

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 Kenny McDonald, who is the president and Chief Economic Officer of Columbus 2020. Kenny, thank you for joining me.

Kenny: Thank you for having us, it was great to be in this conversation.

Jacob: Oh yeah, I mean, I think people are going to learn a lot from some of the cool stuff that you guys are working on. But before we jump in to Columbus 2020 and what that is, why don't you give us a little bit of background information about you and how did you get involved with this initiative?

Kenny: Well, this is my 25th year of working professionally in the field of economic development. So I am an economic developer, I admit it and proudly and I've worked in various communities around the country, Savannah, Georgia, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Charlotte, North Carolina and now here in the Columbus, Ohio market and work on the behalf of urban areas, metro areas in all cases and have seen over a period of two decades how our profession has changed. And that a workforce and the workplace, how that's changed dramatically.

Kenny: And in fact, how it's made a huge difference in how people make location decisions. And so my role here at Columbus 2020 is to be president and chief economic officer of a team that is helping our local companies grow as well as reaching out to great companies around the world including overseas, talking to them about where they're going to put their next locations and where they're going to hire their people.

Jacob: My mother-in-law lives in Savannah, Georgia. So it's small-

Kenny: Super place.

Jacob: Yeah, it's a wonderful place and I had the opportunity to visit there and it's beautiful. All right, so let's talk a little bit about Columbus 2020. So maybe can you start with a high level overview around what it is and then maybe we can talk about some of the specific programs that you guys have going on.

Kenny: Sure. So first and foremost, it's an organization focused on the Columbus, Ohio Metro area. So multiple counties, 11 counties around the Columbus market that make up our

metropolitan economy. And the charge of that is really what came out of what's called Columbus 2020 regional growth strategy. And the question that we were trying to answer is, could we have the best decade of growth in the metro areas history. And that'd being measured by a net new job growth, capital investment from economic base projects, projects that are bringing in, companies that are expanding and new companies that are coming into the market, bringing new money into our market, for us to grow the economy.

Kenny: And the third, to raise per capita incomes by as much as 30% over the course of the decade. And I'm proud to say that we started this and just after 2010 coming out of the recession and the Columbus market. And in fact we've exceeded all of those goals a few years early and we're now focused on defining how we're going to adjust our services and set new goals for our economy here and adjust our services to meet it. And the changing workplace and workforce is at the top of that list.

Jacob: Why did this initiative even happen? And not only why did it happen for you, but why did it not happen in more parts of the United States? Or why isn't it happening in more parts of the world?

Kenny: Well, in some ways it is. So we and myself personally am a big believer in the power of cities and as we all know, there's sort of mass urbanization around the world. We're moving from what was 200 really important countries to 600 really important urban areas around the world and Columbus, Ohio was one of those. And we think about the power of how cities are small enough to band together and get things done, and big enough to have scale and be big trading partners with each other.

Kenny: What got Columbus motivated was what got a lot of places, at least in the United States, motivated and I would argue maybe lots of places around the world, which is the global recession in '07 and '08. And the devastation that that sort of wreak havoc across the housing markets, financial markets and things like that cause business and civic leaders, wherever they sat to say how are we going to get ourselves out of this whole.

Kenny: Columbus did something just slightly over that. Certainly they said, you know, how do we actually recover from some something like the great recession, but they ask, maybe a better question, which is recovering is not good enough. How do we use this as a catalyst? Did you better than we've ever done before? We're very fortunate to have very diverse economy, it is a capital city, so a major government sector who, a giant university, one the largest in the world with the Ohio State University and a cadre of independent colleges around.

Kenny: So a little bit recession proof from those industries, but we're a big retail sector, a big automotive sector. And I think we definitely felt the recession here. And that caused those leaders to come together with public sector leaders by the way, and say, let's try to answer this question. What would have to be true? What platform would we have to create so that we could really get out and compete and grow our economy and make it healthier? Actually raise incomes across the board higher than they've ever been before.

Kenny: And that was the catalyst of the beginning of the 2020 regional growth strategy.

Jacob: You mentioned that now a big focus for you is workforce of the future. So when you say workforce in the future, what are some of the things that you're paying attention to? I mean, how is the workforce different? What are some of the trends that you guys are focusing on?

Kenny: Well, the Columbus market is really a super laboratory for that question, because we have so many different types of industries, we're a big Honda of America Manufacturing has their headquarters here, so this is where all Acuras are made and many of the Honda's and much of the R&D that Honda does. So big automotive sector and supply chain around that. In that arena, that's changing very rapidly. Honda announced over the next 10 years there'll be almost entirely making electric cars in our market.

Kenny: They've made Honda Accords and lots of Acura is here for, you know, since the early 1980s. So that is going to require a different workforce that already does. We're a huge finance and insurance center. So JP Morgan Chase is our largest private sector employer. JP Morgan Chase has their biggest technology team in the country here. They have a trading floor here that over 20,000 employees and our market nationwide insurance and a cadre of other major insurance companies are here headquartered here and had thousands of people here.

