

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 Christy Gillenwater. She's the president and CEO of the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce. Christy, thank you for joining me.

Christy: Thanks for having me, Jacob.

Jacob: So, before I pushed the record button, I was just sharing that I've had a couple people on this show who are leading these various, cool city initiatives, and it seems like you guys are doing a lot of really interesting stuff, which is what we're going to talk about today, but before we get into that, maybe you can give people a little bit of background information about yourself, and also the city of Chattanooga, in case people are not familiar with it.

Christy: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much again for this opportunity, and ability to showcase what is happening in Chattanooga and Hamilton County. Sure, so I have been in the industry, so as we say, in the Chamber of Commerce and economic development field, for over 20 years. Spent the majority of my career in Indiana, perusing a few different cities in Indiana, but nationally, have always been very in tune with counterparts throughout the country, and trends happening, and the economic development, public policy, talent development space. Very passionate about the work that chambers do, and how we sit at the center point, or the connecting point between government and business, and the nonprofit sector.

Christy: So, a lot of those sectors all converse together around chamber tables, and chamber conversations, and so yeah, over the past 20 years doing this work. And specifically, some of the things that we have going on here in Chattanooga, or to just give you a little bit of a perspective about Chattanooga, we really have been an overnight success story, made in 50 years. So, it has been a 50 year journey for Chattanooga. In my opinion, we are a very self-reliant community, that is willing to take risks, and look at ourselves in the mirror, and find our faults, and say, "Okay, we need to do something about this, and be proactive about it."

Christy: One of the interesting things about where we sit, so we're in a tri-state area, and one of the things that the Chattanooga Chamber is involved in is an organization called the Greater Chattanooga Economic Partnership, so we actually run point on this partnership, and it's a 16 county, three state economic development initiative, and I say

that to say within our region, we have a million people in our population base. In Hamilton County alone, we have over 200,000 jobs, so we are a significant economic engine in the Southeast. We are located a couple of hours from both Nashville and Atlanta, in between the two cities, in fact, and find when we study where people are moving from and to Chattanooga, we see those two cities as two of the top.

Christy: When I say we're an overnight story made in 50 years, that's from a lot of intentionality that was built around earlier visioning processes. First of all, called Vision 2000, where community leaders came together, Jacob, and really focused on what we needed to do to advance our city, to clean up our environment, that was a key component, and to build places where people want to gather, and that people would celebrate in the community. And so, so has ensued 50 years of really delicate work, and now we find ourselves looking forward at the next 20 years.

Jacob: Very cool. And it's great to be looking at the future, especially for a city. Most of the people that I typically talk to on the show are business leaders, or executives inside of organizations, but it's thinking about the future city that is also so crucial, so what do, and you touched on this a little bit earlier, but what does a Chamber of Commerce actually do?

Christy: Great question. Every chamber has a slightly different flavor, but for the most part, chambers really focus on the economic prosperity of their geographic region, so whether that's the county, their city, or a multi-state, multi-county area, they focus on making sure that their existing businesses can grow, thrive and prosper, that those companies have the talent they need to meet existing and future customer demands. They really think about and partner with their elected leaders, and business leaders, around what does their community need to continue to grow and diversify, and build their GDP in their area. So, chambers are very focused around that. A lot of us get involved in public policy work at the local and state level, in particular. A lot of that's related to business climate related policy, as well as more and more just quality of place.

Christy: As talent is now the new narrative in economic development, you have to think about having a great place where people want to live, because that is what attracts and retains talent for a community, and when I say talent, I basically mean people who want to work, and so thinking about all of those elements that go into making a place great, that's what a chamber typically does. And depending on the community, and what their strength point is, in Chattanooga, we're well known for outdoor recreation, but just up the road a bit in Nashville, they're known for music. And so, understanding what your culture is a community, and partnering with others, and really telling that story and nurturing that story to the best of your ability.

Jacob: Is this a relatively new trend, you think? Because if you were to look back, for example, like 20, 30 years, it seems like a lot of people would just go anywhere where the job was. They would just relocate, they would just travel wherever they could find work. But now, people care much more about the city, they care much more about quality of life, and well being, and all these other things that go into the decision of where people work. Are you seeing a great emphasis being placed on this now than in the past?

