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 Greg Hanover, the CEO of LiveOps. Greg, thank you for joining me.
Greg:	Good morning. Nice to be here.
Jacob:	So for people who are not familiar with LiveOps, can you give us a little bit of background information about the company?
Greg:	Yeah. LiveOps is about an 18-year-old company, and actually one of the first companies to really lead the way in crowd sourcing in a gig economy. So we are a virtual at home based call center. All of our agents work from home around the United States. And we are headquartered as a company out in Scottsdale, Arizona. And we also have a lot of employees of the company who work from home also. So we've been pioneering in the virtual call center space for the last 18 years. And we work with a lot of large brands, a lot of different verticals, retail, healthcare, insurance, travel and hospitality really focusing on customer care and sales.
Jacob:	Who would be some of your customers or when might one of the podcasts listeners have interacted with maybe a LiveOps employee?
Greg:	Yeah, we work with a lot of, unfortunately due to confidentiality with our customers, we don't share names. But we work with a lot of large retail brands. So if you're buying a women's apparel or you're shopping at some of the large retail outlets around the country, there's a good chance, if you've interacted online with that brand or in store that if you called in to check in on an order, or you had a question then a good chance you spoke with a LiveOps agent. If you work with some of the leading roadside assistance companies out there, you buy their monthly subscriptions. Then there's a good chance if you called in with a roadside need that you were speaking with a LiveOps agents.
Greg:	It's interesting, I think a lot of people would quickly realize how many times they've spoke with a LiveOps agent, whether it be for retail need, a roadside need, maybe a healthcare need given all the different verticals we serve today.
Jacob:	Yeah. I remember there was an actual big new York Times' article written about you guys and I think they cited the AAA and Home Depot in there as some of the people who

are customers, which is fantastic. These are big global brands that a lot of people would be interacting with. And how many employees do you guys have versus contractors?

Greg: Yeah, so for employees, we have a little over 200, employees of the company. And again, we're headquartered out here in Scottsdale, Arizona. We have offices in San Francisco, Portland, Oregon, in Dayton, Ohio. And then we have quite a few people who work remotely around the country. In terms of our agent community that we call LiveOps Nation, so our independent contractors, the 1099s of LiveOps model, we have over 14,000 who are active on a weekly basis today. And we have a network much larger than that. But in terms of active agents, it ranges and depends on the time of year. One of the benefits of our model is just the flexibility and the scalability. In Q4, that number can grow significantly when we're working with a lot of our retail customers. But it ebbs and flows depending on the needs within our business. But on average, consistently we have about 14,000 who are active on a weekly basis.

Jacob: Wow. So that's several times larger, many times larger than the actual full time workforce that you guys have. How does that work? How did you get these 14,000 people? I mean, how did they see they get built and created? Maybe you can walk us through that a little bit.

Greg: Yeah. The history of our business. It's interesting, we always like to talk about how companies are founded and where did that idea come from. If you look back at the LiveOps history, we started back in the early 2000s and were based out of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. And there was a need in the infomercial business, so the inbound sales calls. If you look at the traditional call center model in how brick and mortar call centers were servicing that business, there was a large need to solve the call handling challenge in that space. And all the brick and mortars were struggling to staff up and staff down in a cost effective way to handle those calls. And LiveOps came along with this at home independent contractor model, a very innovative model and figured out a solution to how to be able to handle those significant call spikes that were coming in in the infomercial space.

Greg: But do it in a cost effective way where we could staff up, handle the calls, and then staff down quickly to meet the needs. And that's really where the LiveOps agent business started and then grew significantly in the 2000s. And then we started looking at how else could we apply this innovative model or this disruptive model into other verticals and other spaces. And we started to focus on the enterprise space and looking at companies that could leverage a model like ours where there were similar needs, but looking at it from a customer care perspective. And some of the customers we started supporting early in the enterprise space were in the insurance space, and we have a distributed workforce who are licensed agents selling insurance policies. And when you think about the need to have state licenses, a model like LiveOps provides a huge advantage because we can tap into a workforce around the country who are licensed in the various states.

Greg: We started looking at all the different applications of this crowdsourcing model and how could we apply it in different verticals and different industries. And there was an evolution of not just servicing the direct response for the infomercial space, really

moving into the enterprise sales and customer care space, given the needs there to provide better customer experiences. And that's really where our focus is today is servicing the enterprise space. We still do a lot of work in direct response in the infomercial space, but the growth engine behind LiveOps now is really taking our model in helping customers in the enterprise space provide better customer experience to their end customers.

Jacob: One of the things I think people can really learn from what you guys have built at LiveOps is how you are working with a virtual team. And so I definitely want to ask you about culture and how you guys work. But maybe a little bit higher level before we jump into that, we can start with some of the big workforce trends that you're paying attention to in the world. Kind of what are you looking at, so to speak?

Greg: It's interesting for us as we talk to analysts or we do our own research is just this massive shift happening in the American workforce. It's no secret, everybody pays attention to the Ubers and Lifts and the other crowdsourcing companies out there. But the shift happening in the workforce of people not wanting a traditional eight to five office job or employee job, wanting more flexibility in their life, wanting to tap into the gig economy and be part of that evolution happening. Gets us excited about the opportunity in front of us. If you read the studies and you talk to the analysts, they're saying by 2021, over 45% of the American workforce will be leveraging the gig economy in some capacity, whether it be for primary work, secondary work, tertiary work. It all varies.

Greg: But when you look at that shift happening and you look at the talent in the gig economy and the access that our customers have to the level of talent that you can get, that you can't get in a traditional call center model, it just leads to a better customer experience and it gets us excited about the opportunity in front of us to help our customers provide a better customer experience.