Kenny: We see mass automation in many of the functions and finance and insurance, what does that going to mean to our future. And then we're kind of oddly, many people would not know this, but we were one of the largest retail and retail technology centers in the country with much of what was the mall in the 1990s and 2000s, Victoria's Secret, express Lane Bryant, DSW shoes, Abercrombie & Fitch are all headquartered here. And so the big headquarters here and then there's a cadre of great suppliers and people in their value chain, including in a store designers and people like that here that industry is changing maybe more than almost any other in terms of built environment, where people are going to work in retail.

Kenny: And so we interface with the changes in the workforce and in the workplace every day, all those different ways. And we're asking ourselves what will be automated, what jobs exist now and have existed for decades that maybe in the next five or 10 years are no longer going to be a way for people to earn income, how are they going to do that? How are we going to create that tax base out of that in the future? So we consider ourselves a laboratory and are leaning into all of those changes.

Jacob: What jobs, and I don't know if you guys have studied this already, have data on this. But from your perspective, what are the jobs that you think are going to disappear and what are the jobs that you guys are planning for, for the future, the new jobs that you're trying to create?

Kenny: Well, it starts with the fundamental belief and a restatement of this in every room that we're in, every community room, every city council we meet with that we believe fundamentally every job will change in the next five to 10 years. So we do believe

maybe it was closer to five, then 10, by the way, that literally every job that exists today is going to change in some fundamental way. And whether that's a small business or that's at our biggest employers.

Kenny: We've studied automation and there's, we have a workforce in our region. The region itself is a little over two million people and our workforce is a little bit over one million people. We've studied that and best we can determine maybe 200 to 220,000 of those jobs are under serious risk of going away.

Kenny: Now, we don't think that's a threat as much as an opportunity, and I'm not being overly optimistic when I say that I don't think because we already see that job's changing. Ohio, Michigan, there'll part of the country has so many manufacturing jobs. We've already seen this, we've seen what was labor intensive, I don't know, kind of unskilled positions become highly skilled, highly automated, computer-oriented. And quite frankly, most of the jobs that changed in that industry has gotten better and better over time, if there's less of them.

Kenny: We see more customer support at a higher level being required as we connect our IOT devices to everything in our house, our Alexa to our toaster, to our refrigerator. All the things that didn't need customer support at a fairly high level, at a sophisticated level now require that. So we think there's going to be thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of jobs. It was actually created in some of those sectors that don't exist today. We're biggie common, we're a big e-comm logistics center. So the number one job in America is truck drivers and as a major logistic center, obviously trucks aren't going away overnight.

Kenny: But over time they will and there'll be automated, we're testing some of that on some autonomous corridors that we're building in our region so that we can be a leader and not a laggard in those spaces.

Jacob: It's funny, as soon as you mentioned Alexa, my little device popped up, it was getting ready for its voice command. All right, so you mentioned that are like 200,000 plus jobs that you guys are looking at are going to go away. What sort of jobs do you think you're going to disappear? Are they specific jobs in specific industries? Like where is the, I guess the biggest opportunity is you put it.

Kenny: Let me answer that in a maybe a bit of a different way. I'll give you an example of what one company has recently done, and I'll name the company. But there was a major company that we had that met with their IT staff, and they kind of had a town hall meeting of their associates that work in the field across the board. And they said, "So I want us to think about this in a different way, everything that we don't like about our jobs the repeatable kind of grudging and things that you have to do on a consistent basis and do over time, but can actually be better predictable. Let's go to work right now in earnest automating those things.

Kenny: So that we can start focusing on higher value things. So in that case, and this will have to play out over time, but I think if people think about automation and machine learning

and AI and stuff that way, the lean into your changing the things that are repeatable and kind of, you know, if you will "dumb activities" and it will start to allow humans to actually start working on those things that do require a complex thought and social awareness and things like that and our higher value.

Kenny: And I don't think that company would lose a single person in that, they may even actually have to hire people but they would actually make the jobs a little bit better, maybe even more rewarding as people are doing higher value work. That won't be the case in everything. Some things will certainly be job loss and in some fields, but that's a really interesting way to look at it.

Jacob: Yeah. One of the things I always say is that we created jobs that are perfect for robots and for automation, but we just didn't have them decades ago. So we used humans and now finally we have the technology that's ready to take over the jobs that we designed for technology to begin with.

Kenny: Yes.

Jacob: And I also hear several stories from the executives that I interviewed, like Accenture was one of them, where they automated 17,000 jobs, but they didn't lose a single employee and they automated all the jobs that were in finance for a number crunchers, what we would call in a nice way. And then the upskilled all of these employees and basically taught them to be strategic advisors to their clients instead of simply just crunching numbers.

Kenny: But then also has ancillary impacts. So as we think about that playing out, then the workplace starts to change. So we do feel, you know, also in the business of helping people identify where they're going to locate, what building or what kind of site or what kind of campus they're going to build in our market.