Christy: Absolutely, Jacob. I mean, I think of even just when I entered the workforce, it was all about the job, and today you hear it from every young person you talk to, or candidly, even people more senior in their career who say, "I'm in a point in time now where I am choosing place first." Candidly, when I joined the Chattanooga Chamber a year and a half ago, I thought about that. I thought, "You know what? I first want a great place. A great place that I can sell, and be a part of the community, the culture, that's first, and then we'll figure out the right job fit." And I think you see that more and more.

Christy: I've heard that from Lyft and Uber drivers, who I regularly talk to here and in other cities, particularly in Chattanooga, it's been interesting the last year how many people have moved here, and then are figuring out. It's like, "Okay, I'm starting driving, but I'm going to find a job here, because this is the place I want to be," and I think it's interesting how companies like Lyft and Uber have enabled people to make some of those plunges, as well. And you have others, too, I mean you have so many gig workers, and we're a hot spot for gig workers with the fastest internet in the country, [inaudible] sixth in the U.S., we have a great asset, so we have a number of people who live and work here in Chattanooga, who their work base is not here. They report up through somewhere else, but they can live anywhere.

Christy: And as you're finding more and more companies offering those solutions to employees, people are just picking where they want to live, and in some cases continuing to work, or working from a distance. So, yes.

Jacob: And it's interesting, because I also think, just from my own observations, that that is definitely much more of a trend that we're starting to see, because usually when most people think about attracting and retaining talent, their immediate jump goes to, "Oh, what is the company doing?" They don't think about the city, necessarily, which is interesting to me, and now that conversation is becoming more prevalent. So, what are some of the big trends that you are paying attention to, just when you you're thinking about how the workforce is changing, or what's going on with the citizens, the people who live in these various cities. What are you paying attention to?

Christy: Great question. Very much focused on to some degree, if you will, the will of the people. So, people are passionate now about their place, so they're... To our point, people are moving to a place, then finding a job, so if they're moving to a place, they have a lot of intentionality around that, and they want to see their place continue to prosper, so that means often, they're engaging in that place, and so a community and a culture that welcomes new people, engages new people, and allows not only those, as we call them in Chattanooga, Chattanewbies, not only allowing those newbies to be a part of the solution, but also those existing residents, who have stuck with the community for decades, and were born and raised there. And finding solutions of how you bring both the newer folks and those who are your tried and true together to solve community problems, and offer solutions.

Christy: And so that's where... We've launched Velocity 2040, and there are a couple of other communities we've looked at in the country. Omaha, who has done this work, that really helped guide some of our work here around envisioning what a future looks like in 2040. And the public input process is much different today than it was in Chattanooga

20, 40 years ago, where you had to go out and hold meetings, and have people physically present, and while that's still important, there's so much you can do electronically to survey folks, garner feedback, et cetera, and so technology played a key role in our Velocity 2040 development, and really can in other communities.

Christy: So, there are different ways of engaging people and going where people are, to have them engaged in what the future looks like in the community that they hand selected. And I think that's really a key trend.

Christy: I think another trend is where people work and how people work, in that the coworking space, et cetera, and how that plays into the community work, as well, and that's where when we looked at Velocity 2040, we found that the number one thing that people wanted was to make sure that students have what they need to learn, and the concern they had was that good jobs and good schools are not available to everyone, and they wanted to make sure across the board, everyone has access, so what we really focused in on on Velocity, Jacob, is first of all, is focused on education. Being the smartest city [inaudible] in the South. Focused on educational excellence for all, okay?

Christy: Second was that every resident thriving, so thinking about jobs, and the types of jobs that we're creating and recruiting here to our economy. Third was 20 minutes or less, the new transit standard, so knowing that so many families and individuals face time poverty issues, and so how can we help narrow that gap, thinking about public transit and just our infrastructure overall. And then we are also are focused, number four, on making sure our leaders represent the full spectrum of who we are and who we're becoming as a community, so that we're really intentionally inclusive in our leadership structure. And then five, that we have a new collaboration process for solving issues with openness, respect, participation, and a shared vision, and that that really continues to transform our neighborhoods, and bringing our governments, and business, and everyone closer together.

Christy: So, I think... Those, to me, those would be a couple trends that I think we're very focused in on as we move forward.