Jacob: Okay. So changes it sounds like in a pretty much, I don't want to say employees, what individuals want is kind of the big trend.

Greg: Yeah. We spend a lot of time with our members of LiveOps Nation, we go out and meet with them in the different cities. And we talk to them about what else we can be doing better for them in terms of providing them with a better agent experience. And we always ask the agents, what brought you to LiveOps? Or what is it about LiveOps that keeps you here? And it's the flexibility, it's the ability to use their experience, the skills they have acquired maybe in a different profession or a different stage in their career. And being able to leverage that and use that to help large enterprise, brands. And giving them that flexibility to work around their life is what leads to the high tenure that we have here at LiveOps when you compare our model to a traditional call center model.

Jacob: Got it. Got it. And so you have 14,000 employees, well, not employees, contractors who are basically all over the United States. And they're working from their homes, right?

Greg:	Correct. All of our agents work from home, and that's a big difference. When you look at our model, we've grown up and we've been pioneering the virtual space. And when you look at a lot of companies who may be started out with a traditional call center model, a brick and mortar model and then they've tried to build a work at home model, I think one of the big mistakes you see is that they try to take their brick and mortar model and apply it in a work at home environment. It's very different. The type of people that come into a work at environment are not the same type of people that go into a brick and mortar call center.
Greg:	When you look at a LiveOps agent and you look at the experience and you look at the motivation and the drive individuals have to come in and run their own business, it's very different than a traditional model. And I say that because it's important, and that we've grown up in this space and we've had 18 years to make lots of mistakes and improve along the way. And that's important to know in terms of why we've been able to be as successful as we have is because we've grown up in this space and we've learned a lot and continue to evolve the work at home model because that's all we know.
Jacob:	Let's talk a little bit about the culture because 14,000 people working from home, 200 full time employees, what is the corporate culture like? And I mean, how do you maintain all that? How do you even create a corporate culture with 14,000 people in the United States working from home?
Greg:	Yeah, I think it really comes down to, and I think a lot of people say this is your communication strategy. And how are we working with our independent contractors? How are we supporting them? And what tools are we using to ensure strong communication and building a virtual community that they all feel part of? I think there's a lot of things we are doing well today. I think one area we invested in we're definitely seeing a return on is we've built out a online community using a collaboration tool called Lithium. And we call it LiveOps Nation. You can go to liveopsnation.com, and you can see this tool in place and how it's supporting our agents today. But we give our agents a platform to communicate with one another, to share tips, secrets, checks in terms of how are they supporting the end customer.
Greg:	Gives the agents a chance to get to know one another, communicate with one another. Gives us a chance to communicate with our agents. And I think the nice thing about that is when you do share out information, everybody gets a chance to see it. And it allows us to disseminate information much faster across the larger audience. And I think part of the success of running a virtual community is you have to have the tools in place. You have to leverage the technology out there that allows you to communicate effectively in a remote environment. And that's not easy to do. But again, it's something that we've been doing for the 18 years we've been in existence. We've understood that that's critical to running a very successful virtual model is you have to make sure you've got the proper foundation in place around your communication so that the agents do feel engaged and they do feel part of LiveOps, and they do have the support they need to go and support our end customers and provide an excellent experience.

Jacob: Are we able to talk a little bit more in detail about what that communication strategy looks like? And the reason why I'm so curious is because there are a lot of people listening to this podcast who either work for companies that have remote teams. Either they're leading remote teams or they want to be part of a remote team, and their manager is kind of not believing in that. And so I think kind of helping people create that framework for how to build this kind of a virtual team and how you execute on that communication strategy would be, I mean, fantastic insights. So anything that you think you can share around how that works would be great.

Greg: Yeah. I would say it really comes down to setting expectations. First, actually, I'll take a step up. It gets back to the comment around the type of individuals that you bring into your model. We all know there are some people who can be more successful than others in a virtual environment. And I think it starts with the type of individuals we bring into our model. Folks that we profile and we feel like have the attributes and the skillset to succeed in a virtual model.

Jacob: What is that by the way? What do you look for?

Greg: Somebody who is very self-driven, motivated, has more of an entrepreneurial spirit is going to be able to come in and really take control, and really treat this as their home-based business. We provide a lot of support to our agents, but this is very different than a traditional model where your hand is going to be held and you're an employee and we're going to tell you what to do every step of the way. In the LiveOps model, you truly are running your own business and you have to come in with that mindset and that willingness to come in and figure things out and really take the lead in seeking out the information and the tools you need to succeed. So we're going to provide the platform to do that, and we're going to help you succeed. But you really have to be driven and motivated to come in and run your own business.

Jacob: And that would be similar, I suppose, I mean, slightly different in that the contractors, like you said are running their own business. But let's say you're an employee at a large company, those qualities would probably still very much be applicable as far as being entrepreneurial, being able to be driven, kind of take ownership over things and not necessarily rely on somebody standing over your shoulder watching you all the time. So I think those qualities and skills can be relevant whether you're full time or not.

Greg: Completely agree, very transferable. I would say one of the things the agents love about our model in terms of having the ability to really control their future is the earning potential. You're not limited to working a certain amount of hours. You can work as many hours a week as you'd like as long as you're meeting the requirements of the program. So in terms of looking at your earning potential, there are things that are more attractive in our model that maybe have restrictions if you're in a traditional employee type model.

