

Jacob: Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of The Future of Work podcast. My guest today is Wade Foster, who is the CEO of Zapier. Wade, thanks for joining me.

Wade: Yeah. Thanks for having me, Jacob.

Jacob: So, to get started why don't we jump into a little bit of background information about you, and then we can talk a little bit about Zapier, for people that are not familiar with it. But let's start with you! How did you get involved with this space? How did you become CEO? How did you start the company?

Wade: You know, we were ... Back in, it would have been 2011, I was working at this online mortgage company, Veterans United, with my friend, Bryan Helmig, who ultimately became my co-founder here at Zapier. During the nights and, you know, weekends, we would do a bunch of like, kind of freelancing, side projects. Anything that kind of was like, internet-y related to just make some money. And, you know, we kind of aspirationally thought, "Hey! One day maybe we'll do something bigger than this together."

Wade: Well, a lot of the projects we got asked to do kind of had to do with integrations. We got asked to build PayPal Quick Books integration. We built a Word Press forms plug-in that hooked up to Sales Force. One day Bryan kind of just had this realization. He was like, "I think we can build a tool that helps people set up these automations, these workflows, between different apps with them not having to hire engineers, with them not having to know how to write code or what an API is or anything of that sort of stuff."

Wade: During my day job I was messing around with Marketo API. I'm not a great programmer, so I was struggling with that. I'd kind of fallen in love with a lot of these up and coming SAS tools, things like Basecamp, Mail Chimp, Wufoo were some of the apps at the time that were like ... It was so cool that you could just put a form on a website with Wufoo. Like, that was so exciting to me. And so, the idea that we could kind of be a part of that story, to help connect all these different tools that I was using as part of that work, like, it just seemed like fun.

Wade: And so, Brian and I teamed up with Mike and just kind of started working on the very first MVP version of Zapier during nights and weekends at the tail end of 2011.

Jacob: So, this was basically a side hustle.

Wade: It really was at first.

Jacob: Side job. And now what has the company become? So, how many employees do you guys have? Maybe you can give us even a bit of information about Zapier. I'm sure a lot of people have probably encountered Zapier and maybe haven't even realized it. You guys are basically powering a lot of the behind the scenes integrations, right? So, I mean, I'm sure people have come across it without knowing.

Wade: Yeah, yeah. We ... Let's see. We have 200 people employed at Zapier now. We have ... Over three million people are using Zapier in some form or fashion or have signed up to use the product. Over 100,000 customers. So, it's not a side hustle anymore. This is a real thing.

Wade: You know, I think people, a lot of times, you know, we power a lot of things that folks don't always realize, like Slack notifications that are getting sent into your Slack groups. There's a good chance that there's maybe a Zap behind the scenes that's powering that. Someone on your team probably went in and set that up and you didn't know that they did that. So, we help with just a lot of these kind of connections that various folks set up inside of their work.

Jacob: So, basically you help make different systems talk to each other and play nice with each other.

Wade: You got it.

Jacob: Got it. The company itself is very unique. One of the reasons why I wanted to talk to you is because from what I understand, you have 200 employees and you guys are totally remote, which I think is completely fascinating. I actually have somebody from Red Hat. I had the Chief People Officer from Red Hat as a podcast guest a little while ago. They have a very distributed and remote team as well.

Jacob: This conversation keeps coming up as well. I had the CEO of Live Ops, and they have also a 100% remote team. They are basically ... They're called or known as the Uber of call centers. And so, I'm really fascinated with a lot of these organizations that have fully remote teams, and basically how they make it work, not just for somebody that wants to build a company but for a lot of employees who even work at big companies that are trying to get some kind of remote work going on. There's probably a lot they can learn from how you structure things.

Jacob: So, why don't we start high level and just look at how do you hire these people? I mean, how did you build 200 people remotely? How does it work?

Wade: Yeah. Yeah. You know, I think the thing we honed in on early on was we developed a set of values based on what we kind of believed were the characteristics of folks who could be successful inside of a company like Zapier. A few things we identified were first, we wanted self starters. You know, if these are folks who are going to be working from home, they didn't have a boss or a supervisor sitting around to kind of help them figure things out, we needed folks who could kind of have that motivation, that self starter, that go-get-it-ness attitude already. So, we kind of ... Default to action is the value that we have behind this. So, we try and screen for those types of things.

Wade: The second thing we really focused on was transparency and communication skills. If you're going to ask that folks kind of default to action, if you're going to ask that they kind of be a self started, that they go solve problems, you need to equip them with the right information. That means that everyone on the team has to go a little bit further

than maybe they're use to, in terms of documenting their work, documenting the decisions that they make, and sharing that outwards with their teammates and with the broader company, so that if you have a teammate who's maybe on the other side of the world, you're asleep at night, and they kind of run into a similar situation, it's like, "Oh, shoot. The site's down. I've never dealt with an issue when the site's down. Is there a checklist for this? Ope! Yep! Someone put a checklist. I'll run through the checklist and kind of make sure to get all this set up. Now I can get the site back up. I don't have to wake my teammate up."

Wade: So, like, that kind of transparency, that communication skills, the ability to share what you're working on and how it's being worked on, is super critical for a remote organization. So, those are kind of two of the values that we really honed in on as part of our hiring process to help scale out a remote org.

Jacob: How do you screen for those things? Is it just like, a series of questions that you ask? Isn't everyone just going to say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm great. I'm great working by myself. I'm a self starter."

Wade: Well, I think this is where a good interview question design comes into play. You know, if you say, "Hey, are you good at remote work?" Or, "Hey, are you a self starter?" Of course the answer is yes, right? That's not a great question to ask. The best interview questions tend to be these behavioral interview questions. You ask folks to, "tell me about a time when," basically is what it starts with. In our case it might be, "Hey, tell us about a time when you uncovered a problem at work, and what'd you do about it?"

