

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 Mike Fenlon, the Chief People Officer at PwC. Mike, thanks for joining me.

Mike: Great to be with you, Jacob.

Jacob: So we had the opportunity to first meet a couple weeks ago in Orlando as a part of your Digital Accelerator Program, which we'll talk about, which by the way is one of the coolest programs I've seen any company do. But before we talk about all those different types of details, why don't you give people some background information about you. How did you get involved being a Chief People Officer? How did you get involved with PwC?

Mike: Sure, happy to, and it's great to be with you here today. I didn't grow up saying to myself, "I want to be a Chief People Officer one day."

Jacob: You didn't?

Mike: Actually the title to my knowledge, certainly did not exist when I was born, and for most of my life I'm guessing it probably didn't exist, per se. I'm from the Mid West, I'm from Wisconsin, I grew up in a small town in Wisconsin.

Jacob: I was just in Wisconsin yesterday, actually.

Mike: Is that right?

Jacob: Yeah, I literally just flew back at 1:00 in the morning from Madison.

Mike: Well that's great. I've lived in Madison. I grew up closer to Lake Michigan. I suppose early in my life I had a couple different interests, one was in religion, politics, psychology, those were all shaped by my family experience, growing up in an Irish

Catholic family. And ultimately decided that I was really interested in the kind of difference I could make within businesses, within organizations, really, in terms of leadership and helping other people fulfill their potential. And maybe that theme of fulfilling potential is an important one to me.

So I moved to New York City after college and never left. I spent a lot of time at Columbia University in leadership roles, teaching, as a student, and really focused in my interest ultimately around organizations and leadership, and how to build great teams and great organizations. Those were things that I still to this day am passionately interested in.

Jacob: And how did you get hooked up with PwC, have you been at the company for a long time, and in this role for a long time?

Mike: I joined over a decade ago. I did a PhD actually at Columbia, and was never planning on joining PwC, but I was approached by some colleagues who were building a practice in the area of strategy and change, and that was really interesting to me. I spent some time in consulting that space. Actually then left what was then the old PW, and spent time again at Columbia teaching, leading MBA programs, doing executive education. Then someone out of the blue, I never planned on it, was again approached after spending almost a decade I think at Columbia, with an opportunity, the firm was looking for a People's Strategy Leader at the time, this was over a decade ago. That led to a lot of discussions, and I was excited by the opportunity, and joined the firm.

Jacob: And now, here you are.

Mike: Here I am.

Jacob: I guess for people who are not familiar with PwC, maybe you can give us a bit of background information about the company. How many employees are there, and what do you guys do?

Mike: In the U.S. we have about 50 to 55,000 people, if you include our interns. We hire a large number of interns every year. And we really take a one from approach. So we have a diverse set of capabilities and expertise. You might associate that with obviously accounting, and insurance and financial statements, auditing, but also tax services, tax consulting, and a very, very large advisory consulting business. That includes everything from strategy through execution, technology consulting, risk. It's a very, very diversified set of expertise and practices, which is I think, one of the things that makes it exciting for our people, that an opportunity to learn from a range of skills and experiences, and perspectives, and bring that to bear and solving really complex, challenging issues for our clients.

Jacob: And I think around the world you guys have a couple hundred thousand people don't you?

Mike: That's right, we operate in approximately 158 countries around the world.

Jacob: Wow!

Mike: Almost everywhere. So we're a very large network of firms. And that too lends an element for example, for our people, or additional opportunity working with people across borders, countries, nationalities, and bringing really the best talent to bear up against really challenging, compelling opportunities with our clients.

Jacob: As an executive at PwC, what does your day look like? Maybe you can walk us through from the time you wake up, to the time you get to work, what does a typical day like in the life of Mike Fenlon?

Mike: I don't know that there's a typical day in the sense that I do travel a lot. We operate across, for example the entire country, and it's important for me to be out, to be engaged with our people, to be meeting with our clients. I really work hard, I think it's very easy to work hard at staying connected. In other words, it's [inaudible 00:06:19] we all know to be consumed with the things that just demand our time at the moment versus just being very deliberate about making sure I'm spending time listening to the experience our people are having, for example. In our teams, serving our clients, across our offices, and at the same time, constant learning, constantly getting great ideas.

So it really does vary. You and I last saw each other in Orlando. I was there for our Accelerator Program. We can talk about that. But that was simply a fantastic opportunity, not just to participate in a learning experience, but to spend time with so many of our people, and just have some great discussions around the experience we're having at our firm.

Jacob: It was definitely a lot of fun, and you guys are embarking on a very interesting program. So maybe we can dive right in to that because I think a lot of companies listening can learn quite a bit from this huge effort that you guys are doing. So maybe we can start with a very high level of what is the Digital Accelerator Program? And maybe why did you even decide to do this kind of a program inside of PwC?

Mike: Yeah, a great question, the why. They why is so important, and I'm going to step back for just a second because I think in a sense this is just about PwC or even the broader business community, this is about our society. There's a lot of discussion right now, and some anxiety too about feeling left behind, people feeling left behind, about divisions in our society. There's so much change as we live through this digital revolution, which in so many respects is just beginning.

