're going to really make sure that we're totally [00:15:00] connected and that everything we're doing is essentially aligned to their needs."

People were really excited. I think the challenge was not about that engagement, or as you say lighting, that kind of need to light people up. It was about how do you then navigate from one to the other and how do you leverage this momentum, but also keep the authenticity during what is a significant transformation. It was quite interesting.

Jacob: Today we're looking at this notion of modernizing the organization. I'm assuming that Vistaprint has gone and [00:15:30] is going through some sort of modernization. Why don't we start with just kind of very high level, what does modernization mean, and why are you doing it at Vistaprint?

Trynka: Yeah. I think about this as modernizing the organization. I'll take you back to this period of time around 2010, 2011 where to grow, we had gotten ... Really created these pretty rigid hierarchical structures [00:16:00] in the organization, and essentially we're having the teams implement a playbook and there was a lot to be proud of at that time. We were growing really rapidly.

There were a lot of external measures of success. We had gone public. You could see feedback in the market. You could see the growth. There was a lot of things that people were proud of, but it wasn't about actually maybe potentially the impact that they were having individually was their impact as [00:16:30] part of this kind of collective unit really focused on scaling.

As we needed to adapt the organization and listen to customers and get into the market, I think there's a lot of things that drove that. It's one, when you're global, when you're large, or larger than you were, you cannot actually learn fast enough about customer needs and the changes in the market. You can't control that from [00:17:00]

the executive team. You can't get that information or this maybe more kind of way of working.

When things were moving more slowly, you could say, okay we're going to get this feedback from the organization and it could kind of move up the ladder, and that we as an executive team can process this information and make all this decisions and we can align our teams and they can executive. You can imagine how that might work if things are moving slowly, but as you think about the pace of change that's happening in [00:17:30] the market and technology, literally those processes don't work.

I think other things that impact that are also of course generational change. What is the expectation of someone coming into the workforce now in terms of what motivates them. It's about that impact and it's not about filing. It's about really having a business impact and leveraging but they know to make that impact soon. There's an expectation in terms of how you engage employees and team members and get the best work from them and really [00:18:00] empower them to make change.

There's a lot of things that I think changed this necessity of change and how we work, and I started doing a lot of reading around this. I was exposed to some of the grassroots Agile methods that my technology team was using and we don't need to have a plan over the course of two years where everyone knows exactly what they're going to do. In fact, we need to have a general direction and work in increments to learn and adapt as we go. I'm like, wow that sounds kind of logical and really intriguing and can [00:18:30] we do that faster and can we do more of that?

I was reading a book Frederic Laloux, I think it's called Reinventing Organizations. He talked about different other structures other than hierarchical structures. So I started kind of researching and trying to understand a bit about how could we be both big and fast, and how could we be as we're successful, continue to innovate and how do we ensure that we hire just such smart people in this organization? How do we [00:19:00] ensure that we're putting them in a role or in a situation where they can have the impact that they're capable of having? How do we kind of unlock the power of this organization?

As we've done that now I would say we're three years into this transformation, and there's three ways in which we look at that. One is essentially how we work. What are the business processes? How is the organization working? This is about things like placing more emphasis on teams than on individuals. [00:19:30] It's about Agile practices, not just in technology but really around the organization, and I can give you some examples here if you're interested.

But one of the pillars is really how we work in the business processes. The second area that we look at is really the employee experience. We talk about things like performance reviews. I hate performance reviews. You think about them and it just creates this very awkward conversation as if the manager is in control [00:20:00] of the feedback and the employee is subservient to the manager and kind of go again to hear what is it that everyone says about me.

For us, we're like that just doesn't seem like it makes sense anymore. That's just not the conversation we want to be having or the type of relationship we want to be creating. Our employee experience is things like how do our employees develop and how do they think about development, and how do they get feedback? Feedback is a big part of that. Also, what's the environment that we work in?

[00:20:30] We all sit out in cubes and what does that mean and how have we leveraged our space? It's about setting expectations around what are the behaviors that we aspire to as an organization? What does good look like? There's a whole focus around this employee experience, and that lifecycle really starting actually with the candidate experience.

The third thing that we look at, but I would say we looked at later, probably in hindsight too late is really the role of the leader. How does the role of the leader need to evolve to [00:21:00] ensure that we are supporting the team member but also these different ways of working? What does it mean to lead now in this more modern organization? If it's not about delegating tasks and kind of checking up and one-on-ones and performance reviews, what is that? How do we ensure that our leaders are really well positioned to help to drive this change, but also work in a very different way?