Wade: So, you know, a not so great answer would be like, "Hey, you know, I uncovered this problem that we were having and I raised it to my boss." Well, okay. Well, that's okay but that's like, basically the smallest amount of work you could have done there. Like, a better answer might be, "Hey, I uncovered this problem. I raised it to my boss, but I also kind of created this solution that helped us kind of make sure we didn't have that problem again." Like, okay. Now we're doing pretty good.

Wade: A great answer might be, "I figured out this problem. I put a solution in place. I realized that others in the organization were having this problem too. So, I made a guide for it. I sent it around to folks. I got feedback on it. It made my own process better in the process of kind of going through this cycle. Now everyone in our org uses this kind of new and improved way of solving this problem." Now you're like, "Wow! This person kind of like, did the most that they could to fix this issue that they ran into."

Wade: So, you're kind of just trying to figure out who are those people who really are thinking one, two, three steps ahead of everybody else.

Jacob: A lot of people ... which is great. I love the approach to those questions, which is important because I feel like a lot of times people just think of, "Oh, yeah. Remote work. Flexible work. I'm just going to work from home." But they don't realize that it requires a special kind of person, a certain set of skills, ways of thinking, to be successful in that environment. It's not just about kind of, you know, sitting at home and not having a

commute, right? I mean, like, you need to have a different way of thinking about work to succeed in that kind of environment.

Wade: Yeah! I think that's totally true. Now, the good thing is I don't think that these skills are un-learnable. These aren't like, innate traits that some people have and some people don't. But if they're things that you haven't used throughout your career, if they're not skills that you've kind of honed over time, it might make like, kind of a transition to a remote environment a little tricky for you. It's something you're going to have to work a little harder at. You're not used to kind of writing down your work and how you go about your work. Well, that might be a bit of a new thing for you.

Wade: So, you can learn these skills, for sure. But if you already have kind of gotten used to doing that stuff, you're going to find remote work like, a breath of fresh air, I think.

Jacob: Have you guys always been remote ever since you started?

Wade: We have been remote basically since day one. Because we were a side hustle, you don't have an office with, you know, a nights and weekend project. You kind of work from wherever you can. In our case it was like, our apartments or a coffee shop we might meet up or something like that. But we got used to working via GitHub and Chat and other tools like that.

Jacob: When you say remote, maybe give us a sense of how remote. Are there co-working spots that employees use? Do you have a central headquarters? Are these employees all over the world or just in the United States? How remote are we talking about?

Wade: We've got folks in 20, 25 states in the United States and across, I think, 15, maybe 18, different countries in the world, and across every continent except for Antarctica.

Jacob: Well, Wade. You're clearly going to need to get somebody to work from Antarctica.

Wade: You know, I think that's the next step. Like, that's really what's holding us back right now is we've got to get that Antarctica person to join.

Jacob: You need a brave volunteer who's just going to slog it out in the snow with the penguins out there.

Wade: Exactly. Well, with the polar vortex this week I'm sure people are ... There might be some folks who are thinking, "Antarctica sounds alright right now."

Jacob: Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. So, you guys are literally all over the world?

Wade: We are. All over the world. Yep.

Jacob: And then as far as physical space goes, where are people working out of? Is it co-working spots, homes? Are there any offices at all?

Wade: There's no office at all. Most people do work from home. Like, a home office that they've set up. A few folks do work at a co-working facility. We allow that optionality if folks are interested in doing that. You know, all we say is, "Hey, as long as you've got a good internet connection, as long as you're kind of there when your teammates need you, it doesn't really matter to us where you're at." But I kind of find that most folks, over time, prefer the home office set-up to anything else.

Jacob: I have a home office. I mean, my team's obviously much smaller than yours. I have a team of around 10 people that I work with, also throughout the United States and a couple of international as well. I've also debated getting a co-working spot. For me personally, I like being near my refrigerator. So, you know, getting food every two, three hours, I'm just kind of like, "Eh, doesn't make sense to get an office. I like having my fridge."

Wade: Yeah. There's some creature comforts at home that you just don't get in an office.

Jacob: Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. So, why have a remote team? Obviously, I get it. When you started off as a side hustle, you know, makes sense to have a remote team. But now you have 200 people. I mean, a successful company, you guys are growing. Why not have that headquarters? Why not bring everybody together in San Francisco or LA or, you know, one of those tech hubs?

Wade: First, we couldn't do it now. We couldn't convince all 200 people like, we're all going to move to San Francisco. That just wouldn't work. So, there's kind of just the, you know, physics, I guess, of the situation. But let's assume that, you know, we could convince everybody to move. I think the reality is that it still provides ... Remote work provides a huge access to talent pool. You can hire folks from all over the world. Your retention of your teammates is really strong. Eight of the first 10 people who joined Zapier still work with us today. Our retention rates are well into the 90 percentile, I think 95% last year was our retention rate.

Wade: That is one of those things that folks in offices tend to not have those like, high retention rates. [crosstalk]

Jacob: Not even close.

Wade: Yeah! And as you're growing and scaling a company, you know, the one thing you can't buy is experience in your company. So, if you can hold onto that person who's been with you for five, six years, they have experience that you can't get when you go out to hire somebody, because they know your organization in a way that just no one else really does. And so, I think kind of those things and more like, make remote just a really good way to scale a company.

Jacob: Totally agree. Totally agree. Do you guys make any mistakes during the process of building a remote team? If so, what were some of the mistakes that you may have made during the journey?

Wade: Sure. I mean, we made plenty of mistakes. Fortunately, I think we've managed to, you know, minimize most of them. I think one of kind my key learnings early on was the value of management. You know, we didn't really have much in the way of just management structure until maybe about 20 or so people. It was kind of a pretty flat organization. You know, no one did like, regular one on ones with anybody. We kind of had a team meeting once a week, but everyone kind of knew who each other was and what they were doing. It was kind of working fine. But we got to like, 20, 25 people and we just started to notice like, things are just a little more disorganized. It's a little harder to kind of understand like, where this things are going.