Every business is racing to keep up, and a big part of that for us is not leaving anyone behind. That means not just investing in technology and tools, but investing in our people, and insuring that everyone, and when I say everyone, I mean everyone, has an opportunity to up-skill for this digital economy, for this digital revolution that we're living through. So for us it really starts very broad, and saying we've got ... I don't know if you wear them, a lot of people wear fitness trackers, for example, watches that track your steps, your movement. Well just like we're focused on fitness, we need to be digitally fit. So it's not just a matter of being physically fit, but digitally fit if we're going

to achieve our individual potentials in the 21st century, and that's an agenda for everyone.

For us at our firm, we've done a couple things, one is we actually created an app. We couldn't find anything in the market. We created an app that all of our people have access to, and that gives me an immediate base of feedback on my level of digital fitness, and then connects me to learning assets, whether those are learning about Blockchain, or AI, or drones, or IOT, across really the vast domain across digital related tech skills. So that's an agenda for all of our people, and it's one we're driving really aggressively. Not leaving anyone behind. Obviously I have to opt in too. I have to take responsibility for my development. So that's a part of the conversation too.

It starts with that, if you're thinking of almost a cake, that's really the base level of the cake, the foundation, the first tier, the first layer of that cake, but then we have other investments around fast tracking some of our people who are particularly motivated. And the Accelerator Program is a great example of that. Would it be helpful if I sort of walked you through some of the kind of the life cycle of the program and the experience?

Jacob: Yeah, maybe we can start with the high level overview, and then I'm actually taking notes while you're going over this, so I have already lots of follow up questions. But yeah, let's start with a high level overview and then we can talk about some of the details, like how the app works, the life cycle, how you created it, all that sort of stuff, unless you're already done giving the high level over view piece.

Mike: Yeah, that's kind of the frame. I wanted to start with that point that ... because I think it's an important point that this has got to be an inclusive agenda, and it's not about picking winners and losers, people who have a future versus those who will be increasingly less "relevant." It's very important, I think, and this goes to a fundamental ... These are our values inside of PwC, this is an inclusive agenda for all of our people. So it starts there, and by the way, there really is no opting out because we're moving from maybe a period of time where technology, digital expertise was viewed as the domain of certain professions, engineers obviously, and others, technologists.

Well really every domain of life in business certainly is being transformed. And that has implications for all of us. That's both exciting, but it can be anxiety producing as well. So our agenda is a very comprehensive one, and it's about engaging all of our people on this journey. And then on top of that, we've got some fast track programs and the Accelerators is one of those.

Jacob: Let's start even before all of that was created. It sounds like PwC as a company realized that this concept of digital up-skilling was important, you saw that the world was changing, how we work is changing, and you guys collectively said, "We've got to figure out something to make sure our people don't get left behind." Who was it that made that decision? Because I'm assuming you need approval, right? Executives need to come together, it probably costs a lot of time, and money to build this, so who was the team that was responsible for driving this? How did that aspect of it work?

Mike: The short answer is Tim Ryan our Chairman is the personal sponsor of this agenda-

Jacob: Who was also a past guest.

Mike: That's right. And so you know Tim. He is the personal sponsor deeply, deeply involved. This goes to the core of our business and our people strategy. It starts there. But you know we have one of the benefits, one of the beauties of a firm like PwC is that we've got innovation occurring across our firm. It's not as if it's come sort of central command and control culture. Our teams, our people are innovating constantly. And in some of our practices, groups have developed kind of these fast track programs, and they were called different things. But we were seeing that individuals with virtually no background at all, for example, in this space in a short period of time could become equipped with tools and new skills, and could have really tremendous impact. And that it was very motivating, very engaging. It was a stretch in an exciting way for so many of our people.

Our leadership team then developed a vision for example that included this Accelerator Program. And that's a fast track program. It was a competitive process, so we had people raise their hand. No one was "assigned to do this." We wanted to open it up and actually just see how many people would raise their hand. We had thousands, and we selected then the first cohort. The program you attended was really the kick-off to that particular cohort.

And the training program is a very personalized approach. And this mirrors our overall approach to digital fitness, by the way. So personalized in the sense that it starts with an assessment, it gauges what are my interests, what are the areas I want to focus on, what would be most relevant for my practice area in terms of skills and knowledge, and then it's a customized learning experience. It's also a very holistic one. So when we use the phrase digital fitness, we're not just referring to, well I'm going to go out and learn how to do data analytics, statistics and analytics. I'm not ... visualized data, or create bots. Yes, you'll learn to do all those things, but you're also going to learn about design thinking. You're going to deepen your skills in collaboration and teamwork and leading innovation. You're actually going to spend time thinking about how to be a really inclusive leader, because that's critical to being an influencer and for driving innovation, and the very best ideas. An environment where all of our people can fulfill their potential.

The curriculum starts with a focus on actually design thinking, digital storytelling, leadership skills. It includes kind of a deep dive on data, how to structure data, clean data, how to do analytics using tools, Alteryx Tableau, how to drive automation of processes, how to create bots, and for some, they'll go on for more advanced training, for example in AI, and our other areas.