Jacob: Let's start with the first pillar, which is Agile. You mentioned you had some examples there, [00:21:30] so I'm sure the listeners would love to hear some of those examples. You actually have, is it pronounced a Kanban board, a Kanban board? How do you say that?

Trynka: I say Kanban board, yeah.

Jacob: Kanban board.

Trynka: Yeah.

Jacob: Maybe you can let people know what a Kanban board is, Kanban board. Oh man, speaking today is tough for me. Let people know what a Kanban board is and maybe some examples of how you're using Agile.

Trynka: I think [00:22:00] Agile there's a lot of articles now about Agile and HR goes to Agile. I know you have a lot of folks in that field that listen to your podcast and I could talk about that as well. There are certainly business processes that are used in Agile, but there's also a philosophical mindset around more incremental thinking, more experimentation that is foundational to working in an Agile environment.

What we've tried to do as we've implemented Agile is of course there's things [00:22:30] like Kanban boards, which is some of the processes that you can use. I'll talk about that in a second, but it's also really important to think about how do people work, and how do we think about framing and delivering the work that we're committing to as an organization?

I think it starts, first and foremost, as really thinking about teams versus individuals, so really changing the emphasis of how we organize work from going from an outcome or something we want to achieve and then breaking it down and giving individuals [00:23:00] tasks, I'm sure this might be a really exaggerated view of like an old way of working, to really saying okay, how do you form a team that actually accomplish an outcome and give them a goal without prescribing the tasks.

Not telling them how to get there, but you just ensure that hey, we're putting this team together and we're willing to invest this amount, this size of team, whatever it might be, to achieve this outcome. You work with them to define the outcome, and then giving [00:23:30] them a lot of autonomy to actually figure out how they best get there, and really encouraging them to experiment and to learn and adapt as they go and to stay close to customers and every part of that really product development process.

A Kanban board essentially is one way of visualizing the work. My leadership team and I, we started this a couple of years ago where we said okay, there's a bunch of things that we as a leadership team need to do. We need to define the broad priorities for the organization. [00:24:00] We need to think about the culture that we're creating. We need to make sure that we're changing our business processes to align with what we're asking teams to do, so how we work.

There's a lot of things that you could do within that, we need to develop our leaders. What a Kanban board does is it basically gives you this ability to say, "Okay, what are all these things that we think we might want to do into a pool," and then as we're ready and we have a capacity, we would pull things from the pool.

[00:24:30] We'd say, "Okay, we really think it's important to have a leadership development program to really explore new ways of leading. Who's going to take that on, and how are we going to refine that? How are we going to get started and what's the first increment that we're going to do to experiment and get feedback from the organization on is this resonating and is it working and having the impact that we desire?"

It's just about kind of managing that flow of work, and instead of trying to preplan the roadmap that you're going to have for the year. It's about kind [00:25:00] of defining the outcome that you want to have as a team, but being willing to learn and adapt as you go. It's a way of representing that, but also kind of clarifying the team commitment, of coming together as a team and having the shared workspace to say, "Hey, what are we collectively trying to work on?"

I'm sure other people will describe that better than I did, but it gives you kind of a sense of the flow of what we're doing. We felt that it was really important that we as a leadership team were starting to work in this way so that we were working in a way that was consistent with this transformation we [00:25:30] were making within the organization.

Jacob: Perfect. You mentioned some examples of how you're using Agile. You mentioned HR. I'm sure people would love to hear that example, because although HR isn't the only group that listens to the podcast. There are, as you can imagine, a lot of HR people that are really interested in what other executives are doing and thinking about. If you have an HR example for Agile, that would be great.

Trynka: Yeah. I think we're [00:26:00] really excited about what's happening in our talent and experience team. If you think about the high level, what the team has done is they've moved from being more reactive to their customers, their employees or the team members' feedback or problems that they're seeing to really more proactively building experiences that make an impact in the organization.

As an example, we think about these things as product. [00:26:30] One product is how we give and receive feedback as an organization. We've moved away from performance reviews. We actually don't do performance reviews anymore. Instead, employees get feedback from the team members that they work with. They get feedback from their leader. They get feedback from maybe internal customers, but how they do that, so ...