Jacob: I love that you guys are looking at 2040. I find even companies have a very hard time looking a couple years down the road, so you guys are already looking 20 years in the future, to imagine what that city's going to look like.

Jacob: Well, maybe we can dive in a little bit deeper into some of these things, and can you share, what are you guys doing now to become this future city? What are some of the initiatives that you have going on? Any changes that you've made? Anything that you can share?

Christy: Absolutely. Great plan. So, within those five, we're working on strategies under each, and so for example, on the thriving part, we have just developed a five year economic development strategy. So, we knew we needed to understand, for example as an organization, where the community wanted to be in 20 years, what levers they wanted

us to push, and then back end, the chamber's role in growing jobs, and helping to foster more jobs here, and the types of jobs that that would take, and what we need to do.

Christy: We have just crafted a five year economic development strategy that really has four key levers. One is that we will be future ready, and by the way, it's called Chattanooga Climbs, and so that we will be future ready, that we will make sure our residents have the skills for the new economy. Second, that we are focused on mobility for all, that every resident thrives, and again, that's around really jobs, building jobs for all. Third is gig city [inaudible] is that entrepreneurs lead the way in Chattanooga. That we need to continue to hone and really foster a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem. And then all built over the foundation of an inclusive economy with collaborative leaders.

Christy: And you know, in the world of economic development in the past, Jacob, we'd look at, "Okay, what was your capital investment over the last five years? How many jobs did you create? What was the multiplier effect on those jobs? What was your wage growth?" And now we're looking at some new metrics, as, "Okay, what is our certification completion rate," for example, in some of our target sectors. And in those target sectors with specific occupational needs, are we producing, for example, the computer science degrees that are demanded in our market in the next five years, right? If we want all of our people to thrive, then we need to start aligning our talent pipeline partners, so K-12, early childhood even, to higher ed, with, "Hey, these are the needs in the region, and these are the types of jobs and occupations, certifications, degrees that will be needed."

Christy: And so what we're doing is we're pulling the business community, as a number of other communities have done, Charleston, L.A., a lot of communities have been really aggressive in having their business community lean in to these talent pipeline partners, to make sure that there is alignment with what's being delivered, and we're seeing a lot of that through future ready institutes here that our school system has launched. We have 16 industry pathway programs, 27 future ready institutes at 13 high schools, and it's just really exciting to see that that's the kind of work being done.

Christy: So again, how can we track the number of future ready institute partners? Business partners in the community? Are we tracking the number of apprenticeship participation? I'm sorry, apprenticeship program participation, not only in terms of the businesses who are offering them, but then the students who are participating in them. So, it's you're thinking about our metrics in a different way. Mobility for all. We're thinking about making sure our economy is teeming with high quality jobs that are accessible to all residents. Looking at employer driven solutions to addressing hiring barriers, or how can we target industries? We have target sectors now that we're going after, and being thoughtful about those target sectors, and what they need in order to be successful in our economy.

Christy: And you know, then when we look at tracking progress, looking at what kind of capital investment is coming into our economy, sure, but also how are our target industries really growing, and what kind of recruitment activities have been leading to those outcomes? And on the entrepreneurial ecosystem, Big City Wins, making sure that we continue to have an energizing campaign to attract and retain entrepreneurs, and then

really amplify our innovation district, assets like our incubator. We have the third largest incubator in the country that we run, and how are we really amplifying that at a much larger level, so that other people understand the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the success that others have had here?

Christy: And then tracking venture capital investments in Hamilton County businesses, in Chattanooga businesses, and tracking the number of startups that we have here. How many companies are starting up a year? How are they scaling? Really following what's going on there. And then even tracking startup ownership by people of color, and women. Not just, "Hey, how are we doing overall," but then really starting to track our metric [inaudible] in populations that we haven't seen as much progress from in our community.

Christy: And then on the inclusive economy and collaborative leaders, making sure we're holding ourselves accountable through bold metrics and transparent reporting. That's so important for economies. Again, talent today, they want to move to inclusive communities, communities that are welcoming of all people, and companies that are welcoming of all people and ideas. What are we doing to intentionally help drive that, not only in the business sector, but in our economy and community as a whole? And then, so you know, thinking about metrics like how are we closing income gaps in our community? What is the diversification of corporate boards and governing bodies in our community? How diverse is our workforce?