It starts with an on boarding program. That's what you experienced down in Orlando. There's an intensive deep dive immersive experience, it's relatively short, but you know I think about 10 days. And then I'm quickly, and this is an important feature of the program, I'm quickly assigned to teams where I'm applying what I'm learning [inaudible 00:17:15] and each week, I'm part of a cohort that's continuing to have protected time for skill building.

And the social aspect of this, the team aspect I think is really important because we're sharing what we're learning, we're sharing roadblocks, we're sharing bots that we're creating. So that's a very important ... that community aspect of this I think is very important as well. So it started with some innovation in our businesses that we recognized was working really well, and we refined the thinking into this Accelerator fast-track program. We designed a process where people could raise their hand, and apply, and then it builds with a formal on boarding, an immersive experience, and then learning on-the-job.

Jacob: Well let's talk about how the program more ... or how this aspect of it was launched. It sounds like you guys created the program, first step it sounds like was you built this app, this digital assessment app, that I'm assuming you launched to I suppose all the employees in the United States, or a subset of them-

Mike: Yeah, Jacob, yeah sorry, the app actually is part of that first layer of the cake I was talking about. In other words, leave nobody behind, and give everyone access to learning asset. So the app does a couple things. It gives me immediate feedback on my base of knowledge, and then it connects me to all of our learning resources. And, you might be interested in deepening your expertise in Blockchain, I might have different interests. Maybe I want to pursue and dig into design thinking, user experience. AI, maybe I want to get into coding, maybe what's most relevant for me at this moment is data visualization.

So first there's a base line of knowledge that we think is important for everyone in the 21st century, base line of digital acumen. But then on top of that, we ask our people to pursue their interest. What's most relevant for your role? So that's for everyone. The Digital Accelerator Program is for a subset of our people who have raised their hand, and this year we'll put well over 1,000 people through that experience. Others will go through other types of fast-track programs not as intensive, but digital academies, training in specific tools, and the like.

Jacob: Got it, got it. So I'm really curious about the app. You open up the app, I'm assuming it's ... actually I downloaded the app. I was shown the app, you can find it on the Apple store on iTunes, just like with any other app. You download it, you enter some information, and then it sounds like you go through a series of questions, and these questions will ask you about various technical things, and then it gives you kind of an assessment of what your fluency is on various topics. Is that roughly how it works?

Mike: Oh, that's right. You got through a short quiz. By the way, version 2.0 will be released in just a few days. We're excited about that based on a lot of user feedback, so some new functionality. But what you described is right. I go through a relatively short assessment, I get feedback on my base of knowledge, I actually get a score. And that over time enables some comparison as well. And I can move that score. It's dynamic. If I just take the assessment and do nothing, over time that score degrades. Kind of like a credit score. But if I take action, so if I engage in learning, if I do quizzes that are found in the app, if I deepen my knowledge in data analytics, or in any of the other areas we were talking about, my score will improve over time. And we're also building in a social dimension. My gamification as well.

Jacob: So you get your score, and do you assess everybody that takes the app in like 10 different categories or skills, or is it kind of like a choose your own adventure. Because I'm thinking, if I open up the app now, and I want to assess my own fluency on Blockchain and AI, and bots, and data visualization, that's probably a lot of questions that you need to ask me. Do you just ask like 100 questions that ask about all different technical skills.

Mike: No, the initial assessment is shorter, and it includes as well, not just domain knowledge, whether that's cyber security, or use experience AI or the like, but also am I committed for example ... Do I have a growth mindset? So, am I actively diversifying my network of relationships? Am I curious? Am I actively seeking out opportunities to learn and to stretch? Do my relationships reflect that? So it's also about mindset, and behavior, and relationships. Again it's intended to be a holistic assessment, not simply about my content knowledge of design thinking, though it connects me then with assets that will deepen my knowledge in those areas, and then short quizzes as well, which are both a way of gauging my progress, but also a way of learning too.

Jacob: What happens next? You open up the app, you take the assessment, you get the score on your ... I guess you get your assessment evaluation on these various topics, and what's the next step? What's the next process after that?

Mike: Well, it gives me this personalized assessment, and you and I may have very different interests, so it's not a cookie cutter approach at all. It's intended to be a very personalized digital training and skills plan that it really helps you create for yourself. Now we may decide, let's say we're on a team together, we may take it together, and we may decide, what would be most relevant for our team is to deepen our knowledge on Blockchain, or deepen our knowledge on AI, or to develop our skills with a data visualization tool, and then start to apply it. So it's not meant to be an academic exercise per se, but rather to give you a rapid base of feedback on your knowledge, your skills, your behaviors, and then connect you with learning assets, and I use that word broadly. That could be an article, it could be an actual course, it could be an online learning experience, that will then deepen your skills, the quizzing then will actually move your score over time.

It also provides a base line from an organizational standpoint. Over time, you can get a sense of what themes are, where interests lie, where there might be gaps and the like depending on what the priorities are for your team. It's really meant to be personal and a fun thing. One that's very tied to your own personal interests and priorities.