Kenny: And to me, a fascinating element of this is as those things change and you need, you're going to allow humans to interact with each other and you require them to convene in different ways, how they build their offices and stuff changes pretty radically too. And that everything for the manufacturing floor, it can be aligned differently when it's highly automated, to what used to be a cubicle farm a decade ago, you're not going to see that. But in very rare instances you were going to see offices be places where people gather, convene, meet, but they're not necessarily sitting in a singular space over a long period of time, sitting down and not interacting with other humans.

Kenny: So I would offer that that might be more rewarding and healthier for everybody as well.

Jacob: Yeah, for sure. But if you go back to this idea of jobs, what do you think this, because obviously a lot of people who are in those industries, whether it's manufacturing or whether it is a truck driving, a lot of those people are very worried and concerned and even a lot of knowledge workers too, that are typically doing those types of routine jobs.

Jacob: So I'm really curious who's responsible for the retraining and the upskilling? Because we hear a lot of debate back and forth, we hear a lot about like the skills gap, jobs of the future, how do we solve the problem?

Kenny: So, I think that it actually starts with kind of a combination of the community and the major employers, getting together to have honest conversation about this. And that may sound easier and socially more acceptable than it may seem. Let me give you an example. If I'm an employer and I'm saying, "Wow, now my work is changing pretty radically, I think those are going to have a big impact on my employment base."

Kenny: The currency between a major employer and its community oftentimes is how many jobs they create, how many working full time people they have that are creating the tax base for a community. And so the interaction with mayor and everything is built on that currency. And I think that it's time for really honest conversation and say, "This is the future of how our work is going to be. This is what is required." We have to make some hard decisions about it, but we also think there's big opportunity here.

Kenny: Here's what we're willing to do in order to reskill and upskill our people so that instead of just firing everybody and hiring a new set of employees that can work at different function in a different way, how do we take talented human beings and actually upskill and reskill them? It requires employers make the commitment like they always do. I mean, I would say our clients companies that we work with here, the ones that we recruit into the market, I'm constantly fascinated about how much they care about their people and how they're trying to do this.

Kenny: But they also need to have honest conversations with the traditional education and workforce delivery system, because there needs to be radical change in that field as well. And we start to see it in our market, we have great institutions like Columbus State here who are working with employers like Honda saying, "How do we actually get into the high schools and start to explain what that career and that job looks like to a middle schooler or somebody in 9th or 10th grade and what that job in that career could look like?" It's going to be highly automated, but perhaps I'm nearly 50 years old.

Kenny: So when I was in high school, a manufacturing job, the perception of that was much different than it should be today although, that perception hasn't changed in many cases. That kind of honest, open conversation with parents and kids, and academic partners is beginning to happen, but it needs to go to a whole another level. If we're going to get across this chasm with us, with at least amount of pain as possible.

Jacob: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. Well, let's talk a little bit now about Columbus 2020, because you guys have a lot of initiatives, there were a part of this. So why don't we start with, I think, there are like four or five different things that I at least saw on the email. But let's start with one aspect of Columbus 2020 and jump into one of the programs that you think are unique or special.

Kenny: Okay. Well, I think one of the special things we do and this was actually done across the country by economic development organizations, we would like to think that we do it

pretty well and whether we call it a program or we just call it our standard operating procedure is, we're kind of a conduit and Alaysia on between the government sector, the academic sector and the employers themselves.

Kenny: And as they consider a location to expand, they had people, they had capital, had equipment. It's a big strategic decision whether you are running a coffee shop or a major Fortune 500 company looking for a major tech campus. Many of the decisions are the same. Where am I going to find the talent? Can I get that talent at the right cost? And does it give me the ultimate access to achieve my business objectives?

Kenny: And we're a guide in that process and we are doing really hundreds of things for those people looking throughout the process, including, and I'll drill down on this because this is the topic with the evaluation and the implementation of hiring and retaining a quality workforce. We first, and this is again something that we do on behalf of companies at no cost, but we're giving them comparative information. So they're making a good decision about can they be successful in a given market? Can they get access to people with the relative skills that they may need in that market?

Kenny: And that goes pretty deep and we use some fairly sophisticated tools that are helping them evaluate whether they can actually hire enough people and that they could continue to grow over a period of years. Two, it were on then walking them through the process and introducing them to other employers so that they understand the societal norms, whether that's shift work in a manufacturer's case or it's how do you actually find quality tech employees in our market? What mediums, what channels do you need to reach out to within our market? And where are those people living and how are they commuting to work?

Kenny: Whether that be on a bird scooter or the autonomous vehicle or they're commuting from a traditional suburb. And then as we began to recruit, there are teams in place that are basically holding the hand of the employer, helping them be successful in market, all the way through to success in hiring the initial workforce. And then just ongoing maintenance and aftercare with that client. That is the biggest "program" that we offer, that we are for those companies that are expanding. We are going to do all of those things on a repeated basis and it is all we do every day, so we were experts added.

Kenny: Most companies are only siding an office every four or five years. They're not doing it all the time, so they're not experts and we can really help them with that.

Jacob: So essentially you're like this strategic future of work advisors to the companies that are there.