Wade: People wanted a little more like, career mentorship, coaching, guidance, that sort of stuff. We started to hear now and then, which we never heard before. And I kind of always shirked traditional management. I think it's because, you know, I'd had a couple managers. They were fine. But I didn't feel like they added a ton of value to what I was doing in my role. And so, my natural inclination was like, "Well, I didn't need a manager to start Zapier, so like, of course no one else needs a manager." Right? But then like, you know, these kind of things started popping up like this, and I was like, "Okay, well, maybe I should kind of dig in and learn a little bit more about this stuff."

Wade: I ran across ... The tool that kind of really changed my thinking on this was this podcast called Manager Tools, which just teaches the bare bones basics of how to be a manager. It's not this kind of fluffy, pie in the sky management book that talks about leadership and, you know, leaders eat last or whatever, you know, kind of mentality. It was really tactical things like, how to have a one on one, or what words do you need to say when you're trying to give feedback to somebody, or you're thinking about firing someone, here's the checklist of things that you need to have gone through to make sure that you're about to make the right choice.

Wade: So, it was these just like, really tactical, useful things that, you know, I kind of think I knew in the back of my head, but I didn't really have the words to execute against them in a way that this podcast kind of helped illustrate for me. Once we started implementing like, kind of a strong management discipline, I think the experience of working at Zapier got a lot better for folks.

Jacob: Makes sense. Yeah. I'm going to have to check out that podcast. Well, you're talking about management, and one of the big concerns ... and you probably hear this as well, when you probably talk to some of your friends who maybe are managers at bigger companies. Maybe they always ask you, how do you manage and lead a team of people you can't see? Right? I mean, they're not in the office. How do you know they're working? How do you motivate and engage and inspire them when you can't, you know, look somebody in the eye in person and see body language? How do you manage that kind of a team, and what skills do you need to be that kind of a manager?

Wade: You know, this is always a funny question to me because, you know, how do you manage a person in an office? I think a lot of folks kind of have a misconception of what it means to know if folks are doing work. You know, they think like, "Oh, I walk out and I supervise the floor. I see everyone sitting in a chair. I know that work is getting done."

But like, if you've ever been in an environment, you know that's not true. That's not how it works.

Wade: How you know that work is getting done is that you see work! In a remote set-up, seeing the work is the only thing that you can do. So, you know, if you're an engineer you can look at the pull requests people are making in GitHub and see, "Okay, is that a good pull request?" If they're a designer you can see the designs that they're making. If they're in support you can see the emails that they're sending to your customers. If they're in marketing you can see the campaigns that they're running.

Wade: And so, like, in a remote set-up kind of all the presentation of layer of being in an office that is kind of a façade, really, about are people getting work done, is gone. Now all you really have to go on is the person doing work? Not did they walk in the door this morning and smile at you nicely. It's, "Hey, you know, we have an expectation around this certain thing. Did that get done? Yes, it did. All's good here," or, "Hey, we had this expectation this thing would get done and it didn't. We should have a conversation about that."

Jacob: Makes ... You know, when you explain it like that it makes complete sense, yet still a lot of organizations, you know, and I do a lot of talks every year to companies, and whenever I give talks at these organizations I can't tell you how many times managers raise their hands and they say, "You know what? I get it. People want flexible work. But we're not comfortable with it." Because we were taught ... And most managers and leaders were the same way, right? I mean, they were taught that you manage people that you see. Everybody had to show up to the office, work nine to five, and all of a sudden you're telling me that I'm not going to see them anymore?

Jacob: Like, it's ... I mean, like, I understand where they're coming from, but I think a part of it is we need to adapt to these new ways of working. So, what are some of the skills that you think managers need to have to be able to lead and manage a remote team that maybe you didn't need to possess if everybody was showing up to the office all the time?

Wade: You know, I think ... I honestly think the management skillsets are probably the same, but that most managers don't actually live up to them, whether they're in an office or a remote set-up. The kind of key skillsets ... I guess they all could kind of fall into three buckets of things. One would be strategy. Do they understand what the company's goals are? Can they set a vision for the future? Do they know how their team rolls into that strategy? Can that get done?

Wade: Second is operations. So, do they know how to like, build teams and put the teams together in a way that they'll be able to fill the strategy and the mission? And then the last bit is coaching. Can they actually coach and mentor and teach their team to level up and hit that goal? I think the thing that ... The last one is the one I think a lot of folks sometimes fall down on, which is they don't have the tough conversations with their teammates. And a lot of times they're not actually tough conversations. It's things like, "Hey, this is what I expect out of, you know, this role. When you join a team, hey, I'm

going to expect that you have these deliverables to me every week," or, "When I ask for these types of things, this is what I like it to look like. That's how I know that you're going to be successful in this role."

Wade: And just kind of having those upfront discussions about what does success look like. What does success not look like? What are the things that I like as a manager? And then doing those one on ones every week to make sure that you stay on the same page. Because it's easy to get off page with another person over time. If you don't have those kind of routine check-ups, it's possible that two people would kind of, you know, drift apart or drift in a different direction. So, having those routine cadences where you check up, make sure that you're on the same page, that the deliverables are staying the same, the strategy's staying the same, or if it's not, that you have a chance to communicate how it's changing, and all that sort of stuff.

Wade: So, I think those are kind of the key pieces that make a strong manager, whether you're in an office or whether you're working remotely.

Jacob: Yeah. I suppose if you're remote you probably need to be a little bit more tech savvy as a manager, like, the different tools that are out there. You mentioned some workplace practices, which I'm going to ask you in just a couple of minutes. But before we jump into that, I wanted to ask you about the tools that are required to power this kind of a remote team.

Jacob: Obviously, you mentioned very basic, strong internet connection. You also mentioned you guys are using Slack. Can you talk about some of the other tools that you guys are using to make sure that your remote team of 200 employees is staying connected and communicating and collaborating on a regular basis?

Wade: Yeah. At this point in time we use a ton of tools. Like, the tools that we have in place is pretty sophisticated. But if I were just getting started, the things that I would look at are team chat. So, something like Slack. I would recommend Slack. A video conferencing tool. So, something like Zoom. Zoom works great. I love it. I think that would be my first choice, but there's others that you can use that would work just as well. And like, G Suite. Something that has like, Google Docs, Google Sheets. Somewhere where you can kind of communicate plans, write things down, document types of work.