Jacob: That's what I was just going to ask you is how and how often?

Trynka: Yeah. We love to get continuous [00:27:00] feedback. We don't like this once a year process, although there are certain times of year like when you're in the midst of thinking about the following year or the year end that are more natural to do that. So, we'll prompt at different times of year, but I'll give you a really specific story of something that the team developed.

Essentially it's a sailboat analogy for giving feedback and they saw an example of this at a conference they went to. This isn't something we created, but it's something that we use. They say okay, they might pull together and actually the talent and [00:27:30] experience team just went through this themselves and they had this kind of out in the open. I just saw this today. It's pretty interesting.

They have a picture of a sailboat and what they do is they pull everyone together and they say, "Okay, I want to talk a little bit about what you see as essentially the wind behind my sails. Those things that propel me forward. These areas that really help me have more impact on the team, on those around me, and in my job. But I also want to talk about the things that might get in my way. What are the blocks that get in my way?"

They'll literally go through and they'll have like 10 people and they have these sticky notes and [00:28:00] the sailboat up on a board, and people will just start putting in and they'll say, "Oh, you're such an amazing communicator. You're always open and responsive." Someone else might say, "I feel sometimes that, I don't know, you commit to something but it always feel like it's just in time or a little late."

They kind of have this conversation and the person, the team member, the person whose sailboat you're talking about is actually participating in this conversation and they're saying, "Oh well, when you say this, do you mean more [00:28:30] like this?" Or,

"Hey, it seems like you're saying that's a strength, but I see this as a weakness." They're all literally like just kind of having this open discussion about feedback in this really kind of interactive way.

It's interesting because we use this experience now in our interview process. You can imagine a candidate coming into the organization and they're halfway through the interview process and then three or four people come into the room and they draw the sailboat up, and they're starting to give them essentially real time feedback on [00:29:00] what is it we think is really exciting about you as we think about this role, and what are some of the things we think might get in your way and how are you thinking about it?

They kind of process this feedback together and you think about, again, before what that might be as you go in and you're interviewing and someone is asking you questions and you're looking at them and they're showing no facial expression. Maybe you're having a little bit of a dialogue, but you're like, "God, how did I do," and the recruiter comes back and says, "Well, [00:29:30] sorry, we've decided not to offer the job. We have another candidate." You don't really kind of understand why and the difference of that versus this process I think is really a great illustration of how our organization is working.

I think I would encourage other people to do this that are interested in creating more of a feedback culture because obviously it also sets a tone with candidates coming in around what it might be like to work here. But getting back to the HR role, it's about saying okay, we know feedback. [00:30:00] We want to create this feedback culture. What are ways in which we can do that? What are experiments we want to try?

They're doing this with people in the organization, so they will pull together a team to do an experiment. They have different methods that they use, and then they share and tell stories about them. HR is product owners of the employee experience and we think about feedback, we think about recognition.

We think about how you create development [00:30:30] plans. We think about learning, and really getting that feedback and thinking about, and the role of the HR business partners, less about sitting there next to a leader and providing support for what they see in the organization, which can tend to be a little bit reactive and more about saying okay, how are we sharing these best practices or making these products essentially stick in the organization.

It's quite a different way [00:31:00] of working. I would tell you that the engagement of the team is incredibly high. You talk to them and they're like, "Oh my God, I'm doing this. I'm trying this new area." This team is running and sprinting about making these changes in the organization, and they're feeling really empowered to do, to really own these products essentially and drive them forward.

Jacob: Before we get to this second pillar looking at employee experience, I'm actually quite curious, what is it like to work at Vistaprint? Obviously there are 99. [00:31:30] 999% of

the people listening to this have never stepped foot into a Vistaprint corporate office, so maybe you can just walk us through what is it like to work there? You can talk about the perks or the benefits or the corporate culture, just to give us kind of an auditory guide on what it might be like to be a Vistaprint employee.

Trynka: Yeah. If you walk around the office here in the Boston area, which is where I'm based, [00:32:00] what you'll see is one, it's very much oriented around teams. A few years ago, as an example, we moved everybody out of offices and we gave the offices to the teams. They don't sit in the offices, but they use them as team rooms and places to meet and places to visualize their work or workshop.