Kenny: Right, and that infrastructure exists all over the country, the US is a very interesting place from an economic development standpoint that states and cities are, is this network of professionals that work. And I think a lot of times in the newspapers that's pitted as a giant competition, but it really is as a built-in network of professionals to help companies be successful and hire people and grow their companies with good,

straightforward, local advice. And connections to public and private resources in those markets that exists all over the country.

Kenny: A lot of times in countries around the world that's only done on a national basis and it's not done at a local level like it is in US. And so I always think that's a great strength of the country.

Jacob: Yeah, for sure. Well I read that one of the things that you guys had, which I thought was pretty cool. You have this smart city design challenge, I believe it was for middle schoolers.

Kenny: Yeah, the Columbus market was fortunately the winner of the major grant from the US Department of Transportation over two years ago now that was initiated by the Obama Administration to, not to give a gold star to the smart city, somebody who was already implementing everything. But to give it to a community with a vision around the future of mobility and really access for people in those markets to access education and healthcare and a workplace.

Kenny: And the Columbus pitch was largely built around how do we actually use mobility, advanced mobility to enhance the quality of life and what we call our opportunity neighborhoods in the city of Columbus. And those are challenged neighborhoods where unfortunately there's less economic opportunity and even in some cases less life expectancy and infant mortality rates are higher and things like that.

Kenny: How do we actually use, how do we not only change the way that we're approaching transportation and moving people around our community, but be very intentional about actually how do we get single mothers in those opportunity neighborhoods to their prenatal care visits to the hospitals. So that we're using mobility as an advantage, not a disadvantage.

Kenny: And we're taking off the table the inability by some to access quality, safe transportation to and from those visits and things like that. In doing that, we back into the education system to try to foster innovation and growth. The most creative people in the world are children, and they've come up with some super ideas through entities like our stem schools that are met what's called the metro school here in our market.

Jacob: Which is another, that's actually something else I want to ask you about too, but we can jump to that after you finished that stuff.

Kenny: Well, this design challenge is actually, it's really just finding ways to find practical solutions by asking people that actually live in those neighborhoods and that are inside the education system. We can read reports and prescribe lots of technologies that we think solve problems. But it's only when you actually get into the neighborhoods and get on the ground, in schools and things like that that you actually discover the challenges with kids getting to and from school or mothers getting to and from a prenatal care visit that you start to get really practical, real world solutions.

Kenny: And Columbus's practicing that in maybe hundreds of ways now across the community. And we think over time those are, we want to be a leader in that field and we actually want to share what we're learning, both the successes and failures with other metro areas around the country and around the world.

Jacob: Can you talk a little bit about the, what I read was the Metro Early College Middle and High School, which I believe was open to any student?

Kenny: It is, it's a public school and it offers say advanced stem education, and it was built with couple of greatest institutions here in the Columbus market. Battelle is the US's largest private research organization that runs many of the national labs, a creator of the xerox machine and all these things. But they have a great unit called Battelle For Kids and they along with others like the past foundation education foundation in our market created something called the metro school.

Kenny: And in a partnership with the Ohio state, it actually sits on the western campus of Ohio state, this is campus of this public school and it is a, just to an advanced stem learning environment experimental learning environment in stem that is taking kids through the program and helping them master skills. Many of which are getting at least a year done of college education as they work through taking classes at Ohio state when they're juniors and seniors in high school.

Kenny: And vastly reducing the cost of a college education and the process of getting a great secondary education.

Jacob: I love that you guys have a very strong focus it seems like on stem there. Yeah, I'm sorry, go ahead.

Kenny: Well, it's a very, I mean we are the home to Ohio State University, a major research university with over billion of dollars of R&D going on every year. We have 15 fortune 1000 companies that are highly focused on technology because of those things. We have a slightly younger, slightly more educated populous than most metro areas. So there's a propensity unit kind of a push from that from the market itself. And then we'd just really leaned in, Columbus has never really been a known as traditionally a major manufacturing center like other parts of the Midwest. Although we do have manufacturing like Honda and everything, those came relatively in the modern era here or last 30 or 40 years.

Kenny: So a lot of what we have is fairly advanced and the need for those skills, particularly in technology skills, whether that's devising a smart app for a JP Morgan Chase or it's working to develop the next accurate super car, there's ample opportunity to apply the skills right here at home and they see some of the world's best employers doing that right on their doorstep.

Jacob: So you are teaching students all of these emerging skills, which I think is pretty unique. I mean, I even read that you guys have like one of the first, I don't know if it was a major or program, but specifically focused on e-sports, which I'm not aware of any other

educational institution that has anything around e-sports. But I mean it really seems like you guys are trying to understand kind of like what some of these future areas are and actually designing programs around them, which is I think fascinating.

Kenny: Well, it starts with having a committed private sector and the corporate community that's focused on how do we grow our market. And a hundred years ago that may have been the major employers saying, "I want to educate everybody so that they work for me, or I want to develop a pipeline so I can hire everybody." It's a little different than that now, certainly employers want pipelines of talented people at their doorstep, whether they're coming out of our high schools or they're coming straight from our colleges and universities that we have in the market.