Jacob: So the content that then you serve up to employees after they take this assessment, you might say, "Hey, here are some articles, or links to YouTube videos, or internal PwC resources on something like the Blockchain," and so the employee will go through all of that information and kind of check it off that they did that, and then I'm assuming their, I guess their score or their fluency increases after they complete those things?

Mike: It's a dynamic tool. Over time, and this is partly the notion of digital fitness. You're never done, I'm never done, nobody's ever done in the 21st century. So when you think about what does it take to fulfill my potential. Well I need to be physically fit, well, I need to be

mentally well, emotionally, spiritually, which is all part of our agenda as well. But I also need to be digitally fit, and that [inaudible 00:26:12] habit, so just as I might think about building habits around mindfulness, building habits around my physical well-being, my emotional well-being, well these are habits I need to build around my digital fitness. So that means, I'm never done having a curious growth mindset and investing, challenging myself to deepen my knowledge and my skills.

And we found when you personalize it, when it's also done in the context of a community, the community inside of our firm, teams, there can be a lot of fun with this, a lot of energy. And it's also then an opportunity to really secure my future. So, just as every business is wrestling with the how do I keep up with the innovation, the disruption that's occurring. The same thing is true for us as individuals. And so this is a means of really securing my future and creating opportunities.

Jacob: And I love the program, and how you guys are integrating then that into the real world stuff is great. My understanding was that everyone has access to the app, and then you put out a call for volunteers for these Digital Accelerators, and you basically asked employees to step forward, they didn't know much about the program, or what was going on, or what they would get, but you kind of said, "Look do you want to be a Digital Accelerator, maybe give some high level information?" And then employees had to volunteer, they answered some questions, and then you picked what is it, around 1,000 people. And then you hosted this kind of lunch in Orlando, that I was fortunate enough to be a part of, and we did two together, and we have one more in October.

And the whole space theme, and the way that you guys integrated all of that, just the whole experience was really amazing. But maybe you can talk a little bit about how you recruited people to be a part of the Digital Accelerator Program and what that process was. Because I thought that was also very, very interesting.

Mike: It was, and it was learning for us as well. One of the things that we've done on my own team, for example, we created a new role called Digital Talent Leader. My colleague, my [inaudible 00:28:36] partner, Sarah [inaudible 00:28:38], who you've met, serves in that role. She and another leader on my team, Rod Adams, developed this application process, and then worked with all of our businesses. It was a very formal process. So this is real. This is a serious opportunity, it's a serious investment, and it was about motivation. We wanted to know who really was the most motivated to take on this level of challenge, to really invest and push themselves, and be stretched. So people were able to raise their hands. It's an all volunteer [inaudible 00:29:24]. And we went through then a thoughtful selection process for this first cohort. And then people are going through in cohorts, in groups, and in teams again to create this sense of community, and shared experience, and to really accelerate the learning as well. After they go through an immersion, and the experience you were part of in Orlando was part of that immersion, really quickly then I'm out there with our teams, so I'm continuing to learn. There's a formal curriculum over the course of the year that I'm engaging in with other Accelerators. But now I'm part of a team serving clients, or working on projects inside of our firm, and by the way, these Accelerators come from all parts of our firm, including HR, finance, marketing, as well as all of our client service practices. And they're



immediately then applying skills, and also sharing those skills, and helping others learn and build their digital acumen.

They're really meant to be a catalyst. It's not simply a role where you're getting training and then you're doing statistical analysis on something. It's a broader role. And ultimately, we all have to be Accelerators. There is no other path I think in the 21st century, and in the economy we're in, we all have to be Accelerators, but this was an opportunity for people to raise their hand, and really receive fast track investment in their development.

Jacob: I also really love the message that you guys had at the event, which was that if you go back to your offices after you go through this program, and a manager or one of your peers or somebody says, "Hey, that's great that you went through this, can you go back to the old way of doing things," that you actually encouraged your employees to say, "No, I'm sorry. I can't go back to the old way of doing things. We've got to do things in a new way." You actually shared the contact info of several of your executives, and you said, "Look, if somebody at the company asks you to go back to the old way of doing things, email Joe, email Mike, email Sarah, and we will show up, and we will fix it, and make sure your team and your managers know that we're not going back to the old way of doing things." And that's a commitment that I rarely ever hear a company actually make.

I really love that message of just really pushing employees to not going back to the old way of doing things, because that can easily be something that we fall in the trap of doing. We go through these cool programs, and then we go back to work, and it's kind of like, it was a great program, but now I'm doing the same thing that I always used to be doing.

Mike: It's a classic trap in so many organizations where, and I can give you other examples outside of this digital agenda that we've learned from, where we go off and we may have had a fantastic experience. We learned this lesson for example around well-being, and flexibility, and changing our culture, where we were sending hundreds of our people, thousands to truly a world class experience around well-being, but then they come back to a team where no one else has gone through the experience, and they're very, very established ways of doing things. Maybe not the level of receptivity you'd hope, and it really is kind of a defeating experience.

We've learned to, over the years, we've learned a lot from that. For example on well-being, just last year, we've learned it really lives in the DNA of our team. So we held actually a competition. And we asked all of our teams across our firm to create plans around how they would incorporate habits that promote well-being, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual well-being, and we [inaudible 00:33:40] a habit bank that people could contribute to, and learn from. We had over 5,000 teams submit plans with measurable goals. This was just this past year.