Wade: If you start with just kind of those three tools, you have all the basics that you need to get started. Now, over time you're going to find that like, there's other things you want to layer in, or there's ways that you can be more effective, or there's things that you can automate. You'll build and get more tools. But at its core, those are the three that kind of set you up for success out the gate.

Jacob: You mentioned that you guys are pretty sophisticated now with some of the tools that you guys are using. What do you have set up? Can you give us maybe a little peak under the hood, so to speak, with some of the stuff you guys have got going on?

Wade: Well, so, like, we use Zapier a ton to automate like, communication and work inside of the company. So, I'll give you an example. I run our weekly executive meeting. We have a Zap set-up that generates a document every week, the meeting notes, every week. It kind of puts a template in place with the sections for the all the execs to fill out, and it pre-fills a few things in there as well. It pulls in like, statistics. Like, key metrics that we're working against. It pulls in who's going to run the next all hands meeting and what the topic is supposed to look like.

Wade: Then it posts that document into our Slack channel and alerts everyone that the document is ready. It puts it into a shared Google Drive folder, so all of the historical notes are organized in the same place. It gets added to the Google Calendar invite so that everyone can find it really easily. So, that's like, a kind of little work flowy hack that we've set up using Zapier and ...

Jacob: And it's all automate?

Wade: Yeah. It's all automated. So, no one has to think about, "Hey, who's creating the meeting minutes this week?" You know, pull in all the information that they need. It just gets generated automatically for us, and so that when we get ready to start having our meeting the doc's there, ready and waiting for us.

Jacob: That's pretty awesome.

Wade: Yep.

Jacob: Most companies that have remote teams, as you can imagine, they don't have a lot of automation set up. In fact, I don't even think a lot of people think about applying automation to remote teams. They think about it just, you know, AI and jobs and stuff like that. We typically never hear conversations about how to leverage AI for remote teams, but I think this is a great example of how to make something like that work.

Wade: Yeah.

Jacob: Okay. So, we talked a little bit about the skillsets that are required. We talked a little bit about the management side, some of the tools that you guys are using. Speaking of Slack, by the way, I also heard that you have something called a donut bot [crosstalk] Can you talk a little bit about that?

Wade: So, what donut does ... Even though we work remotely, relationships with your teammates are still pretty important. And so, one of the ways we try and kind of try and encourage that is through this donut bot. There's a channel inside of Zapier that matches everyone in the company up with two other people. So, it used to be just one on one, but now it's groups of three. It randomly assigns you to have what we call a pair chat or a donut chat every week. And so, you can then any time during the week, it doesn't matter when, find 30 minutes where you can jump on a call with your fellow teammates, and just discuss whatever's on your mind.

Wade: It's super informal. A lot of people will talk about books, or they'll talk about their role at the company, or they'll talk about their family or their hobbies, or movies that they've seen recently. But it's a way to just kind of develop relationships and nurture the comradery across the team. I think one of the things I heard from another ... like, a VP of Engineering at one of the big remote companies. They said this line, which is, "You want to get to know your team before your house is on fire." Or, "You want to get to know your neighbor before your house is on fire."

Wade: And so, these pair chats or these donut chats are kind of our way of doing that, where you get to know your teammate before we have like, a really hard problem that we're going to solve. Because we're going to have a really hard problem that we solve. If you kind of already know the person and you know them on like, a human level, it just makes it easier to connect with them when you get into the trenches and solve something really, really tough.

Jacob: I love that idea of the Slack bot. We've seen some companies do things like that in person. I think it was FreshBooks, if I'm not mistaken. I had the CEO of FreshBooks on a little while ago. I think he was telling me they encourage ... they do something ... I believe it was called like, blind dates. But they're actually at coffee shops. Because they have employees that are in a vicinity within each other. So, they get employees to go on these kind of blind dates and just get coffee with each other.

Jacob: So, similar idea but it's just being applied to a remote environment, which I think is great.

Wade: Yep.

Jacob: So, what are some of the other workplace practices that you guys have going on for a remote team? Obviously, culture is important. Teamwork is important. So, aside from these informal donut chats, what else do you have in place to help make sure that the team sticks together?

Wade: Another really cute thing that we do is we have ... All of our channels in Zapier have a naming convention to help you kind of navigate through Slack. There's a set of channels that are off topic, not work related channels. These are all prefixed with fun. And so, there's things like fun gardening, fun parenthood, fun sports, fun movies, where people who share that interest can kind of get together and chat about those things in an informal way. It's just another way to kind of build those connections with teammates across the organization, that, you know, when you're in an office you kind of naturally run into people in the hallways and you see folks, and you kind of get that.

Wade: These little fun channels are our way of kind of creating this serendipity in the organization where you can find others who share kind of like, these similar interests, outside of work interests, and build those key relationships. So, that's one thing we do. Another really important thing is as much as we are staunch advocates of remote work, we still do think that building bonds in person is important. So, twice a year we do a big team retreat or get together, where we'll fly the whole group of the company together

to one location, and we'll spend the week working together, and spending time together as a team. That has really helped people get kind of an immersive experience into what the Zapier culture truly is like.

Jacob: Very cool. So, all 200 people from around the world?

Wade: Yep. Yep. People will occasionally miss like, if, you know, they had a kid recently or have an illness or something like that, but generally everyone's there.

Jacob: You also mentioned that you do ... What was it? Weekly one on ones between the managers and the employees?

Wade: Yes. So, I think this is critical, just kind of management practice, is that every manager should do a weekly one on one with their direct reports, as a way just to kind of keep up to speed on what their team is working on, but also keep up to speed, more importantly, keep up to speed on them as a human. Where's their head at? What are they thinking about these days? Has their career goals changed? Has their personal goals changed? How is their family? Anything that is on that individual's mind, that gives them an opportunity to raise that to you.