Kenny: But they also just want a more vibrant economy and place surrounding them. So we're blessed to have unbelievable engagement from major CEOs like Les Wexner and Steve Rasmussen from nationwide. And Mr. Kaufman at cardinal health and stuff who were saying, "I want to recruit the best people in the world." And undoubtedly you have to recruit not just from our local market, but we need people from Shenzhen and we need people from Istanbul and we need people from London that come to our market and say, "Not only am I see opportunity here for me to establish a career and scale it, but I actually see an opportunity for my children to go to school here in a very advanced environment that will lead them to a career," and we think that's a selling point for the market in the long term.

Jacob: What are you seeing on the business side? I mean, I'm sure you're probably seeing quite a lot of things, but specifically around like skills and talent and jobs, are you seeing a skills gap, for example, in certain areas? Are you seeing demands in certain areas and other things dropping off?

Kenny: Well, as an economic developer in the US, it is an interesting time. So there's a number of markets, Columbus happens to be one of them, but there are number of markets where the labor market's really tight and it's almost a perfect storm, we have an aging population in the US so we have a big demographic change going on, lots of people retiring, lots of knowledge walking out the door.

Kenny: We have behind that until the millennials are sort of fully into the marketplace, we have a little bit of a gap and that's creating a little bit of a ceiling on how many people are available to do work, I would argue that that's actually in maybe a good way causing our companies to automate and look beyond just hiring another body and actually automating and using technology, which ultimately will probably make them more competitive in the global marketplace.

Kenny: But there's something that they have to deal with. And so we're trying to do that too. And then, and I think across our country, unfortunately there's also a major crisis with the use of drugs that are taking, what are perfectly capable people who perhaps even have the certificates and the right skills and taking them out of the job in the workforce because they're unable to operate in a safe way on our plant floor or in a normal workplace. And those maybe number there a couple of issues or kind of compiling to

make it really difficult for people to find the right quantity and the quality of people that can go to work for them in a really rapidly changing business era.

Jacob: Yeah. I mean that is definitely an unfortunate problem we keep hearing about and reading about it in the news of which hopefully will end up getting better. So we talked about a few things that you guys are working on. I mean, you have the smart city stuff that you had from middle school kids. Stem education is a big program that you guys are doing, new majors in schools that you're introducing and new programs there. Two other things that I had a note here to ask you about, we're doing hackathons in college, which I'm really interested in. And also something that you have called the digital flagship program. So maybe we can talk about each one of those things and what those are as well.

Kenny: Well I'll start with a digital flagship and while I won't do it justice, it is at least a starting point, it's first of its kind relationship between Apple and the Ohio State University, which is putting in the hands of nearly 8,000 freshmen every year, advanced Apple devices and not only, it's not some gift that allows a kid to just operate and give them a computer to start their day, maybe lots of schools do that, but it's literally changing the entire campus and learning environment as faculty adopted and start to use the devices for not only the execution of the curriculum but the development of a curriculum.

Kenny: And so that I give a huge credit to the leadership of Ohio State, President Drake and provost for leaning into that partnership and doing a major project with one of the most valuable companies in the world. And it's starting to have like anything else in technology, starting to have other impacts. Because of all of the advanced wifi that's required with those devices, it's also upgrading the technology and the infrastructure at the campus, enabling all kinds of other things to happen with other devices and stuff too.

Kenny: So anytime you lean forward to with technology and you do it for the right reasons, I think a lot of good stuff happens.

Jacob: So the partnership with Apple, so you said, I think it was 8,000 devices and this is for students to just kind of like learn how to use develop apps for ...

Kenny: Well, it's really how you are, it's your device. You're handed this device and the reason I say 8,000, there's 8,000 freshmen and roughly every year that are out from around the world that come to be part of the campus here. There's nearly over 60,000 students here in the middle of our city at Ohio State's campus. And over time they'll all have these devices and as they evolve, the more advanced devices. But it's really actually how the curriculums are given to them. They're on the devices, a lot of their classes actually deliver that way.

Kenny: And so it isn't just something to watch Netflix on and to have in your dorm room. It's an educational tool. And then swift programming and all kinds of things that come along with that, we've had some of our Ohio state teams from Ohio state out of my Apple

campus in Cupertino working directly with the company. And just a super partnership and one of a kind, at least at this time with any major university in the company.

Jacob: Yeah, that's a very, very interesting program and kudos to you for being able to build that partnership with Apple. So let's talk a little bit about the hackathon, so it sounds like the digital flagship is getting these devices in the hands of freshmen, getting them comfortable with these devices, with technology teaching them all these different skills and how to use these things. And what are the hackathons about?

Kenny: We're doing this across the community, I'll focus on one way we're doing it and it goes back to something we talked about just a moment ago as we were actually starting to have hackathons around issues that in the smart cities initiative. And so marrying the two, you take bright Ohio state students who are somewhere in the computer science programs that we have, but others are just interested. And have skills better in different fields. They're actually coming together around hackathons to focus on challenges that the smart cities work is surfacing. And that might be, you know, how do we actually develop operating system for collecting data?