Again Tim Ryan served as a personal champion of this, and I'll come back to that in a moment. The point I'm making here is what you just said, there have to be ways of bridging traditional training and education. Whether that's e-learning, or whether that's

a conference you're going to, a retreat, and how do you get it into the DNA? That's a question so many executives wrestle with. So we took what we had learned over the years, and have applied that both in around our well-being agenda, we call it Be Well, Work Well, but then also around digital up-skilling.

And, to your point, we're asking our people to be these Accelerators, to be disruptive in the best sense. To challenge us, to challenge me [inaudible 00:34:43], to challenge our leadership, but then also establish ways of doing things within our teams. And I think that is one of the keys, it's having leadership alignment, and be willing to listen, to be curious, to be open-minded, to be surprised, and to really support these individuals that we're asking to accelerate the development of our people.

Jacob: Is it true that also part of the program you actually encourage employees to spend less time with clients, less billable time with clients, and they spend a portion of that billable client time learning stuff? Is that true as well?

Mike: Well not quite in that sense. Roles are very diverse, so there is no one accelerator role. They're going out to teams, they're engaged, some of those teams are involved with internal processes. For example, we have Accelerators that we're assigning to our recruiting processes. Looking at the experience our candidates have. That's one example. Others may be looking at other internal processes in finance, for example. Others will be working directly on our client team. So it really is quite diverse in terms of the applications across our firm.

Jacob: Yeah, it sounds like there is a lot of different Accelerators in different programs all over the place. Now, I'm assuming that this kind of stuff isn't cheap to do, right? It takes time, it takes a lot of energy to build these things, to create these things, commitment from employees to do it, and so the other message that I was really struck by is, I think somebody was asking, "What's the strategy for PwC?" And I think it was Joe that said, "You're the strategy for PwC. You the people, these Digital Accelerators, you guys are the strategy for PwC. You are what we're betting on to help make sure that we can future proof the company." Can you talk a little bit about that, and what that means for you guys as far as having your people be that core strategy?

Mike: [inaudible 00:37:15] our people is at the heart of our strategy. Really our business strategy and people strategy are one in the same in that way. And it's an important message, not leaving anyone behind, investing in all of our people, creating at the same time really special opportunities for people who are very motivated to fast track and go even faster. In this 21st century, there are very few companies, probably very few executives who'd say they're moving too fast. Most are saying, "How do I keep up? How do I move faster? How do I drive innovation? How do I drive a more digital experience for my customers, my clients? How do I transform processes with technology, and create just a better user experience both for our people internally, our employees, but then also our customers?" So it's a tremendously exciting agenda. I think that's what you're getting at here.

It really lines up then with what our clients are asking for as well. One example, in some areas of our practice, some of our people would say that, in accounting for example,

that some of the work is more repetitious than they wished. One of the exciting things, as much as in our society there's debate about dystopian and utopian visions of the future relative to automation and technology, we're really bullish in our [inaudible 00:39:00]. We just see the experience our people are having as getting better and better, and it involves up-skilling, it involves more use of our abilities to both be analytic, be creative, be collaborative to work in teams. It's also about that human difference. It's not just a matter of mastering certain technologies, but also understanding what uniquely is our human difference, both in our teams and as individuals, and how we bring that together when we're serving our clients.

Jacob: Yeah, which makes complete sense. Is there any other aspect of this digital up-skilling stuff that you want to talk about at PwC, or is the digital fitness, and the Accelerator Program kind of the core of what you guys have going on?

Mike: One [inaudible 00:39:50] I would make, just in the spirit of connecting thoughts, I spoke about, and actually is spoke about this at our Accelerator Program in Orlando, being an inclusive leader, there's a lot discussion [inaudible 00:40:07] in tech broadly around diversity and inclusion. And this is something that is so important to us at PwC, it goes to the heart of our culture and our values, and what we stand for. And we believe we've got a tremendous opportunity here to build a very inclusive agenda, and make a point of investing in the development of leaders who are very inclusive, and being explicit about that. And that's so important. It's important for our society: A, because it's simply the right thing to do, full stop. It's also important because the problems we face today, the challenges we have an opportunity of helping to solve require all of our best thinking. There is not group that has a monopoly on ideas, on potential, and we see it. Academic research actually does bear this out. But we see it every day. That when groups of people who are diverse, diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and we're able to harness that in a creative way. It's really when we're at our best, and we're able to do our very best work.

So we're explicit about that here. That being an Accelerator isn't simply a matter of being a narrow technologist, but it's also being an influencer, being a leader, accelerating the development of our culture. That means building an inclusive culture where everyone can fulfill their potential. Does that make sense?

Jacob: Oh, of course, makes complete sense. And I know you mentioned that you have around 1,000 or so Digital Accelerators, maybe a few more. Is the plan to have everyone go through this eventually?