Jacob: Got it, got it. Okay. That makes sense. So those are the types of people that you look for. So if you are either a manager looking to implement flexible work or at a company, those are sort of the types of skills and attributes that you want to look for. And now for your model, you said people can basically pick their earning potential. But let's say for

example, I work at a company like Coca Cola or Unilever or IBM. I'm in marketing, for example, and I'm a remote employee. I gotta be on there 30, 40, 50 hours a week or whatnot. Is there any difference for how would structure that? I don't control my own earning potential, my earning potential is kind of fixed on a salary. So how do you create that kind of communication strategies as far as like expectations, when I'm supposed to be online, when I'm supposed to be working?

Greg: Yep. One of the big things or processes we have in place is every agent signs what we call a statement of work. And we make it clear, so whether you're supporting a large retail customer or one of our insurance customers, or healthcare customers, we're going to list out what the requirements are to support that customer. So we may have certain requirements around number of hours worked each week or certain quality metrics that have to be met to stay active on a program. We'll clearly outline in that statement of work with the agent what the requirements are to support that end customer. There are requirements. It's not a free for all model. But we do provide requirements to make sure we're meeting our end customer's needs in terms of meeting the quality metrics and providing the level of service expected of us. But at the same time, we communicate very clearly up front with the agents what is it required.

Jacob: And I liked that everybody has to sign something. And again, just bringing it back to maybe full time employees at a company like Unilever or whatnot, IBM, it sounds like that could also be very much applicable there where those kind of expectations are laid out up front as far as quality of work. Maybe some guidelines around when your manager should be able to get in touch with you. So you can still apply that concept to the full time workforce for somebody in like marketing or development.

Greg: Absolutely. Absolutely. When you look at one of the differences and one of the things that's attractive about our model to folks is the flexibility in determining when they want to work. So they sign up and they commit to shifts in terms of their availability and when they want to work. So it's very different than telling somebody to come in from eight to five. We do give them flexibility going in in picking shifts that work for their schedule. So it really allows them to work around their life and give them that flexibility that they tell is critical what they appreciate most about the LiveOps model.

Jacob: One of the things that I often times hear for full time employees, and again, this is not specific at a call center, this is just any full time employee in any function. One of the things that I oftentimes hear from business leaders is they say, "Oh, well, we don't want people to work full time from home. We don't want to really have that much virtual work going on because we need collaboration. People got to be in person, they got to see each other, we got to innovate together." What is your thought on that? Is it the nature of the work that LiveOps does that allows that flexible work force? If you were the CEO of one of these other big brands out there, Home Depot or AARO or one of those companies, would you still have that flexible work model even though the employees are not call center employees?

Greg: You know, I would,. I believe it's a mindset shift in terms of thinking that way. I think with tools and technology that are available today, the ability to collaborate in a remote environment is absolutely possible and just as effective as getting together in person. I

think it's more of a mindset in my opinion. And the reason I say that probably is because I've been with LiveOps now 11 year. We've been able to use a remote model and make it very successful. And we've been able to figure out how to put, back to your question earlier around communication strategy, how to use all the various tools, whether it's chat tools, whether it's webinars, whether it's using tools like Lithium and these collaboration hubs in collaboration tools that allow our agents to get in there, and allow all of us to collaborate together and work together. I am very much more of the mindset that to you can make communication, you can make the remote workforce and environment work very well. And you don't need to be sitting in front of one another to deliver the results that are needed.

Jacob: Well, let's talk about some of the tools. So you mentioned a Lithium, which I'm familiar with, especially being here in the Bay Area. What are some of the other tools or technologies you use? And again, you don't necessarily need to name vendors if you don't want to, just the type of tool. So you mentioned like messaging, webinars.

Greg: Yeah. It could be messaging, it could be using tools like GoToMeeting or Zoom, or just tools that allow you to connect using, whether it's video tools or audio tools, or chat tools. But just using tools that allow you to have that connection with folks so that, again, you're able to effectively communicate. And it's a variety of tools that we've just talked about that we have in place that we use depending on what the needs are. So again, it's very much of the mindset, you don't need to be sitting in front of somebody to communicate and deliver that message or work with them to improve. And again, back to one of my points I made earlier, we actually believe that it's more effective in this model because when you do share information, you can share it out across a larger group. It gets out there in a much faster way, and allows agents to pick up on information.

Greg: And we see this every day. When an agent asks a question, if they're on a call or they have a followup after a call, it's usually a question that many agents have. So instead of telling one person the ability to go and share that information across the larger universe allows you to get that information out much faster. And it leads to improving that customer experience that much quicker.

Jacob: One of the other big issues, especially on the management side when it comes to flexible or remote work is they say, how do I lead or manage a team of people I can't see? How do I do performance reviews? How do I know that they're even working because I'm not there? So how do you address that concern for a lot of managers or leaders listening to this podcast that are just not comfortable with that because they grew up and they started in that traditional model of I got to see you to know that you're working, and I got to be able to walk over to you and check?

Greg: Sure. I would say there's probably two things, and I alluded to one earlier. And that's really around the profile of the individual. Make sure you understand what does the profile look like for somebody who can be successful in a remote position at your company. I think you have to start there in bringing the right people into your company. And then the second thing I would say, and again, not just for our agents, but as I mentioned, we have half of our employee workforce. So people who work for LiveOps

corporate who work remotely, you have to really focus on productivity. You have to have clear metrics of what success looks like for your employees, especially remote employees who you can't see every day, who you can't pick up on those things that you would in an office environment by walking around. You have to make sure that the goals are very clear and that either you're measuring for productivity with your remote workforce so you know whether or not they are getting their job done.

Jacob: Are we able to share what some of those goals might be? I mean, you mentioned half of your workforce is remote. I'm assuming that's people in marketing or in HR or in all sorts of different functions. So how do you measure productivity?