Kenny: It might be how do we actually develop a digital transportation payment system. So we solve first and last mile issues with people getting to mass transit stops and reliable transportation to, and from things. They've come up with all kinds of solutions, probably can't go into detail about each one of them that would be go beyond my capability. But they're obviously solving problems, again, using the intellectual capacity that we have in this market, particularly from young people and people with living in the environments that are able to provide real world solutions that are moving our community and our economy forward.

Jacob: What do you think individuals need to be doing? So we talked a little bit about the role that cities play, the education, stem education changing majors, kind of upgrading the things that they teach students. We talked a little bit about companies and the role that they play, but what about individuals themselves? Isn't there some sort of kind of like drive that individuals themselves need to have to kind of stay relevant and upskill?

Kenny: Well, there'll be an incredible amount of responsibility that comes with being an employee in the future, more so than that we've had as we've entered the workplace in the last several decades, it used to be that you did your work, you got the diploma, you got the certificate and you applied yourself a bit. You're able to get into the workforce and to begin your career where were you started that and whatever industry.

Kenny: And it may have stopped there for many people. I mean, I know there was some continuing education. The need, the velocity of which continued education is going to be required for you to be a competitive employee in the future is going to require a lot of responsibility. So you're going to be responsible for raising your hand and saying, "I want that training. I'm willing to make a little bit of a time sacrifice to learn that skill to evolve as technologies evolve and continue my career.

Kenny: People that are willing to do that are going to have tremendous opportunity, maybe even greater opportunity than we've ever seen before. But those that are unwilling to do that or perhaps don't have the insight and aren't given the roadmap around that are going to have a difficult time. And well, employers and communities can do a lot of things, ultimately it is an individual responsibility to take charge of the career. And we've got to make sure that as a community we make sure that it's accessible and inclusive for everybody, but it's going to be a demanding time for the individual as well.

Jacob: Yeah, and I'm glad you mentioned that because I think a lot of people sometimes assume that we can just rely on schools, just rely on companies to teach us everything we need to know to be successful, but it is going to be more demanding for individuals as well. But I suppose the good news is we've also never had access to more resources than we do now. So I mean we have the ability, at least.

Kenny: We definitely have the ability, we have the programs, there's more thoughtfulness in it. I do think there's thankfully a recognition around the country that, well we've had a great economy, I've certainly in the US for a long period of time and over this past decade, you can point a lot of places that have done really well. But we continue to have a big divide and it's a social divide and it's a technology divide. And we've got to close that gap in order to achieve and build a better foundation for the future and there's just no getting around that we're going to have to spend more time, take more care, make sure that we are equipping people.

Kenny: So that they not only understand but they have access to achieving those possibilities. But that last step has got to be the individuals, that last step has got to be the parent urging their son or their daughter, and exposing to that, and then ultimately it's the person themselves, whether they're 55 and being reskilled or they're a 22 and they're entering the workforce for the first time in a big way.

Jacob: So I guess let's say you had a friend who was 40, and they were kind of in this space where they were trying to think about the future of their job and their career, and they were a little unsure about what was happening. I mean, what advice would you give to somebody like that? Where do you begin to try to upskill yourself, teach yourself new things, any suggestions or tips you'd have for people listening?

Kenny: Maybe several things. One is without looking at the individual opportunity, start to scan the list of big employers in your market. See what kind of job that'll things they have and step in and maybe take a deep breath and say, the overall, this is the skills they're requiring. And if I look at the jobs that nationwide insurance or JP Morgan Chase or cardinal health or Honda, Worthington steel has available. I can glean a lot from that and say, "You know what, there's a lot of consistency in that," technology, we're going to have to know this, I know that.

Kenny: I can't stress enough talking to your community college leaders and not, I think in, again, what is changing pretty rapidly is those campuses and those training programs and facilities that those institutions are building are real time. You know, if you want to know what jobs Amazon has in place, I would look to them and go talk to somebody at

the community college, say, "How are those kind of companies actually working with you?"

Kenny: They're doing great things, huge partnerships between Columbus state and Amazon and Apple and people like that that are, they're looking there first. And then finally, 8I would offer that, you talked to somebody in economic development or in the job of, we're in a position of having great visibility to what kinds of jobs are coming to our market. The companies that are actually having those jobs and we're happy to make connections for people, building online tools and things like that to help connect the dots for people so that they can gain really good site and see real opportunities.

Jacob: I love that you mentioned community colleges specifically, I actually went to community college before I went to a UC Santa Cruz, but I went to Santa Monica Community College years ago. And I feel like we don't hear enough about community colleges anymore. And I don't know why that is, but I'm glad that you brought them up.

Kenny: Well, I'm certainly not the one to say that four year institutions are out of date. They are, they're getting a four year degree, having a campus experience and all that is awesome. But it's also not for everybody and not required for every great career. And even if you do get that college degree, you're more than likely going to interface with community or technical college system at some point in your career in the future. And that's to learn or an online course, you're using something like a Udacity or something where you're getting a nano degree on your own time or formally through your employer.