Wade: And so, those one on ones, I think, are just really important.

Jacob: What questions do you think or do you encourage managers to ask in these weekly one on ones? Is it sort of like ... Do you provide a series of questions that you encourage managers to ask, or do you just kind of let them use their best judgment and say, "Have your weekly call with you team. Get to know them a little bit. Just find out how they're doing." Or is it kind of like, a template that they go through every week?

Wade: We have some questions that kind of are like, getting started sort of stuff. But honestly, the best one on ones ... One on ones are really meant for the direct report. It's their time where I set aside my time every week for them to come to me. Like, as a manager, I kind of implicitly, I can ask them whatever they want at any point during the week, because I'm their manager. I'm like, that's what I'm there to do.

Wade: So, the one on one is really ... It's in some ways symbolic, but it's a very real, physical thing where it says, "Hey, for, you know, an hour a week I'm yours. You have my full, undivided attention. Whatever is on your mind, I'm there for you, whether it's personal, whether it's professional. It doesn't really matter what it is that you want to talk to me about. I'm there for you." So, I really try and encourage them to come to me as a resource.

Wade: And so, the first part of the meeting is always them. Like, what do they have on their mind? And at the end, that's when I'll ask questions. And so, oftentimes I try and do a little bit of a yin and yang sort of thing. So, if they ask me a lot about like, work stuff, I'll start asking about personal things. Or if they talk to me a lot about personal things, I'll start talking about work stuff. That way I kind of make sure I've covered like, the full basis of things and have a good perspective on what's going on in their world.

Jacob: Yeah. I love that practice. I mean, it seems like you need a special kind of manager for this as well. Most traditional, kind of stereotypical management is hierarchy, "I don't want to know details about my employees. It takes too much time. I just want them to do their jobs and not ask me any questions." I mean, that's like, the stereotypical in a lot of these larger, hierarchical, bureaucratic companies. That's still how it is.

Jacob: So, I mean, it seems like you need the type of manager ... Like, if you have a manager, I'm thinking, from like ... I don't want to name any companies, but you take a traditional manager from a conservative, hierarchical, bureaucratic company. You hire him at Zapier, and you say, "You're having your one on one with your team. Get to know the on a personal level." They're probably going to do a really bad job at it. Like, they just ... It's out of their comfort zone. They don't know how to do it. So, how do you ... I mean, do you train your managers on this? Do you just make sure that you hire the right ones? How do you get those people in there?

Wade: You know, we definitely train our managers. We also screen for this if we're hiring an external manager. You know, I kind of think if your approached to management is don't ask any questions, just do your job, say yes to all of my ideas, like, you're probably not really ready for management. That's not what a manager's job is. A manager's job is to be there for strategy, be for operations, but then also to be a coach and a mentor and to provide guidance and leadership for the individual. If you're not doing that last part, you're not really being a manager.

Wade: So, you know, I think it's really critical to provide the training, but also you should just screen if you're hiring people in your org to make sure that they align with you on how you think about that sort of stuff. That's how we think about it at Zapier. And so, if they were to come in and not have those things, it would show up on ... We do like, manager feedback surveys. It would show up in their scores, and it would say like, "You know, this person is probably not as good as the other managers." That means we would have a discussion about that and ask them to improve.

Jacob: Hmm. So, you do manager feedback surveys. So, talk a little bit about that, the manager feedback surveys. Do you do engagement surveys? Performance reviews? Is all of that done kind of in a typical way that you would expect at any other company, or is there something unique about how you guys approach it?

Wade: You know, I don't know that there's anything incredibly unique. We do performance reviews. We do engagement surveys. The management survey is perhaps the most unique one. The gist of it is we send a survey out. It's 10 questions. It's things like, you know, my manager ... It's agree or disagree statements, and it's things like, "My manager cares about me as a person. My manager has had a career conversation with me in the last six months. I understand my role and how it connects to the rest of the company. I understand how to use the product at Zapier."

Wade: It's a variety of different questions to just kind of get a feel for is the manager living up to the values and the expectations that we have of a manager at Zapier? A lot of this is modeled after some of the stuff Google did. If you read the book "Work Rules" by Laszlo

Bock [crosstalk] outlined this in there. And so, we kind of borrowed a lot of the principles from that.

Wade: One of the things that Google found was even when managers are not scoring high on this, the good news is they would just take those scores back to the manager and say, "Hey, you have low scores on these feedback surveys. Here are the things you need to work on." Most managers were able to correct the behavior by the time they ran the next survey, which was six months later. So, these like ... Getting poor scores on these surveys are not a death sentence. It's feedback. It's a way to help you get better. It's not a way to kind of out you as a bad manager or anything like that. It's just a tool to say, "Hey, here's some things you have to work on."

Wade: I think that is so critical because most managers ... I don't think if you go into manager you set about to become the bad manager, that stereotype. No one wants to be that person. But it's really tough for managers to get feedback. And so, this is kind of our way to help managers get more feedback about how they're doing in their job.

Jacob: Which is, of course, extremely valuable.

Wade: Yep.

Jacob: What about promotions and raises? How does that work in a virtual environment?

Wade: You know, I don't think this is too dissimilar. We have our kind of career pathing where there's different levels inside of the organization. There's pay bands that kind of match up to those different things. If you meet certain expectations you'll be ready for a promotion and a raise and all that sort of stuff. This is an area where I don't think remote and in office really differs, or probably should differ in any way.

Jacob: It's funny. Talking to you about some of these things, it's sort of like, yeah. I mean, it's the same stuff that you do at a company. Which, you know, you talk to some people and they look at virtual teams as sort of like, some kind of weird black magic. Totally foreign thing. But the reality is, it's a lot of the same, similar processes, similar approaches, similar things that you do. You just do it with different tools and technologies instead of doing it in person.

Wade: Yeah. Instead of sitting down at a coffee shop or sitting down in an office, we jump on a Zoom call. It's the same stuff, just with a small twist, a little twist.