You see boards all around, whiteboards with what the work is or with they're working on. It's very organized by team and I think that there's a lot of things that you see around the office that give you that sense of this kind of move [00:32:30] of emphasis from individual to team. It feels a little bit like a dorm room sometimes, but people take a lot of control over their space as well, but you could really I think feel and see that when you walk around the office.

I'd say we change a lot. There's pros and cons we try to talk to teams about to say change is a strength, not a weakness of this organization, and we understand change. It's a lot of change but we are experimenting and [00:33:00] learning and adapting and we don't shy away from making changes that we see need to be made. We know that there's pros and cons of that, but I'd say you definitely experience quite a bit of that.

Jacob: Do you have any examples of how you guys experiment? Or you said change is very frequent, what are some things that you guys are changing maybe regularly?

Trynka: I mean, it's just think about ... I talked about feedback and some of the ways that we give feedback, but we moved from three years ago we were doing [00:33:30] performance reviews and people would get a rating and they would have really more formal once a year process with 360 degree feedback and really owned by the manager, to now people go out and get their own feedback and they do these different ways of gathering feedback, different ways of sharing a development plan.

That's a really big transformation to make across the organization in three years from this very formal process. People might get like a six page document to essentially now you're in control [00:34:00] over your development. What does that mean from an employee perspective? It's about wow, I went from six pages of feedback to the next year maybe a page of feedback and no performance rating. I don't have a rating on my review.

Now I'm being told I need to go get my feedback and here's a way of doing that, but I'm not maybe comfortable doing that. You're trying to manage this change, but over a year then you're kind of pushing it a little further. Agile business practices, so moving away from waterfall [00:34:30] planning to having teams, providing outcomes to teams and when you do that, it's not like we have a playbook on how to do that when we start.

We'll try something and we'll say, "Wow, well that worked here, but it created this tension in the organization that resulted in a lot of complexities. So, we think we need to form teams more this way." So transformation, you need to at least for us, maybe someone else has a playbook [00:35:00] I could follow and if you're listening to the podcast and you have that, send it my way. But for us, we have a sense that we read and learn about what other people are doing, but then we try and then we have to learn and adapt and really a lot about how we're working.

Just some examples, but I think that's critical to being able to ... That adaptation, that ability to change, that willingness to listen to feedback, whether it's customers market, [00:35:30] the ability to see and willingness to look externally to see what other people are doing, whether it's how they use technology or how they're working and experimenting that's really important.

We reflect sometimes, are we changing too much? I'd rather change a little too much than too little, but I'd say this is an environment that we talk about learning and adapting as one of the behaviors that we expect and we're constantly thinking about how we can be better or more about how we can be better than looking at where we've been good if [00:36:00] that makes sense, more forward looking than backward looking.

Jacob: Yeah. No, it makes sense. It's not as if employees are showing up every day and somebody's stuff is getting moved around and like they have new space design. It's not super crazy change all the time, but it sounds like you guys are constantly experimenting with different things, which I think is good.

Trynka: Yeah, we think it's great too. It's I think important, but certainly it's part of the experience that we have, which is a lot of change. [00:36:30] Really smart people that are really focused on, you'll see our customers a lot. We rented an RV and drove it across, we hired a driver, but went across the country last year and had teams go out interacting with customers in the market and really trying to break down that barrier and help our technology team know listen, you're totally fine talking to customers.

You don't need to go through market research and sit behind a glass door looking at a focus group. You [00:37:00] could go out and actually talk to a customer yourself and how do you break down those barriers and bring customers into the space. There's a lot around customers and getting customers into our development process, helping to get that feedback as we think about everything that we do.

Of course, we're very global. We're quite a global organization. We have offices all over the world. We're organized functionally. People work a lot with global counterparts and I think that's really [00:37:30] exciting and quite engaging, but also certainly a part of the Vistaprint experience.

Jacob: Is there anything that Vistaprint does that you think no other company on the planet does, whether it's, I don't know, a tactic, a perk that you have, a benefit that you have, a strategy that you implement that maybe no other company out there does?

Trynka: Yeah. From an employee experience perspective, one thing that we do that we think, and we get so much positive feedback on, is [00:38:00] called our Vista break. Every four weeks in our Boston office, and this varies by location depending on what the policies are, et cetera, locally, but in our Boston office, every five years, employees get a four week sabbatical. I have to tell you, in other companies, I don't know that this is so unique, but it's certainly not very common.