Christy: And I think all of that is to say, Jacob, that we think it's important that we're aggressive. We have a lot of intentionality around this plan, and we've pulled on a lot of partners, because as you can imagine, in things like degree completion rates, and certification programs, we are not the deliverer of that. We have higher ed partners who are, but we need to be [inaudible] the table, helping to convene and facilitate those conversations about how do we solve some of the challenges facing businesses, and how do we provide more opportunities for more of our people. And so while we are not by any means the sole organization involved in this work, I think that's the space that a lot of chambers, and a lot of communities are finding that key lever partner, who can facilitate this work and say, "Okay, we're all in this together. How do we help everyone understand the community vision, and then align all the partners to their work and the work that best suits their organization?"

Jacob: When you think about future jobs, what are you thinking about, or what are you seeing when you think about the future of jobs? Are you seeing certain jobs getting eliminated or replaced? Are you seeing new jobs being created? What does that landscape look like for you?

Christy: Absolutely. We are seeing a lot of that. We have a lot of freight companies here. Freight Alley is one of our brand names, so when you think about the logistics sector, you think just take that sector alone, and how AI is changing. So many components of technology are changing that sector. Health care is changing. There are a number of sectors that will see tremendous change over the course of the next five to ten years, to the point where thousands of jobs will be eliminated, and so that is part of what we did on our very aggressive, robust economic development strategy is had had a better handle on what

kind of jobs will not be around in a few years, and what kind of jobs and certification programs, et cetera, do we need to quickly start producing, in order to meet the future demands.

Christy: So, we're seeing more focus on two year degrees, and certification programs, versus four year degrees, and I think to a large extent, that's [inaudible] the country, and so when you look at a lot of states, and communities like Chattanooga, with a goal of having 75% of our residents with post-secondary credentials, be it a certification, or two year degree, or four year degree plus, there has to be more and more weight on that two year degree, in order to not only meet our goals, but also meet the demands that we're seeing from area employers. So, a tremendous amount of change is on the forefront as it relates to the types of occupations that are out there.

Jacob: What sorts of occupations? Because we talked a little bit from a high level, but if you're able to go maybe one layer deeper, what are some of the occupations that you think are going to be maybe more at risk, and where are some of the areas where you see these new occupations, or new jobs being created?

Christy: Okay, well let's take in manufacturing companies. When you go and you walk the floor with these companies, and you see, as automation is advancing, they are seeing a change in their workforce, where there are certain heavy labor, candidly in some cases, challenging physically [inaudible] people, being changed into more automated processes that require more technical skills around how to maneuver and work with automation. So, whether it's a robot, et cetera, okay, how to problem solve when something goes wrong, how to work with that piece of machinery, versus being the one to physically conduct some of the work. And so that is one area in particular where you see more of a demand for machinists, for example, those who have more technical skills, who can deliver what those products are that their company needs. Instead of, again, that earlier entry for them in the... For example, in the advanced manufacturing sector.

Jacob: Okay. That's a fair example. And the new areas, where are the new areas for job growth that you're seeing? Any new professions that you think are going to be emerging? Or new skills maybe that will be more relevant?

Christy: Well, you know it's interesting trying to peel the layers off of software and IT, that sector in particular, and what's fascinating about that one, and any occupations in the software and IT space, Jacob, as well know, is that's an undercurrent to all companies. So, all companies and organizations today [inaudible] have a heavy reliance on technology and software, et cetera, and so those types of occupations not only serve as sector support, but cross industry support. To the point where it's interesting, I was with a very high level CEO not too long ago in the health care sector, who said, "It's fascinating in our sector, we're a health care company. My background is health care, but I'm telling you now that my successor will be on the technology side of the house. They will have been a CIO, or a CTO, before they hit the CEO position for my organization."

Christy: And I think that's becoming more and more relevant to a number of industry sectors, where they may be actually technically in a different industry, but technology is such an

undercurrent to them that that expertise is so necessary to move that company forward. And so, to me, there's so many opportunities, and that occupational sector, you think about again, coding, and all the coding academies that communities have propped up, computer sciences. I mean again, you break down all the layers, there are so many opportunities, and many that we can't even see today that will be at the forefront in five and ten years from now.