Greg: I would say if it's, for example, if we have a team here, our talent acquisition team, for example, that sources all of our agents. And we have goals for that team in terms of what they are expected to deliver, whether on a weekly, monthly or quarterly basis. And that's just one example of where we clearly outline what those goals are and track to those and make sure that they're delivering on the goals that have been set. So I think there's probably many examples across a lot of different departments. In marketing, it could be around demand generation. Are they generating the number of inbound leads that we expect around new customer acquisition? It just gets back to making sure that the goals are very clear and clearly defined. When you're having those conversations in you're meeting and you're determining whether those employees are effective or not, you're really looking at are they accomplishing and achieving the goals that had been set for them.

Jacob: So as long as you're getting your job done, I don't care where you do it, I don't care when you do it. Just do a good job, that's all that matters is pretty much what you're focusing on?

Greg: Correct.

Jacob: Got it. Are there any jobs inside of a corporate environment that you think are not as conducive to a flexible or remote work environment?

Greg: That's a good question. I think maybe some of the GNA functions, I think of functions like human resources or maybe finance, some of the teams that it's important to have I think maybe at the corporate office who are largely responsible for helping put together the distributed workforce model. Those are some functions that in my opinion, some people may differ opinion on this, but I think those are that ... I know I personally prefer to have located at the headquarters.

Jacob: Yeah. And I suppose a lot of it just means that you got to have that conversation. You got to have that conversation with your manager. And the manager needs to have the conversation with the employee and kind of come to some mutual agreement there. You mentioned that you look for a certain profile of individual when you bring them on to LiveOps. But what about employees who maybe were working at a company for a while, who now all of a sudden decide that they want to work remotely or virtually? And

what happens if they don't exactly fit that profile? I mean, do you just say no? Do people get resentful if some can work from home and others can't?

Greg: No, not in all cases. I think there's always exceptions are edge cases that we consider when we look at folks and determine whether they can succeed in a remote environment if they don't have experience previously in a remote environment. It's not all black and white. There's definitely a gray area in there in terms of making decisions around folks who we think can succeed. In terms of folks who, back to your question around the folks who get upset or maybe resign if certain folks have that privilege and they don't. We don't really run into that challenge here just because in the cities we have offices, all of our folks come in to those offices and spend time in the office. And then our remote folks, obviously they're working remotely.

Greg: We do pride flexibility in our office locations. So we do have flexibility where folks are able to, for example, on Fridays work from home even if you're in a city where we have an office. And we do give them flexibility around trying to avoid, if they live far out, they need to avoid the rush hour. We provide flexibility and the ability to come in a little bit later or leave a little bit later just to try and make it a little more accommodating for them. But again, at the end of the day, again, it all comes back to productivity. Are your folks getting the job done? Are they delivering the results that they're expected to deliver? And if so, then having that flexibility and that privilege is certainly something that they appreciate.

Jacob: Makes sense. And for the contractors or even for the employees actually, what are some things that you do to kind of create that team environment? And is it different for employees or for contractors, like team on sites? I saw a YouTube video, for example, I think you were in an aquarium in Georgia. And it looked like you were with some of the contractors there as well. So I mean, how do you create that team environment with your employees and also the contractors?

Greg: Yeah, we go out. And one of the things we've been spending a lot more time doing is visiting with our agents as I mentioned around the country. We do these LiveOps roadshows where we go out and visit with our agents and bringing them together, and give them a chance to meet one another in person. So back to your questions around the value of being together in person. We believe there's a lot of value there. You'd love to see when these agents get together, they've been communicating with one another in, whether it's the chat rooms or the collaboration hubs via email maybe. And when they get together and they meet each other in person for the first time, it's always fun to watch because these people have known each other for a long time, and they finally get the chance to meet in person.

Greg: Our ability to go out there and spend time with the agents and connect them to LiveOps corporate and then to one another, we believe there's a ton of value in doing that to build a strong community. But we have lots of other tools in place. Back to your question around how do we foster that culture, whether it's gamification tools. A lot of competition in the community and LiveOps Nation between different agent groups and different pools of agents who support different programs. So we run lots of promotions and contests where we really have teams compete one another. That helps build that

unity and that strong community because we all know people love competition. And that helps bring people together especially when you're on the same team. So there's a lot of different things we do to help foster that strong community.

Jacob: What about as far as just in general what it's like to work at LiveOps? And I suppose this would probably be more relevant to the full time employees that you have, but I don't know, maybe for contractors as well as far as like perks or benefits or what are the offices like at LiveOps? How have you designed the company?

Greg: Yeah. I would say we really focus on our core values. And our four core values are one, we're willing to figure it out. We're good natured and down to earth. We have entrepreneurial spirit, and we're relentlessly results driven. And those are the values that I believe and a lot of us believe have been in place in the 18 years that we've been in existence. So part of our DNA, who we are as a company, why we were very successful in our early days and why we continue to have success and we're excited about where we're going. It really starts with the values of the company. But I think you'd find that those values are definitely alive here at LiveOps and they exist within all of the employees we have. And some of the things we do here, like I said, we have a flexible schedule even in our office locations.

Greg: We do a lot of the things I think you see up at a lot of the Bay Area companies where we bring lunches in and we have lots of contests. We have a culture committee, TLO team, LiveOps where we get out and do stuff in the community and give people a chance to give back. So there's a lot of things we do to try and make it a very welcoming environment, make it a place that people want to come and want to spend time at. Because we all know your job is where you spend the most amount of your time. And we want to make sure it's a place that people want to enjoy and be part of.