Mike: Well, the plan is for everyone to build digital acumen, and that journey will look a little different for all of us depending on our interests, and our roles, and our careers. So there's no cookie cutter here. But one thing that is common is the imperative for all of use to build our digital acumen. That's where assets like the app, the Digital Fitness App come in, and other kinds of learning experiences that we're providing our people. Then this is just the beginning of the Accelerator Program, the first cohort. And we're excited about continuing to build that [inaudible 00:42:39].

Jacob: I'm certainly excited to see where all this goes as well. You mentioned automation, so of course I need to ask you about that. But it sounds like you're generally optimistic about the role that technology and automation is going to have because, as you mentioned PwC you do a lot of accounting, you do a lot of finance, and all the studies out there predict that those are the jobs that are at most risk of getting automated and disappearing. Are you seeing that inside of PwC? Are you guys losing people by the thousands?

Mike: No, no we're not. We're hiring by the thousands. But of course it's top of mind for our society. Almost on a daily basis if you're reading, you're coming across either studies or debates, some as I said with very dystopian, or even utopian perspective. Very divergent perspectives. We're bullish in the sense that what we see is an opportunity. It's about the human difference. As we're able to automate work, it means our people can only do more and more challenging and interesting work at the same time. And it means we can collaborate in new ways. We talk a lot about one firm and bringing together diverse skillsets, learning from each other, so I think it's also part of that opportunity as well that I think our people tell us is so enriching.

We are bullish, and I am personally bullish. Of course there will be challenges for us as a society. It would be naïve to think that wouldn't be the case. But that's been the case whenever there's economic disruption, and it goes to this fundamental point of not leaving anyone behind.

Let me connect the dots here. One of the things we're very invested in from a societal standpoint is something called achieve your potential. We have a five year \$350 million commitment investing in tech up-skilling, financial literacy, other areas, this is curriculum, teacher training, it's our people going out and working in schools and driving tech up-skilling, for example, in underserved communities. I want to connect the dots there because I think it's never been more important for anyone, for any company, any organization to be more engaged in some of these broader societal challenges.

So when we talk about digital up-skilling, this isn't just an agenda for our firm, or just the business community, this is an agenda for our society. And we have an obligation, we have a responsibility, and our people couldn't be more excited to be engaged, have opportunities to make a difference in our communities as well. So it's a great example of where this discussion around digital up-skilling quickly takes us to the broader societal discussion.

Jacob: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. Well I have a couple questions from LinkedIn that I wanted to ask you, but before I jump into that, maybe you can give your advice for individuals, and also for organizations as a whole, that are looking to digitally up-skill their employees. What can learn from the work that you've been doing at PwC so that they can bring in some of those similar concepts, and ideas, and learnings to digitally up-skill their employees. What advice would you give people listening?

Mike: I would say, number one, this is an agenda for everyone. It's not about just a certain elite, or some subset. In the 21st century, if we're going to be able to fulfill our potential

as individuals, in teams, as businesses, it really needs to be an inclusive agenda for all of your people. It is for all of our people. And that's I think a very important point.

Number two, it needs to be a personal agenda. Yes, we believe there's a base line, a foundation of digital acumen that really we all need to possess as we move into this 21st century, but it also has to be a personalized and customized agenda depending on my role, my interest, and where I want to take my career. I think creating a personalized experience is very important.

I think making it fun, making it energizing, creating a social and community element to it, is also extraordinarily important to accelerate learning, share practices, to create some energy, so it's not a solitary journey whatsoever. And that I think can be really beneficial for culture, and cohesion. And then I think the last point I made that we all have an obligation to not leave anyone behind in our society. That ties to diversity and inclusion, and it ties to addressing this technical skills gap very broadly in our society as well. In the business community we have, I think a special obligation. We benefit so much from our educational systems, and so much from our country. This is a critical area for us to be engaged as business leaders and to give back.

Jacob: And as an individual, I suppose the message is don't wait, and take charge, and start doing this stuff yourself. We have access to so many tools and resources online that there's no reason why we can't start learning about things like Blockchain now, or data visualization. I think earlier, at the very beginning of the podcast, you mentioned that idea of accountability and responsibility, so I think that's a great thing for individuals to remember as well.

Mike: I can't say that enough as well. I think that we've all got to opt in. We all have to raise our hand, and if we're not, we should understand what we're opting out of. Which in some respects is the future. No role, I don't think any career will really be left untouched by this digital revolution, so that can either be a source of excitement, curiosity. Yes it also means I have to push myself, and certainly not allow myself to be paralyzed or complacent.

Jacob: Yeah, if a company like PwC's doing it, I can only guess how many millions of dollars you guys are investing in this, then here's really no excuse for other companies to not pay attention to this.

I wanted to ask you a couple of questions from LinkedIn because I put up online that I was going to talk to you, and I asked if people had any questions, and I got a bunch of questions from folks, so I wanted to ask you a few of those. One of them is from Inga Patton, and she asked actually a really, really good question that I keep hearing about a lot, and she said, "How about those of us who are much older but also experienced and educated? Where and how do we fit-in in a relevant way?"