Jacob: A small twist. What about things like, perks and benefits? Can you walk through maybe some of the things that you offer for your employees, and also kind of a side question to that, do you keep track of hours? I'll jump into that one into a minute. Why don't we start with the perks and benefits and things employees get?

Wade: You know, I think perks and benefits are a little different in remote companies than maybe say like, a Silicon Valley tech company. Silicon Valley tech company's will flood ... They pour on the perks. You have free food, free massages, doctors on site, hair cuts on

site, swimming pools, gyms. Whatever they can think of [crosstalk] They throw everything there.

Wade: In a remote company that doesn't really make sense. You can't do those types of things. I think the perk is, "Hey, I get to work at home. I get to see my family more. I get to be in an environment that fills my tank up, that makes me excited about coming to work, rather than having to go through this like, commute every day and go to an office that sucks my soul." So, a big part of the perk is just that.

Wade: You know, you can listen to the music that you want. You can eat the food that you like. Like, all that sort of stuff. You can personalize your environment to match whatever it is that you do. So, I think that's kind of the big perk for us. But then, you know, from a benefits standpoint, we still make sure we cover a lot of the basics. Like, we have a strong healthcare plans. We have retirement packages. We have vacation. All those types of things that you would have in like, an office company. We make sure to have those types of things too, because those are important. Those are good for, you know, the team's well being, to have healthcare and to have retirement and stuff like that.

Wade: So, you can't do perks in quite the same way, but there's still things that you can do to make the employee experience a good one.

Jacob: I love that you mention employee experience. I love hearing that phrase. So, what about keeping track of hours? One of the things that I've heard, and I've had close friends work in these types of environments, where the organizations say they offer flexible and remote work, but they secretly kind of, you know, if you're using a messaging application they're always looking to make sure that that little green available [light] is always on, and if not they're wondering, "Where are you? Is this person even working? Are they there?"

Jacob: You get to that kind of a point and it's sort of ... I don't know. It makes you a little paranoid. It's almost like, not having a flexible work schedule, because if that little green light isn't always on as being available, people are going to be like, "Okay, you need to come into the office because we don't know what the Hell you're doing. Your light" [crosstalk] You know what I mean? So, how do you ... Do you look at hours? Or is it purely work? Like, I don't care if you spend an hour today or 15 hours today, just do your work and do a good job.

Wade: Yeah. I think this is one misconception about remote. I think there's different companies, even amongst remote work, that do this differently. I know remote companies that track hours, you know, down to the minute. We certainly don't do that. I know other companies that don't track hours at all. They don't even care about it. Which, I don't know that that's the right take on it either.

Wade: I think the thing that's important in a company is you want to make sure that the work gets done. You want to structure it to make sure that the right work happens. And so, a lot of the discussion around tracking hours is less about that, but it's about being available to make sure the work gets done with the customers need it. And so, if you're

in a role like, say, customer support. Customer support, you need to be around when customers have questions and when they need help. And so, that kind of requires you to be around and to have a schedule and to have a routine and things like that. You can't take off in the middle of the day when customers are ... you know, your heaviest hours.

Wade: So, I think that's an example of where, okay, maybe a bit of a schedule and a routine is important, versus maybe a job that's maybe a little more independent, like, say, I don't know what this might be. Like, an IC ... individual contributor engineer. They can write code at any hour of the day. Whatever kind of works for them. But even still, like, as the organizations get bigger, you collaborate with your teammates more and more and more. And that collaboration [crosstalk]

Jacob: Totally. I have two dogs at home. So, I ... You must have gotten like, a package dropped off.

Wade: I did. This is the benefits of remote work too, is that you get to hang out with your little flurry friends.

Jacob: Exactly.

Wade: The flip side is they're talkative sometimes.

Jacob: Yep. Yep.

Wade: Anyway. So, the flip side though as organization grows is you do need some consistency around how you collaborate. You can create an asynchronous culture around communication, but there are certain things that you do that require you to get together as a team, whether that's a weekly meeting, whether that's a daily stand up. It's probably going to be specific to you and your company and your culture. But that is going to require that you show up for those things.

Wade: So, you can have a degree of flexibility. Certainly a lot more flexibility than you have working in an office, but it's not like you can just take off anytime you want, because you're still trying to fulfill a mission for your company. You're still trying to help your customers. You're still trying to collaborate with your teammates. That does require, you know, being around some amount of time.

Jacob: It's funny that you mention that. That's another area of pushback that I hear from a lot of managers and executives, is that, you know, if I have a remote team and they're not showing up, and they're all in the same place, what does that mean for collaboration and innovation? How are they going to come up with new ideas for products and services? Everybody says, "I need these people to be in the office together so that this stuff happens."

Jacob: We've actually seen a lot of companies, I mean, especially here in the Bay Area organizations like Yahoo and HP over the past few years, that have recalled their remote workforce and are forcing them to come into the office.

Wade: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jacob: How do you ... What do you say to maybe executive and managers that are skeptical because they think that you need to be in person for innovation and collaboration?

Wade: I think that piece is kind of silly. There's a fair amount of research around like, brainstorming, that shows that like, group brainstorming is actually somewhat ineffective. People who are quiet don't speak up and their ideas aren't heard. It gets dominated by the noisy person in the room. So, as a result, these kind of group brainstorms are very biased toward a certain individual type, which is maybe not necessarily what you want.

Wade: The groups that tend to get the best outcomes are the ones who do solo brainstorming and then they come together as a group to discuss kind of the ideas that individuals had on their own. And so, I think you kind of have to mix, you know, taking the time to think through a problem on your own, using your own expertise, and then setting aside time to work with a teammate to see like ... basically to get a broader perspective, to see if there's things that you missed. That can happen on Zoom just as easily as it can happen in person.

Wade: There are sets ... I've found that the place where collaboration is more important is kind of around high level strategy, like, getting buy in and lock in on strategy, and coordination. If you have kind of like, urgent projects or things that need to get done or certain things that kind of need to happen, a quick sync up on a call can get that stuff organized a lot quicker than kind of, you know, a chat or like, an email, happening asynchronously can. So, I think it's just kind of recognizing what are you trying to optimize for right now, and then picking the right communication method for that.