The feedback that we get on that from employees is incredible. It's really a gift if you think about it [00:38:30] to have four weeks uninterrupted where really the expectation is that you're unplugging. What people do with that time, whether it's spending time with their kids, we've had people go on safari, people backpack around Europe.

We've had people go and actually volunteer in the Honduras, whatever they're doing, it's that ability to literally have those four weeks uninterrupted where it's like you're not between jobs. You're not expected to check in. It so [00:39:00] recharges people. Everyone that comes back that has the Vista break just talks just incredibly highly about that. I know I've experienced it. It's wonderful. It's a wonderful benefit. That's one that we do that's fairly I think pretty unique.

Jacob: I like it, yeah. It's hard to disconnect too, so if people are able to do that, kudos to them. The next pillar was around employee experience, which this is exactly what my last book was about. I'm [00:39:30] very, very passionate about this topic. What do you mean when you say employee experience?

You mentioned some of the stuff that you guys are doing around how you approach talent, the sailboat exercise. Are there any other I guess pieces of the employee experience that you guys are focusing on, whether it be technology that employees use, or physical space, or anything else, culture?

Trynka: Yeah. One of the things we do is we talk a lot about co-creation. I think co-creation [00:40:00] is something that I'm not sure how much other companies are using this, but we do this a lot. By co-creation it's about essentially working with other people. It could be cross-functionally, working with a customer, working with different people in the organization to find solutions together as opposed to someone creating the solution and someone else implementing it. It's really kind of blurring those lines and think okay, we want to co-create.

One of the ways in which we did that is we actually defined what are the behaviors [00:40:30] as we describe our culture that we aspire to in the organization? [inaudible 00:40:34] our very best, what are the types of things that we're doing, and how does that manifest in the organization? We created that through a process of co-creation with the organization where we talked to ...

I sat down with hundreds of leaders across locations, across level, across tenure, and essentially I started with just some open-ended questions like, what do you think describes us at our very best? What are those areas [00:41:00] that you think maybe we don't do, but we need to do to be able to live and breathe the culture that we're trying

to create in the long-term? Then I kind of tried to put some stuff on paper and then I'd send it out and I'd sit back down with the other groups of people and get feedback on it and feel like, "Oh no, no. It's not that. You got that wrong," or, "Hey, no. It's more this."

I've essentially created, with the organization, a set of six behaviors that we say, okay, we think this really represents us at our very best, and it's things like co- [00:41:30] creation, which of course this was an example of, but also acting like an owner and learning and adapting. We've done everything now with that, to tie recognition to that and really peer recognition. We're talking about how do we story tell around this? How do we make sure that we're creating an open dialogue so that we hold ourselves accountable to these as we continue to grow and learn.

I think as we think about co-creation [00:42:00] or learning and adapting, another thing that we really have in this employee experience is we're trying to just get people really, to unlock their thinking, their intellectual capacity in the organization. One of the ways we do that is really by reinforcing experimentation and saying, okay, we have a broad goal we want to create to really help this business owner succeed.

We want to help them have better design or more products or we want to respect their time better, whatever it might be, [00:42:30] but how we work, we don't want to be sitting here prescribing processes that will work for every team. One thing that we're starting to see quite a bit of as we are putting more emphasis on teams versus individuals is a lot more experimentation and how people work, and a lot more creativity and engagement regarding the actual execution process of if people are kind of learning or implementing an experiment to get feedback from customers.

There are some fun ones that [00:43:00] I've seen that I'm like if I had tried to design these, I never would have thought of these. This talks to the power of really unlocking this intellectual capability of your organization, but also unleashing the creativity that we see is an experiment our design team did with Mob Design. We've heard of concepts like Mob Programming where essentially the way this works is the team might be ...

Let me explain the problem is we need to communicate with our customers and let them know what's new, and we have a merchandising calendar. [00:43:30] The team started working together and what they found is that it's taking us 10 weeks from when we have an idea to when we get it out to market. It just feels like a really long time. They diagram this process and they're like, well, the marketing team gives the creative team this kind of specification on what they need, and then the creative team takes that and it goes into their cue of work and then they get to it, and then they go and they work on it for a week.

Then they hand it back to the marketing team and they [00:44:00] have lots of conversations and then hand it back to the creative team. There's a lot of kind of back and forth and a lot of waiting. The team's like there must be a better way of doing this. We know that we need to do this, but wow, if we could make that process better, more efficient, more collaborative, imagine how much time we would free up to do some other things, to experiment in new ways or try some different ways of communicating with customers.