Kenny: You're getting asked to, I'll give you an example. We have three people on our staff in economic development that were encouraging and sitting on a course to become data scientists. They used to be data entry people, they used to be what we would call the back office. And now because of what we can do with the data we're collecting, I'm encouraging and helping them get on a course to become a full-fledged data scientist in some of the great institutions that we have around us and there's five or six of the institutions that offer a formal data and analysts curriculums.

Jacob: And it's a huge area.

Kenny: On standpoint.

Jacob: Huge area.

Kenny: Yeah.

Jacob: So it kind of a controversial question for you, because you brought it up. There are some people out there who say that the value of college has decreased, there are a lot of like social media pundits, some successful people out there who have been going around saying this, that are basically saying, "You know what, you don't need to go to college anymore." So from your perspective, is college still worth it?

Kenny: Well, if you look at the facts, it's undoubtedly the best way to have a longer and a more lucrative career in a better industry. So has it paid off for a long time and help lift millions of people? Yes, and I would still offer that, that's still absolutely true. I'll just point to Ohio state and how they've actually been able to hold their tuition steady and at a fairly low rate for the quality of education you get.

Kenny: They put an enormous, not only effort into that, they've been very creative, we've privatized our energy at Ohio state and put the dollars back into creating more affordability. We've privatized our parking and we've put the over a billion dollars back into affordability in order to do some of those things. And done it at scale with over 65,000 students and at a very high level with a lot of diversity.

Kenny: So we're inviting a lot of people that in their families, they're the first to go to college. That's awesome and I would argue that all day long. I would also argue that going back to any of the things we've touched on, that's also not the only way, especially now, you can go and I could take 10 courses on Udacity and I can get a quality, I can get quality skills and I can position myself for career opportunities that way or if I happened to be able to build those skills, I can apply at Google without having formal credentials as long as I can do the work.

Kenny: But maybe I'm not experiencing some of the other things that you get out of being on a college campus for three or four years or even on a community college campus for two years. I'm not going to gain some of that life experience that you would get from that either. So I just think it's a cool that we're in a really cool spot where we actually have the opportunity in this country to take advantage of all those things, as long as we're willing to apply ourselves and connect ourselves and put effort in.

Jacob: Yeah, and I also think that the college is still worth it. People ask me that as well and I mean, if you look at still most jobs on planet earth require a college degree. And so for me, it kind of seems a little bit silly to, by not going to college and not getting that education, you basically eliminate yourself from the possibility of like 90% of jobs that are out there. But I think the conversation would be very different if one day we woke up and a lot of companies out there said, "You know what, to apply here, you don't need a college degree anymore." I think then it would be a very, very different environment.

Kenny: We've seen many of our employers do that. So I've seen ...

Jacob: Oh, really?

Kenny: And it's interesting. We've had a few of our insurance providers and things like that, and I'm going to miss the exact term for this from a human resources standpoint, but they've done a deep analysis of the skills required to do the functions that they have inside the building. And they've said, "You know what, you do not need a four year degree to do this and to do it really well, by the way." And we're going to take that criteria off of there.

Kenny: I've never been in such a time where there is a willingness of employers and it's because of the tight market, by the way. But I think some really good outcomes of a tight labor market are that people are going, "You know what, why do we have to have that? We don't have to have that. We can do that differently." I've seen more companies willing to look creatively about how they fill positions, give people chances, we have a great, first of all, great chicken here called hot chicken takeover which is a great company and has been on several national stations and everything.

Kenny: Everyone that works there had a criminal background and they've found a way to actually give them chances and also rise in the company in the fairly formal positions beyond just a food preparation and stuff. There are companies like dad, there's big companies like considering the same things where we're giving people a chance, we're opening our eyes to new possibilities.

Kenny: Still, doesn't take away the fact that it certainly would be easier and life could probably be, you get started a little quicker if you've got that 40-year degree or certificate in hand.

Jacob: That's interesting. I love some of those examples. What was the name of the company, the chicken place?

Kenny: Hot Chicken Takeover.

Jacob: Hot Chicken Takeover.

Kenny: Super place, great chicken if you come to Columbus, got to have some, they're scaling around the country, but just a super visionary guy that is taking a social issue and made it to incorporate it into a real business.

Jacob: What are some of your favorite examples, whether Columbus or outside of Columbus, of what companies are doing to kind of adapt and upskill or partner with cities? You mentioned, for example, what was it nationwide? I think and a couple others. What are they doing that's so unique?

Kenny: Well I'll offer maybe three examples. We'll start with Honda. So Honda, we do a lot with Honda and they have over 200 suppliers in our market, but they have a giant assembly facility here and engine facility. They took a deep look at their workforce and I think they had some of their eyes open and we were talking about the aging of the workforce several years ago. They started to do their own analysis of this and realize that there's many of them, they offered great opportunity to work at Honda over a long time.