Jacob: Oh, yeah. We definitely spend a lot of time at work. What are you finding as far as, I mean, the Bay Area is a very competitive space. So just in general, when you think about talent and attracting people to LiveOps, what are some of the things that you're finding employees care about most? And how are you competing with like the Googles, the Facebook, the LinkedIns that are surrounded all over the place?

Greg: Yeah, I would say people are looking for, and I think it depends on where individuals are at in their career. But one of the things that we're finding is people are definitely looking for more than just compensation. They want to find a place that has a purpose, that has opportunity for them to grow and take on more and really develop. It's one of the things we focus on is making sure that it's not just, hey, we're not going to be about the highest payer in the market. That's never been our position. It's we want to create an environment. We want to create a total package that people feel is right for them. So whether it's the benefits, whether it's the flexibility in the scheduling, whether it's the opportunity to give back, whether it's the career pathing we have internally as employees. We put all that together and we look at the total package that we provide folks and not just one specific thing.

Greg: We think that allows us to attract great talent to the organization and firm believer. We have a lot of great talent today, we've been adding. We added 40 new people, over 40

new people last year to the company as we continue to grow. And we all know there's a war on talent right now with where unemployment is at. And you've got to make sure that you have a complete offer, a complete package, a competitive offer to attract talent to your company. So again, we look at that total package that we provide folks.

Jacob: What about upskilling, learning, training, whether it's for your full time employees or for your contractors? Because one of the things that we also keep hearing about is skills gap and constantly needing to upgrade ourselves like like apps on our phone. What are you guys doing or thinking about as far as training, upskilling and creating this kind of continuous learning environment?

Greg: Yeah. I think we approach it probably a couple of different ways depending on if you're an employee of LiveOps or you're part of ops nation and you're independent contractor. I would say on the, independent contractor side, couple of things that I think lend to this. One is our learning environment. We call it LiveOps University. And it's a blended learning curriculum or solution where we allow folks to come in and leverage all the learning content and curriculum that we've built. And they can access it 24/7. And lots of different types of trainings, whether it's program specific or it's soft skill training. The agents and members or LiveOps Nation have the ability to access that content and those materials 24/7. Much of it is self-paced, and the agents really appreciate that, especially if they're used to a traditional model where they may need to be in a classroom and it's only offered certain days or times.

Greg: The beauty of LiveOps university and this blended learning solution is that they can tap into all of this curriculum and content whenever they'd like. So if they want to go back and do some upskilling or they want to do some refresher training, they have the ability to back and do that on their time. And that's a big advantage in the model. And I think the other thing just around opportunity in general is we very much look at our business as an open marketplace. So when people join LiveOps Nation and they want to be part and support different customers, they can come in and they can look at all the different opportunities that we have open. And they can apply for the opportunities that they feel best fit their needs.

Greg: And if they're supporting one customer and they're doing a great job, we potentially can provide them more opportunity to go and support other customers. And so again, that flexibility, that open marketplace concept is something that our agents really love because it gives them variety. It gives them opportunity to support different customers, give them a chance to really advance their skills, support different customers, learn new things. And again, just grow that experience that they want to focus on and achieve.

Jacob: You mentioned something briefly, which I feel is pretty interesting. And you mentioned soft skill training, and I'm assuming that this is not just for contractors but also for employees. And I feel like more and more a lot of companies are really putting a lot of emphasis on soft skill training. Can you talk a little bit about why soft skill training? What specific skills are you guys looking at? And is it for contractors and employees?

Greg: Yeah, it's for both. So we have curriculum that is specific for both depending on what their jobs are and where they're focused. It's the tangibles and the soft skills that folks

need to really take their performance to the next level. For us, again, when you focus on soft skills, you're talking about communication, you're talking about problem-solving and what are we doing to help, whether it's our agents get better at that so they're providing a better experience for the end customer or internally for employees, how are we helping them develop those skills so that they can continue to advance their career internally?

Jacob: And are these things like, I don't know, empathy, self-awareness, communication? Are those the types of things that ...

Greg: Exactly. Empathy is a big one in our agent community. So working with our agents to be more empathetic and helping them understand what that means, and how do you do that? And then also internally too, I'd say those same things apply. I think communication probably more internally when you think about employee positions especially with a remote workforce, back to our conversation earlier, back to the communication conversation. You can never spend enough time there making sure that they're strong communication and then just helping employees develop those soft skills.

Jacob: Do you find that the virtual employees, do they ever get lonely? Do they ever want to be surrounded by people? Because that's another thing. I've been working for myself for like 13 years now. And I personally don't like being around other people all the time, but some people want that kind of environment, feeling like they're around others. So how do you deal with that? I mean, do you find that any of your employees are just kind of like, "I wish I had a team around me, I wish I was around other people"?

Greg: Absolutely. So there's a lot we do to focus in that area because I agree with you. Even though that you'll have folks who love the remote environment and love the aspects of working remotely and on their own, everybody at some point to varying degrees wants that human interaction. And so we look for opportunities to provide that. One thing we do here or a few things we do here, we do an event once a year where we bring our entire company out to Arizona. And so we give people a chance to spend time together in person for a few days. Because again, we do value that ability to be together in person. We bring a staff out to our headquarters on a regular basis. We have some folks who come out on a quarterly basis. When we're out visiting our agents and road shows, we try and invite our employees in those areas to come out to the event so that we have a chance to spend time with our employees who we don't get to see every day.

Greg: So definitely important that we spend time there. We have a lot of folks in our HR department who do regular reach outs to try and connect with folks and see how they're doing and make sure that we're spending time with them. We do pay attention to that, very aware of the need to make sure we're spending time with the remote workforce.