They were inspired by some concepts of Mob Programming and decided to try Mob Design. I'll explain [00:44:30] Mob Design and you can draw the analogy yourself from Mob Programming. It's essentially instead of having this back and forth, the team came together and they said, "Okay, we're going to try to get all of the next quarter work done over the course of the next week. What we're going to do is we're going to all get in a room. We're going to agree on these goals."

They literally sat someone down. They had six people sitting around a computer and one person would take the keyboard for five minutes and they'd start creating this, call it an email campaign or whatever, [00:45:00] an online display ad. They would sit at the computer and they'd sit there say five minutes or seven minutes, whatever this incremented time is, and then they would literally rotate and that person would get up, and the next person would sit down.

While that person is sitting down actually developing this creative, this merchandising or this campaign, everyone else is behind him giving them feedback, and then all of a sudden it's their turn at the computer. We've actually done that. We've had customers involved in that process. We had our founder involved in that process. You can think about that and [00:45:30] what the team found is the quality of work, the alignment of work, the engagement around that work process and the time it took to complete it was so much less than the alternative.

That's not going to work for all teams, but just as you think about the employee experience and this ability of unlocking that creativity and letting people say kind of play with the possibilities, it does not need to be the way it's always been. What's important is I achieve this thing. What's not important is that I follow this process. Then telling [00:46:00] stories and examples of what that's like I think that's the type of thing we love to do in this employee experience is really unlock this creativity and this potential that we see in the organization that was not coming through in other ways of working.

Jacob: That's a pretty cool story. I love the Mob Design. It sort of reminds me of, so I play a lot of chess and there's one variant of chess where one person sits down, they play a couple of moves and then somebody else takes their seat and they have to continue from wherever that game is. [00:46:30] That kind of reminds me of playing chess with multiple people at the same time. You guys get some pretty interesting results out of that I'm sure.

Trynka: Yeah. It's faster. The team is more engaged, but it also is breaking down these silos in the organization where we're handing off from one individual to another and really saying let's get behind this concept of team. When you have a team, how you give feedback in that team, how you sit with that team, the experience that you're creating, the rituals by which you're working, [00:47:00] all of that is part of the employee experience.

What does it feel like to work here? How do I develop and drive my career? How do I learn? What can I expect in terms of the people around me? As ultimately, our goal is to enable any person that's here to have just incredible impact to really unlock their latent potential in a way that other processes would not.

Jacob: Yeah, that's what it certainly sounds like. Okay, so let's go to the last pillar, [00:47:30] which is interesting because this is what my new book is going to be about, which we spoke about earlier, on the future of leadership. Your third pillar here is all about leadership and the role that leaders play in modernizing the organization.

Maybe we can talk a little bit about that because I know that without having the right leaders on board, probably none of this is possible. What are the key qualities and skills that you look for in a leader to help make sure that you guys can kind of move [00:48:00] towards this correct direction?

Trynka: The role of the leader I would say is something that's a little late. We started this process of really trying to describe and have this conversation around the role of the leader. We think too late in our transformation, so just over the last year. We were hearing feedback from leaders around jeez, it's becoming unclear what my job is.

Before my job was to do these performance reviews and to align my team on what tasks they should be doing and [00:48:30] do these weekly one-on-ones and kind of to set the direction very explicitly and to level of detail that we were now like hey, it has to be a little higher level and give teams more autonomy. They're like, what is it I should be doing? What does good look like?

I think obviously there are some characteristics in this environment that are really important, which is about learning and adapting and being curious and being open, and I think that's just kind of fundamental for everybody. But I think [00:49:00] some of the things that we started talking about is okay, if this becomes the role of the team member, how does the leader best support them? There's a specific book that we read that we're actually having all of our leaders read, which is David Marquet's book. It's called Turn the Ship Around. It talks about this kind of-

Jacob: He was a podcast guest as well.

Trynka: Oh, was he? I have to listen to it. I haven't heard that one yet.

Jacob: Yeah, David's great.

Trynka: [00:49:30] But he talks about the role of the leaders to provide clarity around what's expected of the team, ensure that the team, he talks about individuals, but we apply this to teams, has the right competence and the ability to kind of do the work that they need to do. It's about giving the right level of autonomy and really coaching teams to do that. We're starting a lot of conversations around that.