Mike: Yeah, [inaudible 00:50:06] that's a great question. The agenda I've discussed has nothing to do with age. Nothing! I've tried to emphasize the importance of approaching this with absolute inclusion, for example across our workforce, and digital acumen is a lifelong

endeavor. So sure, are there digital natives out there, yes. But this is an agenda for all of us, and it's one where we're never done. That's been the beauty of the digital fitness app. Sure, we have to meet people where they're at given their interest, their skill, their knowledge base, but even for those who have little background, whether they're, and that might be an entry level employee at our firm, or someone who's at a very advanced stage of their career. There's no barrier to starting. And I think that's it, is just finding the right entry, the right door to open, the right area of interest. We talked about some of those topics around digital fitness. It might mean, for example, if I'm really interested in design thinking. If that's really most relevant, maybe I'll never be a coder, fine. The message is not that we all have to become software engineers. The message is we do all have to be digitally fit. And that's true at every stage of our career.

Jacob: And it seems like if you work at PwC you're fortunate that there isn't that ageism mentality. But I know a lot of organizations who have that kind of belief where it's like, if you're an older worker, you're just automatically perceived as being outdated and irrelevant, and it's time for you to go, and we've got to bring in these younger workers. And it's a very unfortunate mentality to have because I think as Inga mentioned, there are a lot of older workers who are doing a very good job of staying relevant. They're smart, they're educated, they know how the business works, they how to build these relationships, and companies don't do a good enough job of making sure that we retain those people instead of trying to encourage them to get out the door. So I love that your program isn't at all focused on age at all, which is of course nice.

Jacob: I actually have a question for you from a Digital Accelerator, and he said, and his name's Brian Morgan, he said, "What can employees and employers alike do to facilitate clear and open communication during times of rapid change like we have seen with technology over the past few years?"

Mike: [inaudible 00:52:38] as well. We have to evolve. This is not just about innovating with new tools, but it's also about innovating how we work, how we communicate, how we collaborate, how we lead. When I use that word culture, those are some of the things I'm talking about, and that's part of the exciting agenda that we're driving at PwC. Though it does mean finding new ways within our teams to collaborate. Maybe that's reflected in applying agile methodology for example. A lot of our teams have found that to be really affective in promoting both quality and speed, in how we work, how we share ideas, how we collaborate. It also means a different style of leadership. So it's not so much this centralized command and control, the leader has the answers. Maybe just the exact opposite. Leading is about listening. It's about being humble, it's about tuning into what other's needs are, their ideas, being very deliberate to being inclusive. I'm making sure everyone's voice is hear around the table. And being self aware. What are my blind spots? And asking others for feedback.

So it's a great question, and I think it goes to the heart of our ability to learn and learn quickly, and to create a culture where people can really be at their best and fulfill their potential.

Jacob: And if you're an employee, I guess that means speak up. If you want to know something, ask.

Mike: Yeah, that's exactly right. That's the opt-in part of it. That's the part where I have to take responsibility as well. And that's what's exciting I think about that [inaudible 00:54:35] I'm describing, because it means everyone has to voice, and I have to take responsibility for having a point of view and for sharing it.

Jacob: All right, I know we're almost out of time, so maybe I can squeeze in one or two more questions in there. This ones from Giselle, and she says, "How can students prepare now for roles that will demand a higher level of strategic thinking? How can they position themselves and indispensable in parallel with the continued evolution of automation and technology?" And this is specifically for students that are not in the workforce yet.

Mike: Yeah, I love the question, and I think it's two-fold. It's doing really well at the task at hand, if you will, so the work that I'm doing, the role I have. But it's also being curious and asking bigger picture questions, and that's sort of takes us to the human difference. What are the things that we can uniquely contribute in terms of creativity, innovation, teamwork, collaboration, service to others.

I think the other thing I would say is this model we have of education today has to evolve as well. This notion, well I'm going to go and get a degree, and I'm there for four years, and then I'm done, or maybe I go to graduate school, then I'm done. I really believe, A, the mindset today has already shifted, we recognize we have to be lifelong learners. We're never done. Educations going to follow that as well, and over time, imagine kind of a "Blockchain" of verified skills that we accumulate, that we build over the course of our career. And I think that's really where the mindset comes in. That's also exciting right. We're not done, we're building maybe a foundation as a student. A foundation of relationships too, and experiences. But that we're also learning how to learn and be a good learner, and an affective learner.

Jacob: Yeah, I love that response. Do you still have time for maybe one or two more?

Mike: Yeah, I'm flexible, thanks.

Jacob: Oh awesome. Okay perfect. The next question on LinkedIn came from Sushrey and she asked actually a really good question as well. And she kind of cheated and threw in several questions in here. And she basically said, "In the era of digitalization, when skills are getting redundant around every three to four years, how does an individual work on getting them re-skilled at such a fast pace? So if you're an employee at a company, how do you as an individual make sure that you can stay relevant and stay valuable? And what are some of the skills that you think are truly relevant, whether they're technology skills, or soft skills?" And the last part of the question was, "With the focus on soft skills in the future, how do you differentiate yourself from your peers who have the same technical skills that you do when it comes to something like AI or robotics, or machine learning? If somebody else knows just as much stuff about you, how do you differentiate yourself?"

I know it's kind of a three-part, so if you want me to repeat any of that, let me know.