Jacob: Okay. So you guys have actual teams that help make sure that the kind of loneliness because it's a real thing. I mean anybody that's worked remotely, anybody that works from home has a flexible work environment will definitely understand and relate to the fact that sometimes that kind of team aspect can not necessarily feel as strong as it is when you're physically around others. So I love that you have those different programs

and things in place. And I suppose this can be very applicable, like I said, whether it's you're a full time employee at a traditional, more organization like IBM or Coca Cola versus a company like LiveOps. I think a lot of people can still apply some of these concepts and ideas in there as well.

Jacob: What do you say to managers, to leaders because I get this question a lot. I don't know if people ask you this. But they say, you know what, our executive team just doesn't believe in flexible or remote or virtual work. How do we convince them, what can we say to them? They still believe that everyone needs to show up in the office, how do you change that mindset, that culture?

Greg: And I know where the nervousness comes from in talking with different executives who have posed those questions.

Jacob: So you've heard this as well?

Greg: Yeah, definitely. The biggest thing for folks is how do I measure productivity? And it's up back to a comment you had made earlier around people feel if you don't see the individuals, then they're not working. And again, you've got to change the mindset to measure productivity. It's hard because to your point, there's a lot of executives who have grown up in that office environment and they believe that's the only way to drive results. And you have to be willing to step out there and say it's okay that I don't see my employees. And I'm going to change the way that I work with them, and I'm going to make it all about productivity and make sure that I'm going to determine their level of effectiveness and success by measuring their productivity.

Greg: And we're going to clearly define what that looks like. That's what I would recommend as a first step if you're going to test out a remote workforce or a few positions in a remote environment. Step one is let's understand what does success look like in that position. And then make sure that you've clearly articulated that to the folks that you're going to place in a remote environment. And that's how you're going to measure success. Because I think that's probably the biggest angst that executives get is they struggle with how to measure success with remote remote employees if they can't see them.

Jacob: Yeah, that's a huge issue. And do managers need a little bit of training on this as well?

Greg: Absolutely.

Jacob: I'm trying to imagine, for example, just talking to a typical conservative manager, has been in the workforce for 20, 30 years. Just grew up in that time before the internet, before all this stuff where everybody was showing up to the office. And now all of a sudden, you're saying, "Hey, you know what, you might not see your team for several weeks." How do you train that manager? What skills does that manager need to have to get comfortable with that?

Greg: Yes. Do they understand what the rules of engagement need to be in a remote environment? So how are you working with your remote folks? Simple things like, do you have a one-on-one? Are you using a tool like Zoom or GoToMeeting? Are you doing video with them when you talk to them? So that again, you try to create that connection and he try to get a sense of how things are going. Because it's not just all about delivering results, you have to get a sense of how is your employee doing. Are they struggling? And it's a lot of those things that you pick up on an office that might be harder to pick up on in a remote environment. So have you clearly laid out what are the rules of engagement for remote employees so that you're effectively working with them and communicating with them and using tools to help help do that?

Greg: And again, I would start there with folks who are getting into the remote management side. Making sure that you've clearly laid out what that needs to look like with your remote employees and you're using different tools and processes to help manage them effectively. And you got to start there, and it's going to be a little uncomfortable in the beginning, especially if you're new to it. I remember when i joined LiveOps, I was new to the remote management piece. And it takes time, it takes time to be in a meeting where you can't see everybody sitting across the table and everybody's on a phone call. There's a level of discomfort until you get used to it. But I don't know that I would ever go back.

Greg: I think the advantages of how we're able to access talent around the country that otherwise you wouldn't have access to if we didn't have a remote workforce, whether that's our employee model or whether that's our employee, I'm sorry, our LiveOps Nation, our independent contractors. The advantages of tapping into a remote workforce and the talent that is out there far outweighs any challenges that you might have in managing them. Again, it comes back to the profile. But our ability to tap talent around the country wherever it is is one of our biggest advantages and parts of our success.

Jacob: And for this manager, it seems like a new set of skills are also required. You need to be a little bit tech savvy, you need to know how to use Zoom or Skype or GoToMeeting, whatever that might be. It seems like you need to be especially fluent in these types of soft skills, checking in on your employees, find out how they're doing instead of just kind of telling everybody what to do. And it seems like you need to be much more focused on that coaching, that mentoring aspect. Kind of like treating your employees more as individuals than just as workers. Like you need to know a little bit about your employees and their lives and how they're doing as a human being.

Greg: Yeah. You need to spend more time in that area. You need to be more conscious about asking those types of questions because in an office environment, that type of stuff typically comes up naturally in conversation as you get to know people. In a remote environment, there's a tendency to go right to the work stuff. And to your point, you have to spend time getting to know your folks and understanding how they think and how they tick and operate so that as you're working with them in a remote environment, you can really gauge and pick up on some of those things that you would pick up on in an office environment. But that might be challenging in a remote environment. So you definitely need to spend time there and be very conscious of that.

One of the other tools we use when you talk about effectiveness in a remote environment is we use tools like Slack.

Greg: And getting out there and allowing our employees to communicate with one another gives me a chance to communicate across the company and share updates via tools like that. So again, it's just making sure that you've got the tools and technologies in place that allow you to share information across the employee base or the agent base and that you're being very aware and conscious of that, that it needs to happen. And you almost probably need to really focus on over communication with a remote workforce because you can't assume that they know what's going on. And even if you do, you really got to focus on making sure that that information is being shared out there consistently and that it's being shared often.