Really saying okay, what does clarity look like, and how do you create a goal that is clear and one that sticks? In [00:50:00] the concept, it sounds really obvious, but as you get to execution, what you realize is I just heard this example. In the midst of our first cohort of our leadership development program, and this woman in the group that we're working with gave this example where she was meeting with her team and she's like, "Hey, we want to find different ways of helping customers understand that we have

products other than business cards. We want to make sure that they ... We want [00:50:30] to experiment with different offers and different go to market."

For example, what if we had a breakthrough offer like \$5 banners, and get a banner for \$5. There are breakthrough ways of really communicating and getting through and we want to experiment around this. She's like, it's interesting what she got back was actually three different ways of talking about \$5 banners. She realized that in talking to the team by almost giving the example, she was getting a bit more you're too far into the how, and they weren't taking away the broader objective. They're kind of taking [00:51:00] away this very specific example.

What we want to do is kind of share these stories around where it goes wrong, and she's like and then I learned and I thought about if I framed it this way, how do we keep that conversation open? How do we help teams also understand what's expected from them by their leaders as we think about kind of the different roles that folks are playing as we move forward.

That's a framework that resonates with us, David Marquet's framework. If you think about it more broadly, [00:51:30] I think [inaudible 00:51:31] just get back to performance management. If you think about a conversation where someone's coming to talk to you and you have this review and you've gotten all this feedback from people, and they come and you maybe synthesized it into some themes for them, and they come to me with you for their performance reviews and maybe you've given them something to read ahead of time or maybe you're out to lunch for the conversation.

Whatever it is, but the manager essentially is the owner of this feedback. You're saying, hey you set up this relationship that is kind of out of balance, as [00:52:00] you think about just human connections and relationships that might form, and what is the role of the manager? It's like to tell you this feedback and hey, I got all this 360 feedback, and I can't give you this specific example from my confidentiality perspective, but there's a theme around, I don't know, maybe you're difficult to collaborate with. The employee is like, "I don't think I'm difficult to collaborate with. I don't totally understand that."

You kind of get into this conversation and this is the before, and now what we have is a team member might go to their leader and say, "Hey, I've been getting this feedback. I want to share with [00:52:30] you some of the themes that I found. One theme I found is that I'm difficult to collaborate with, and I'm thinking about how I'm doing that and X." Then all of a sudden the managers in this position or the leaders in this position are saying, "Oh, how are you thinking about that?"

You're much of this coach and mentor and together, the two are meeting to say, how can we together help you develop. It changes that tone of the conversation, but the role the manager plays just by the nature of the process it's changed behind it. We think about this role of leader [00:53:00] of course doing these three things, you're providing clarity, creating confidence and autonomy for teams, but also it's about removing impediments and partnering with their team on development and being authentic and open and really helping to enable, seeing their roles enabling their individuals and their teams to develop and have great impact.

It's a little bit we don't know. We talk about is it servant leadership, is it not? It doesn't matter what you call it. Sometimes labeling it has people draw too [00:53:30] many inferences, but it's a very different role of leader as coach, as mentor, and as facilitator, as helper, as opposed to as teller and I'm going to tell you. I'm going to develop you.

Jacob: Yeah.

Trynka: It really puts that on its head.

Jacob: Yeah, for sure. Okay, so before we get to some rapid fire fun questions I have for you, our last leadership question. For leaders that are maybe not willing to change or they're not changing fast enough, [00:54:00] do you have to have a very cutthroat mentality of you're either on board with this or you're fired, or what do you do for those leaders that are still very much in that outdated way of working, that hierarchy and all that other stuff that you were talking about?

Trynka: We definitely want to give people some time to process and learn. We want to story tell and demonstrate the impact of their ways of working, but we definitely have had to take a mentality as well as over time saying, hey, this person is not [00:54:30] going to work in this way. This isn't the right environment for them, and being willing to have those tough conversations. That's absolutely a part of the transformation that we've encountered and needed to really confront as we think about different ways of working.

Jacob: Got it. As a manager, if any managers are listening to this or future managers, I suppose one way that you can help future proof your career, so to speak, is to not be resistant to change because chances are organizations won't want to bring you in or they won't want to keep you if you're not willing to [00:55:00] kind of embrace some of these new concepts. I think that's a good point. Not an easy thing to do, but sometimes you've got to do it.