Mike: Well I'll do my best. It's a big question. But a couple quick thoughts here. So first, you're absolutely right, specific skills related to the use of a given tool, for example. Well tools will come and go, they will evolve, one of the things that I can do that really differentiate myself, and I think we really try to take the holistic approach at PwC, so that means making sure that I have self awareness as a leader around my strengths, my style, my impact on others, that I'm humble, I'm listening to others. Being inclusive, so really valuing diversity, whether I'm a team member or a leader of a team, I'm working hard to create an inclusive environment where we can get the best contributions from each member of the team, and that we deliberately value diversity. So I think that's a very important attribute. It goes along with having kind of a global mindset working across cultures.

Being curious, not just from a technical or technology perspective, but around business and innovation. Relationships, relationship skills, massive differentiator. So maybe we're equally adept at using certain tools, but am I able to communicate and insight crisply, creatively using storytelling. Huge differentiator there. So being able to not only do an analysis, but also to crystallize an insight, and to translate it in a way that it's easily digested, easily heard and understood. And to do it in a way within a team that is build on collaboration, empathy. Those are some of those unique human skills that I think will continue to be differentiators.

Jacob: Couldn't agree more. I'm a big believer in those as well. All right, last question for you, and this I think is also a very good one, and it's kind of a debate that we've been hearing about quite a bit. And this one comes from Dennis, and he says, "He'd be very curious to hear how you balance the demands of professional services with employee work-life balance. Because it seems like a lot of new grads want workplace flexibility, they want to work from home, they want these flexible hours, and perhaps that isn't so easy to offer in a professional services firm." So maybe we can address that, but it would also be really interesting to hear if you have anything else that you can share around what PwC as a company is doing broadly to attract and retain these potential employees, these graduates coming right out of school.

Mike: Good question, and by the way, what we've learned is flexibility, leading a full life, that's important really to all of our people. It really isn't prioritized by any particular segment or demographic. It's important to all of our people. We've done a lot of work in this area around our culture. We started a conversation last year around well-being, physical well-being, mental well-being, emotional well-being, spiritual well-being in the sense of purpose in life. It's a conversation that we weren't used to some of those words in the past. And what we learned around how do you achieve work-life, or a better balance because of course in any profession, it is demanding, there's no question. But that doesn't mean it has to be a burnout. It doesn't mean that you can't have a full life, and in fact, we want you to. And we know we also do our best work when I'm physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually well.

So we've anchored that in our teams. We actually created an app, a habit bank to share practices that our teams have put in place to promote well-being and flexibility. We also use other apps that are out there to help our people. And we anchored it and said, " Listen, come together and have a team plan around well-being." This is what I reference



earlier, over 5,000 of our teams just last year all created team plans with measurable goals. And we had some fun with this. We had some competition, we awarded prizes, and we led from the front. Tim Ryan our Chairman talks a lot about this, the habits he puts in place in his life, our leadership team the same.

So this is a real priority. This is a real priority for our firm and our people. And we've learned that there are ways of being well and working well. That it's also about working in ways that can be more affective, more mindful, more focused, that can help us achieve some of those other goals as well. So it's a priority for all of our people, and there is not a single answer. Our people work in so many different ways, across different industries, so we've said, "Listen, here's some tools [inaudible 01:03:35], each one of our teams, let's have a plan, let's hold ourselves accountable, and we're going to share what's working." And it's been amazing. I mean we've had clients come to us and say, "I'm feeling a real difference with the team, what's going on? It's fantastic. And by the way, how can we get some of that too? What are doing? How could we work together to improve well-being? We'd like that for our people."

Jacob: It sounds like you're rubbing off on a lot of people there. PwC as a company, you're definitely leading the way in a lot of really cool stuff. And, as I mentioned, I had the opportunity to speak with a lot of people, visit a lot of companies, and this program that you guys are doing at PwC is I think one of the most amazing things that I've seen. So huge congratulations to you, Tim, Sarah, the rest of your team that's launching this. I'm very, very excited to see what it'll look like in the next year, and two years, and three years, and new versions of the app. And I wouldn't be surprised if of course your clients are also wanting this stuff themselves.

Well, you've been very gracious with your time. We went even over our time by a couple minutes. But maybe to end you can let people know where can they go to connect with you, with PwC, anything that you want to share or mention for people to know.

Mike: Sure, I'm LinkedIn, Twitter, as you might expect. Obviously we have a digital presence around our firm that's very easy to access for PwC online, [ceoaction.com](http://ceoaction.com) goes to our diversity agenda, and it's a coalition of hundreds of CEO's now that have come together that we're part of, and proud to be part of as well, that ties around inclusive leadership and diversity and some of the societal challenges we've touched upon as well.

Jacob: Very cool. Well Mike, again thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me. And am I going to see you in Orlando in October?

Mike: I believe so. I look forward to it.

Jacob: Yeah, well I'm looking forward to it as well. And thanks again for being a guest.

Mike: Thank you, Jacob. Have a great afternoon.

Jacob:

You too. And thanks everyone for tuning in, and my guest again has been Mike Fenlon the Chief People Officer at PwC, and I will see all of you next week.