Jacob: One of the things I realized I forgot to ask you earlier was, you know, a lot of companies have a relocation package. You have a de-location package. Can you talk a little bit about what that is and how that works, and why you put that in place?

Wade: Yeah. This was the ... One of our engineers had this idea. They had been on a few interviews and hired a couple folks that joined Zapier, who were in the Bay Area. Upon joining Zapier they immediately moved. In both cases it was for family reasons. They'd had young children. They wanted to be closer to their grandparents. This engineer was like, "Hey, a lot of companies pay for folks to relocate to where the headquarters is. Could we pay for people to go wherever they wanted?"

Wade: And so, thus, the idea of the de-location package was spawned. You know, honestly, I was kind of like, on the fence about it at first. I live in the Bay Area myself. So, I'm like, "Hey, we shouldn't knock on the Bay Area. It has it, you know ... It has its perks. Even if, you know, the cost of living is pretty outrageous these days." But ultimately, we ran with it and said, "Alright. Let's make this happen." And so, the gist of it is if you go through the interview process and get hired at Zapier, and you currently live in the Bay Area and you want to move somewhere else, anywhere else, it doesn't really matter where, we'll

help you de-locate or relocate. We'll provide monetary assistance to help you do that, up to \$10,000.

Wade: When we announced this we got a lot of press and a lot of publicity about this. But the interesting thing was our applications to our jobs grew about 50% after that. But most of the applicants weren't from the Bay Area. It was just from people all over the world that were like, "This company gets it. This is the type of company I want to work for, so I'm applying there."

Jacob: I mean, it seems like ... That does seem to be the general kind of consensus or way of thinking about work for a lot of people. It's kind of, you know, we have the technologies now, the concept of always having to be in the office is outdated. It seems like a lot of employees are grasping that and the challenge is just kind of getting the management, the executive team to just, you know, embrace it more widely, which, you know, I think is starting to happen. A lot of companies are implementing a lot of great programs around this. So, hopefully we'll see much more.

Jacob: I had a couple questions before we wrap up around the advice that you might have for managers or employees. But before we get into that, I wanted to find out is there anything else that you want to make sure we cover about Zapier or building a world class remote or flexible team that you think people need to know about? Or any unique practices you want to share? Anything at all.

Wade: Oh my goodness. You've already asked so many good questions. I think we've covered like, all the good ... a lot of the good tips I have. Yeah. Whatever you have next. Let's go to what you have next and I'll think on this one.

Jacob: Okay. Great. Well, actually, one thing I suppose I could ask you a little bit more about it culture.

Wade: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jacob: How do you create culture in a remote team, especially when you have employees that are in different parts of the world? How do you get them to embrace the values, to really just kind of get onto that Zapier culture. This is something that companies struggle with employees that show up into the office in different parts of the world, let alone being remote. So, what have you figured out there?

Wade: Two things, and they're pretty simple. We use our values. We make sure that ... One, we make sure that our values represent what we truly think. These are not things that like, exist on a wall and we give lip service to. We have values that we really, truly think, like, if you live by these things, like, you're going to be a high performer at Zapier. You're going to execute. You're going to do well.

Wade: Those values are turned into a hiring rubric. So, we hire against those values when we put people through the interview process, and then they're also part of the performance review as well. Throughout your entire tenure at Zapier, you're paying attention and

you're being evaluated against how you live up to those values. That kind of makes it this like, undercurrent that's just a part of this organization. You see, you know, non-managers, individual contributors, through the organization now, who cite the values are part of their decision making process, or they highlight when a teammate uses the values to do a think well.

Wade: That's not coming from management anymore. That's not coming from an exec or from myself. That's the team who's kind of caught onto this. I think the reason that that is the way that it is is because we committed to doing this six years ago, and we've been kind of preaching it for six years now. It's gone beyond something that we kind of just put on a doc one after now. It's just now really a key core part of the Zapier experience.

Jacob: Makes sense. So many companies just have values that are words or phrases. It seems like making it a part of how the company operates kind of helps with that.

Wade: Totally.

Jacob: The two questions that I wanted to end on, first is for managers and leaders, what advice would you give them to build a successful, high performing remote team? I don't know. Let's say, for example, you went into a ... I don't know ... an IBM or one of these typical, larger, more conservative, established organizations, and you were responsible for helping create remote teams. I mean, where would you start? What would you begin? How would you make this happen?

Wade: You know, I think one thing that I would do is I would first try and make sure that the group or the people that I'm around that I'm working on it, are open and bought in to what we're trying to do. Because if people aren't bought into it, it's going to struggle to be successful because someone's going to try and be chipping away at it and making it not be successful.

Wade: But once we kind of have that, I think the most important thing is to just start doing it. So, if you're going to do it with your team inside one of these big companies, make it so that everyone on the team is going to work remotely for a week or two weeks, long enough that you really have to live with and learn how to operate as remote. You can't say, "Oh, we'll sync on this when we're back in the office tomorrow." You have to do it long enough that it's a little bit painful for you to say, "We'll do this next time we're in the office." You have to just kind of figure out, "How are we going to solve this problem now?"

Wade: If you kind of set it up where everyone is on the same boat, working in that same way, no one's in the office, everyone's working remotely, you'll start to build the organizational discipline, the practices, the tools, the processes that make remote work. And so, I think just kind of putting yourself in the environment right out the get go is the first thing that I would do.

Jacob: So, don't spend months coming up with policies and procedures. You would just kind of jump right into it?

Wade: Yeah. I'd jump in the deep end and just solve the problems as they emerge, rather than trying to like, design a perfect world out the gate.

Jacob: Got it. I like that. And then you mentioned guidelines and policies and procedures. Is it important to have some of those in place, and what might be any examples of guidelines or policies that you have at Zapier for remote work?