Trynka: Yeah.

Jacob: Okay, so a couple of fun rapid fire questions for you. First one is what's the most embarrassing moment you've had at work?

Trynka: Most embarrassing moment, it's interesting. One thing about Vistaprint that I'd say is hard for people coming into the organization is the amount [00:55:30] of acronyms that we use. I know every organization develops its own lingo and language and we have acronyms. It's like sometimes I'll be talking and I've realized I've just said the alphabet, and sometimes we take these kind of things.

We have a team called Prism, but actually the P-R-I-S-M each stand for something. It's like these acronyms actually become words that are actually real English words and then you don't know. There's always a story behind them and deeply meaningful. It's just something we've always had.

I remember coming [00:56:00] into the organization and I was in an executive team meeting and they were talking about this Project Chocolate. It was about an office we were building in Switzerland, but I had no idea. Finally, I'm sitting there I'm like, "I just don't understand why we are talking about chocolate." Of course, it was a code name for this office in Switzerland we were looking at, and I just remember afterwards being like, oh my God, how could I have even thought we were talking about chocolate. It was super embarrassing.

Jacob: That's funny. I like that one. If you were [00:56:30] a superhero, who would you be?

Trynka: Superhero, I'd have to say that I would be Captain Underpants, which is my daughter's, my youngest daughter's favorite character right now. Simply so that I could show up and make that enormous impact for her. She would be so excited to me, a real life Captain Underpants, I definitely would do that.

Jacob: That's a [00:57:00] cute one. Okay. What's a book that you recommend? It could be business or non-business.

Trynka: I mentioned earlier, Turn the Ship Around. That's certainly one that we're having. I have recommended, we got copies for all of our leaders. I think it's just a great example of a leadership transformation that could be broadly applied. So I thought that was great.

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

Trynka: I think I would love to think that I would be a business owner. Maybe [00:57:30] I'd own a bookstore or something where people come in and a little bit of community, maybe a neighborhood bar or something like that.

Jacob: Ah, all right, I like it.

Trynka: Yeah.

Jacob: If you could have dinner with anybody in the world, alive or dead, who would it be?

Trynka: I would love to have dinner with my grandmother, who is no longer with us. Now that I'm a mom, because one she'd be so excited I finally had her great [00:58:00] grandkids, but two, just to connect with her on that different level.

Jacob: Yeah. A lot of people always say relatives. All right, next question, if you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?

Trynka: One of my favorite places to visit is definitely Barcelona. We have an office there and I've been there quite a bit. I think I'd have to say Barcelona. It's such an awesome dynamic city.

Jacob: [00:58:30] All right. Last two questions for you, if you could get rid of one workplace practice tomorrow at Vistaprint, which one would you get rid of?

Trynka: Well, performance reviews, we've kind of already done that. Maybe budgeting, wouldn't it be nice to be in an environment, budgeting always seems like it takes too long. We'd love to reinvent that.

Jacob: Okay. Then if you could implement one workplace practice tomorrow at Vistaprint, what would you implement?

Trynka: [00:59:00] I would love to implement just more recognition. I think we are so forward looking, we rarely look back at something that's been done and say, thank you. Great job. I think if we could all do that for one another or for the teams that we work with, it would go a tremendous long way.

Jacob: Well, those were all the questions that I had for you, Trynka. Thank you very much for your time. Where can people go to learn more about you or Vistaprint? Any last parting words [00:59:30] that you want to share with anybody, please feel free to go ahead and do so.

Trynka: Yeah. Anyone of course can learn about Vistaprint through our website, so vistaprint.com. We have that as well as a link to our careers page if you want to learn more about the company and how we work. Certainly feel free. Obviously, you can learn more about me through our corporate page or through LinkedIn.

Jacob: Perfect. Well, Trynka ... Man, I don't know what it is today. I can't speak at all. I was going to say, Well, Trynka, [01:00:00] thank you so much for joining me and being a guest on this week's episode of the podcast.

Trynka: Thanks so much for having me. This is a topic I'm passionate about talking about, and hope that it was helpful for your listeners.

Jacob: It was. Thank you very much, and thanks everyone for listening to this week's episode of the podcast, even though I've stumbled over so many words. My guest, again, today was Trynka Shineman, the CEO of Vistaprint. I'm speaking slowly, so hopefully everybody can understand that. But I will [01:00:30] see all of you next week.