Kenny: So they had a lot of people who had it put in 30 years or something, but we're only maybe 50, 55 years old. Started there at a very young age. They begin to retire and they saw a wave coming and many of our utilities maybe have experienced the same thing and they got to work. They have developed a deep partnership with Columbus state where they're teaching inside high schools with the help of Columbus state. They have

people actually getting from high school and actually working a couple of days a week at Honda and going back and forth, getting real world beyond the internship experience.

Kenny: And they're building real scalable pipelines for the future of their workforce. That creativity did not exist 10 years ago. And it's accelerating and getting more scale every day. Nationwide insurance I could probably point to a 100 things that they're doing, but they are super, they have spent a lot of money, and a lot of time over the last several years thinking about the future of the insurance industry and their commitment to technology even they're essentially a technology company disguised in the insurance industry. And they have partnered with every institution I can think of in our region. Higher education, community colleges, technical programs, high schools, minority programs, to develop streams of pipelines.

Kenny: And the last one, I know that there are people beat Amazon up a lot, but if I go out to their fulfillment center and I see the kind of people that are actually working at the Amazon fulfillment center, we have three of them in our market. Each of them as employees were a couple of thousand people. They are doing vouchers with again, with Columbus state. They have learning inside of the building that are teaching people to code. They have very aggressive ways to promote further education for their associates at higher education institutions, things like that.

Kenny: And they become a super employer in our market and they're changing the paradigm for what it means to work in logistics because it's opening up opportunities up and down the value chain in their system and they're really creating a lifelong customers in the process.

Jacob: Interesting. Yeah, and those are some big names, so everybody should know those companies. Well, I know we just have a couple of minutes before we wrap up. So for people listening to this that are working in organizations, what advice do you have for them? I mean, is there anything that they can start doing to maybe better team up or partner with cities, with the schools to kind of take advantage of some of these things?

Kenny: I think everyone should, I'm very biased in this and I have a unique perspective. But the future of your, particularly your metro area, your city that you live in is really important. And it's important to know what direction your areas going in, and to get directly involved with your perspective if you're working in organization and it has great influence in the community, maybe you work for one of the major employers, it's fair to ask, how are we partnering with our city and our state? How's our company involved? Where are we going? What kind of industries are we trying to bring to our market and how are we building our economy? And what role does our company play?

Kenny: For academic leaders and this is largely true already, but it's absolutely important that we no longer just stay in our lanes. Academic partners have to be intricately involved with the major companies in their market and even the mid-sized companies in our market directly, they have to be asking the question, what is it that you need? And more importantly, what are you going to need in five or 10 years? Let's start building it now.

Kenny: And there's so much funding and there's so many ways to actually achieve that through partnerships with companies because they're hungry for solutions. And then for those working in the community, we have a huge challenge in front of us, we've built great places and our cities are doing fantastic things. But they're going to change and then more in the next 10 years than they have in the previous 100 with how IOT technologies are changing, how we're going to communicate and move around our cities and get to our workplace is an exciting time, but daunting and going to be hard to keep up with. Can't stay in a silo, going to have to actually work together like never before.

Jacob: It's funny talking to you, there's like so much of this sense of optimism, but then when you look at the media and what's going on in the world, there's so much negativity that you would never know that all these opportunities and all these exciting things are happening if you just stick with watching the news and reading what's going on in the world.

Kenny: Well, look, and I think every one of those problems is an opportunity, it really is. When we see pain and suffering and disconnects and communities that have not moved forward and inequities, those are giant opportunities that we have more tools that we've ever had before to solve the problems.

Jacob: Totally agree. Well, very last question for you is, where can people go to learn more about you or this initiative? I know you have a fantastic website that has all these programs listed out, so anything that you want to mention for Columbus 2020 or for yourself, please feel free to do so.

Kenny: Sure. We'd invite everybody to come to columbusregion.com to look on our social media connections on Twitter and LinkedIn and everything to connect with us. And we invite your questions and your challenges about what we're doing or not doing. We learn every day, that's our focus is to get to be a better service provider to our organization as we try to build our economy. So, we'd love to hear from you and more than anything, we'd love to host you here in Columbus and come and visit our city and see these initiatives firsthand.

Jacob: Yeah. And you guys recently got an award, what was it? From Time Magazine and one of the 52 places to visit? So it was a fairly recent thing.

Kenny: I don't know if it was an award, but it was a good call out, say, one of the great places you need to visit in the US this year is Columbus, Ohio. And we couldn't agree more. Come and visit and see all the great things that are going on visits a new National Veterans Memorial and Museum where you see the history of our Armed Forces for the last 250 years. And the best zoo in the country, the best library in the country, and on, and on and on.

Jacob: Very cool. Well, Kenny, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to share some of the cool things you guys are working on.

Kenny: You bet, I appreciate it.

Jacob:

My pleasure. And thanks everyone for tuning in. My guest, again, Kenny McDonald, President and CEO of Columbus 2020. Make sure to check out the site and some of the cool things that they're doing and I will see all of you next week.