Jacob: One of the things we actually didn't touch on was this idea of the enterprise gig economy. And you mentioned earlier some stats on the gig economy. Are you finding that more companies around the world are embracing this, they're working more with gig workers on that kind of enterprise level? Because sometimes I talk to companies and they actually have far more gig workers than full time employees, but nobody talks about it. Is there a stigma in having a lot of gig workers? I can't figure out why we're not seeing more stories about this.

Greg: Yeah. One, we are seeing more and more companies tapping into this and wanting to leverage it. We don't get into a conversation. So when we're out meeting with prospects and enterprise companies and we're understanding what their challenges are, it's consistent. It's I can't use the traditional. In our industry, they can't use the traditional call center model anymore to solve their problems. They can't find the talent. They're struggling even to find people now who want to come into a call center. And so when they look at a model like ours and our ability to tap talent with a level of experience that they have, in whether it's education or experience in corporate America and how they can tap into that talent to provide a better experience to their end customers, the story resonates. And it's a pretty easy conversation to have.

Greg: But back to your point around, is there a stigma? It's interesting you read the articles out there and you read the folks who have challenges or concerns about the gig economy because, whether it's a lack of benefits or whether it's a lack of having access to the same things that an employee would have. But I can guarantee you if you talk to our agents, the flexibility and the opportunity that we provide individuals far outweighs any ... Not having the same treatment as an employee. They actually prefer the independent contractor model in our model because of the flexibility we provide them. And they understand that's a trade off you make to have that level of flexibility in their life and the ability to work around their life.

Greg: And it's not a concern. I feel like you hear that from a certain segment, but it's not a concern you hear from the workers because they see the value in the type of model that LiveOps provides and the opportunities that LiveOps provides. Especially if you look at folks who are in a rural area or maybe have have disabilities or a stay at home mom, or folks who just can't go into a regular eight to five office job. What we're able to provide

folks far outweighs any concerns they have around not having access to the same benefits as an employee.

Jacob: I mean, I think you mentioned, there are pros and cons to everything. So there's just a value in those. Well, we just have a couple of minutes left. I thought maybe for the last couple of minutes, it would be great to get your advice on a couple of things. So first would be, for managers or for leaders inside of companies who are thinking about allowing their employees to work remotely, to have that flexible environment, to kind of loosen things up a little bit, but they're nervous. What advice would you give them? Where can they start, and how can they make sure that if they implement this kind of a flexible or a virtual environment, it'll be successful?

Greg: Yeah. It's using the analogy of crawl, walk, run. So start small. And maybe it's taking your existing workforce who's in an office environment and maybe it's allowing them to work from home one day or giving them some flexibility in their schedule. But clearly setting expectations around how that works. But like anything, I would recommend they start small, test out some things before they decide to jump into the deep end and maybe start hiring people in a remote environment. And then I think the biggest thing too is this clearly defining what are your expectations or what are you looking to accomplish by doing this. And making sure that everybody is in agreement on that in that it's been clearly communicated out.

Greg: But again, start small, test out some different things, maybe giving your folks a little more flexibility or the ability to work from home maybe a day, a week. And then if things are going well and you're seeing the benefits, then start moving to maybe looking at hiring folks remotely. But again, what are you trying to accomplish by providing this flexibility?

Jacob: And we mentioned some of the other things as well, having the right tools in place, the guidelines, the expectations. As a manager, you should be training yourself on some new skills that you might need, being tech savvy. You can't have a virtual team that's trying to get in touch with you if you don't know how to use Zoom or GoToMeeting, that'll just be a nightmare. You definitely don't want that to happen. Those are all great places to start. What about if you are an employee at a company. You're not in a management and leadership role, but you want to bring up this conversation of flexible work. So let's say for example, you were an employee at LiveOps and the CEO of LiveOps was like, didn't believe in flexible work and you were an employee there and you wanted to kind of bring this up with your manager or your leader. As an employee, how would you introduce this conversation? How would you convince your manager, what would you do?

Greg: Well, I would recommend doing some research and study around why is remote work working out there? So what are the benefits that some companies are seeing from having a virtual workforce? And look at some of the market data on why this is a advantageous for companies. I think having a conversation that is not employee specific, but why it's a benefit for companies, I think is a great way to approach your manager or executives at a company. Because from an executive position, that's how it's being viewed is what benefit does this provide my company by providing options or allowing

folks to work remotely. And I think you've got to look at it through the lens of an executive and have that type of conversation versus looking at it and saying, "Well, what's in it for me?" It's more what's in it for the company? Why is this going to be a benefit or why is this going to pay off for the company if we start adopting some level of remote working within the company?

Jacob: And by the way, if you are a remote employee, it also puts a lot more accountability and responsibility on you. I think you mentioned this earlier, it isn't you just get to hang out and chill out at home and watching Netflix, relax during the day. It's also a lot more accountability and a lot more responsibility on you because you no longer have somebody that's just checking in on you all the time. If you want that flexible work environment, you also need to kind of step up as well and make sure that you're still doing great quality work. You're still in touch with your leaders in the company. So in a way, at least at the beginning, you might need to work a little bit harder, put a little bit more effort to make sure that this is working out.

Greg: Absolutely. And we actually see that. That's a great point. We actually see that with employees who are new to the company or new to remote working. They in a lot of cases will overcompensate in that area to make sure that their manager sees that they're working, they're doing a good job and they're getting the results that are expected of them. So there are many people, and we see this every day who want to make sure that their manager sees that they are getting work done and making sure that the manager is in agreement that they are productive and they are a meeting and the results. So it's a great point.

Jacob: All right, last a few kind of fun rapid fire questions for you. And by the way, I forgot to mention, you guys recently got an award, FlexJobs top 100 companies to watch for remote jobs in 2019. You guys were number four on that list, right?