Wade: You know, there are ... They're going to come up. We have certain policies for a lot of different things, like, you know, managers do these one on ones weekly. How do you have meetings? Like, who works on what? How does our goal setting process work? All those types of things are examples of policies and procedures. But when you're just starting with this remote work, I wouldn't overdo it. I would just get into the environment and see what you need. You can always add a new process or a new policy or a new procedure. It's a lot harder to take them away.

Wade: I would just kind of go in pretty lean and then put them in place when you know you need them to solve a problem.

Jacob: Makes sense. I like that approach. Okay. Anything else that you think managers need to know about remote work or flexible work or creating that kind of a program in their company?

Wade: You know, I think the last thing I'd add is don't overthink it. Being a manager in a remote environment is not so different than being a good manager in an office. A lot of the things that you need to do are the same. So, find the remote equivalent of those things and make it happen.

Jacob: Simple enough. The follow-up question to that is let's say you're not a manager or an executive, you're maybe an entry level employee. You're not somebody in a formal or official position of power, and you want to get flexible or remote work programs going on inside your company. Maybe you're dealing with some skeptical managers or executives. How do you start having these conversations? How do you start introducing this?

Jacob: Same question for you, right. Let's say you were working at one of these conservative companies and they didn't have these programs in place. How would you go about it if you're just an employee there?

Wade: You know, I think that's a tough thing. I'm not sure how I'd go about it. I think you really need a culture and a company that's open to this. If yours isn't, you know ... And after some sort of trying to influence and advocate for it, I think you're probably better off trying to come work at a company like Zapier or any of the other companies that are more open and just already naturally predisposed to working this way. Then you won't be fighting this uphill battle.

Wade: But I guess if I was to just try and advocate for it, I would try and just sell the benefits as best I can, and like, try and get my own team bought into it and see if the team that I'm

on could get some sort of leeway to give it a try for a week or two. Not trying to convince the whole company, just get the closest team around me to start doing it first.

Jacob: I like that brutal honestly. I mean, if you're a part of a company and it's an uphill battle, nobody's embracing it, I suppose you should take comfort in knowing that there are lots of organizations out there like Zapier, who do have great flexible and remote programs. I know Unilever is another one. Cisco's doing a good job with this.

Wade: Yep!

Jacob: So, you can always jump ship. I think actually a lot of employees really do care about that flexible work environment. They're picking those organizations. So, it's kind of a ... I mean, it's not just a nice thing to do but it's a way to attract and retain top talent as well. It's a huge benefit.

Wade: It totally is.

Jacob: Okay. Perfect. That was the last kind of official work related question I had for you. Now I just have a couple of fun ones for you.

Wade: Alright!

Jacob: So, listeners can get to know you a little bit more. First question for you is what has been your most embarrassing moment at work?

Wade: My most embarrassing moment at work. Shoot. Huh. Wow. What is that? I'm trying to think. What would it ... I mean, my dog starts barking all the time but that can't possibly be my most embarrassing moment. I'm sure like, I didn't mute myself when I needed to mute myself [crosstalk] Left a video on when I probably should have turned it off. [crosstalk]

Jacob: One of the challenges of working remotely with technology. What has been the hardest business decision you had to make?

Wade: Hardest decision I had to make. You know, I think when we were early on, Zapier started as a side project. When I decided to go full-time, Zapier wasn't making much money, not nearly enough to cover my salary. In fact, not even close. Lie, it rounded closer to zero than it was to my existing salary. And so, making that choice to say, "I'm going to go all in on this thing," was really scary at the time, but, you know, in hindsight I'm super glad I did.

Jacob: Yeah. That's certainly not an easy decision. What is your favorite business or non-business book?

Wade: Favorite business and non-business book? Hmm. You know, I'll tell you my favorite one that I read recently. So, I read quite a bit. I read "Shoe Dog," the book about the

founding of Nike recently. If you're into shoes and accounting drama, that is your book. It is a fun read. So, that was one that I really enjoyed recently.

Wade: Non-business book ... I read this book, "The Boys in the Boat," which is about the men's 1936 US crew Olympic rowing team that won gold in Nazi Germany. That was a lot of fun to read.

Jacob: Wow. I'll have to check that one out. Last two questions for you. Who's been the best mentor or coach that you've had, if you've had one. I know you've pretty much been adept here for so long. Have you had any great coaches and mentors during the course of your career?

Wade: I think my dad, my granddad come to mind. I spent a ton of time with them growing up. I learned so much from them, not just about work ethic but just about how to be a good person. I think I carry a lot of the things that they taught me into the workplace.

Jacob: Yep. Fair enough. Last question for you. If you were doing a different career, what do you think you would have ended up doing?

Wade: Oh, shoot. You know, the thing ... My dream job before I started Zapier, the thing I always hoped to do, was be a GM for a baseball team. Maybe someday.

Jacob: Wow. GM for a baseball team. Alright.

Wade: Yeah.

Jacob: Well, maybe one day you'll sell Zapier and you'll buy the Oakland A's.

Wade: We'll see.

Jacob: You never know.

Jacob: Alright, Wade. Well, where can people go to learn more about you and Zapier, and connect with you. Anything that you want to mention, please feel free to do so.

Wade: You know, I think you can check me out on Twitter. I'm fairly active there, @wadefoster. Then of course, check Zapier out. Z-A-P-I-E-R dot com. [inaudible] try and automate some of your work. See if it makes you a little more productive.

Jacob: Are you guys hiring at Zapier?

Wade: We are absolutely hiring engineers, support, design, product management, recruiting across the board. We're looking for folks. If you're interested in working remotely at a company that's ... I'd say we're doing some trailblazing in this space. Come check it out.

Jacob: Hey, well, there you go. If you're listening to this, wanting to work for a company that has remote or flexible work and your company doesn't offer it, you can check out Zapier.

Wade: There you go.

Jacob: Well, Wade, thanks for taking time out of your day to speak with me. I really appreciate it.

Wade: Yeah. Thanks for having me, Jacob.

Jacob: And thanks, everyone, for tuning in. Again, my guest has been Wade Foster, the CEO of Zapier, and I'll see all of you next week.