Greg: Yes, and we've been on that list now for a fourth year in a row. We've been in the top five. We were actually ranked number one a few years ago. And it's all about the number of opportunities that we provide to the American workforce. So it's an award, it's recognition that we're extremely proud of in being a leader in the work at home space.

Jacob: One more quick question before I jump to the rapid fire. It's specifically an American workforce, which I think a lot of people would appreciate being in the United States. Why did you decide to not outsource this, or are you thinking of bringing international employees for this as well?

Greg: We've thought about international expansion, it's something we talk about quite a bit given the opportunity in other countries. But we feel there's such an opportunity or still a very large opportunity in the United States and in North America in general. Our focus is here, we want to focus on providing Americans the opportunity to work around their life and really focusing on different segments within the workforce. As I mentioned, whether it's rural areas or people with disabilities, or vets, stay at home moms, caregivers and spouses of military that. There's just such a massive opportunity to serve

those markets that we feel that to our focus needs to stay there and stay in the uS right now.

Jacob: Got it. Okay. So onto the rapid fire questions. First one for you, what has been your greatest business failure?

Greg: Greatest business failure, that's a great question. Well, we tested, from a technology standpoint and in looking at ways to help our customers. So we talked a little bit about the infomercial business and how we were going in that area. And that industry has changed significantly. That used to be our largest business segment, the change in how consumers buy, so they no longer pick up a phone to call 800 numbers. They go on their tablets or their phones or they order online. And we were trying to figure out how to help solve in that space and find different solutions to serve our customers. So we tried testing text order with our customers years ago. This was probably back around 2012, 2013. Invested a lot into that with the strategy and resources, and it failed for a lot of reasons. Whether it was customer adoption, whether it was how we went about it. But we learned a lot from it, and that's what matters.

Jacob: Yeah. I like that story. Next one, what has been your most embarrassing moment?

Greg: Most embarrassing moment. Let's come back to that one, let me think about that one for a second.

Jacob: What are you most proud of?

Greg: Most proud of the culture that we've built here at LiveOps. For me, first and foremost, that's what's most important is the type of culture we're building, a place that people want to be, they feel supported and they feel it's a place they can flourish and grow and really develop. So that's definitely what I'm proud of most.

Jacob: What was the hardest business decision you've ever had to make?

Greg: Hardest business decision. Man, you're testing me today.

Jacob: Or just a really hard business decision that you had to make?

Greg: I think the hardest decisions, and I'll be a little bit more general in this. But the hardest decisions are personnel decisions, I think. A lot of times, leaders get to their positions because of their ability to build relationships and their ability to connect with folks. And we all know leaders need to make tough decisions around people. And we've gone through a lot of change at this company, and we've reorganized our company to really set us up for enterprise growth. And as a result of that, we've had to make a lot of tough decisions around people and enrolls. And that's always the hardest thing to go through. So we lose or you lose a lot of good people because of the changes you have to make that are are focused on the making sure the company set up for success.

Jacob: Okay. What is your favorite business or non-business book?

Greg: Favorite business book would have to be, man, that's a long list.

Jacob: Or one that you recommend frequently.

Greg: I would say Start with Why, Simon Sinek.

Jacob: Okay, Start with-

Greg: Yeah, all about purpose.

Jacob: Okay, that's a good one. Who has been the best mentor that you've had, if you've had any?

Greg: Yeah. Quite a few folks that I tap into. I would say, it's interesting, there's a gentleman lately that I've met in the last couple of years locally here. A guy named Conrad Prusak who is part of an organization called Vistage that I've enjoyed getting to know over the last couple of years. And I look forward to working with him more especially as I'm new to the CEO role for the last couple of years. You can never have enough advice, and good advice. And he's been somebody that I cherish that relationship.

Jacob: Very cool. Yeah. I mean, a lot of CEOs and executives have coaches and mentors and people that they work with. A lot of people don't realize it, they think of the CEO like, "Oh, man, that person knows everything." But the CEOs actually do get a lot of help.

Greg: Absolutely. Yeah. Any CEO that thinks they know it all, they're probably not going to be a CEO for long. So you can never have enough help.

Jacob: And last question for you, if you were doing a different career, what do you think you would ended up doing?

Greg: Well, I started out, so my career actually started in the sports marketing business and industry. And it was something I wanted to do early in my career and spent a lot of time there. And then decided I wanted to get out and go do something completely different. I would say if I wasn't in the crowd sourcing, in the call center space today, I'd probably still be in the sports and entertainment industry.

Jacob: Not a bad place to be by the way. Very cool. Well, where can people go to learn more about you or the company? Anything that you want to mention for people to check out, please feel free to do so.

Greg: Yeah. I would encourage folks, come check us out online at liveops.com. If you're interested in the opportunities we have within LiveOps Nation, you can go to liveops.com and click on become an agent. And our join.liveops.com website is for folks who are interested in the gig economy work, the 1099 work that we offer. So I would encourage folks to start there and check us out. For me, you can connect with me on LinkedIn, would love to connect with folks and help them understand how they can work with us in different capacities. We're a growing organization, we're a learning

organization. And back to the comment earlier, just around you can never connect with enough good folks. Whether it's helping them or vice versa, it's always good to connect. So I'd encourage people to find me on LinkedIn.

Jacob: Very cool. Well, Greg, thank you for taking time out of your day to speak with me.

Greg: Yeah, my pleasure. Thank you Jacob.

Jacob: And thanks everyone for tuning in. My guest again has been Greg Hanover, CEO of LiveOps, and I will see all of you next week.