Jacob: Yeah. Couldn't agree more, and it seems like technology is definitely causing a lot of change, and helping drive some of that across the board. Are you, and this is kind of a little tangent to this, thinking about technology, are you guys thinking about smart technology, self-driving cars, AI and automation, and the role that that might play in the city, as well?

Christy: Absolutely we are. I mean first of all, we're extremely excited that Volkswagen has announced their electric vehicle production here in Chattanooga, so there is a significant amount underway in Chattanooga and Hamilton County focused on electric vehicles. As I mentioned, we're a community that cares a lot about our environment. In addition, I will tell you there is a smart city initiative that is a partnership between EPB, which is our data provider, so our fiber provider here, in addition to our city, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and a few others on really following trends, and creating smart city infrastructure, so that we can follow... How are people driving on the street? How are they engaging on a street? How are pedestrians engaged with vehicles on a street?

Christy: Very thoughtful around what kind of research do they need to be producing to understand the future of electric vehicles, the future of how, again, pedestrians and drivers interface, and what transportation will look like in the future, so there is a lot of energy going on in that space in our community. Again, as I said, we have a very strong logistics sector here, and so our logistics leaders are really challenging our thinking in the community around logistics. For example, expanding parking at our airport. That's a project that's been underway, and we think is really important, but there's some who will say, "Hey, in 10 years will we need that?" Right?

Christy: It's where we are today, but also planning and thinking about where we're going to be in the future. As autonomous vehicles become more and more prevalent in our future, as electric vehicles become more and more present in our future, and it was interesting, I read a piece from FreightWaves, which is a local company here, around the average... I think it was lifespan of a car is 16.6 years, the average ownership, and so just the amount of time, they were actually saying it'll take us till 2040 until 90% of our population has electric vehicles, that you'll see electric vehicles at that prevalence on the streets. And that's just kind of an interesting stat to think about. I didn't pull it up here, but that was pretty much the gist of it, of how long will it take us to really move towards the majority of folks driving electric vehicles, and how can we intensify and further that movement, so that we're moving faster and smarter towards those new technologies like electric vehicles?

Jacob: Hey, my wife and I, our lease for our car is up in a couple months, and we're looking at electric vehicles, as well, so I-



Christy: That's great.

Jacob: Yeah, I definitely see that trend continuing quite a bit. What role do you think business plays in the future of cities? So, you talked about some of the things that you guys have going on, but what role do the organizations who are based in that city actually play, and how do you work with them?

Christy: Great question. So, chambers have been around for a long time. Our chamber, 130 years, and to me, a lot of times when you look back, and look at what have made cities tick for a number of years, it's either a lot of consistent public leadership, like a really strong mayor, who was a solid mayor for 20 years, 30 years in the position, which you do find some of those, or it's a very strong business community, often facilitated by a chamber, sometimes not, but typically. And so the businesses, I would argue, businesses in a community have really been the driving force for improvement and prosperity in a lot of communities.

Christy: Not solely. Again, in partnership with government, in partnership with other nonprofit partners. But businesses play a critical role. Going forward, I think they'll play an even more critical role. There is a lot of consistency in business. While things are changing rapidly, businesses are constant. They're there, they employ people, they're passionate about the community, and I think more and more, as we look at here, we have a 2.6 unemployment rate. When you're at 2.6, 2.8, your businesses are going to rely even more heavily on the economy and the community for the talent that they need, and as, again, talent becomes more and more important, it's so critical that we really focus, and businesses really focus and lean in towards K-12 education, towards early childhood, towards higher ed. They have a lot of motivation to do that, and to do that for the right reasons, for the benefit of the community, making sure again, it's a great quality of place, so that they're able to attract and retain the talent that they need.

Christy: And you know, again, I even think of organizations like EPB here, who really invested in 10 gig technology here in Chattanooga and Hamilton County, so they invested in their own infrastructure, understanding that that would help drive development and success in our community. And so, there are a number of companies who invest in organizations like chambers, and United Ways, and community foundations, to further their missions and impact the community, but you also have companies who can make tangible investments themselves directly in things like fiber infrastructure, that can really make a difference, and propel a community in a much faster track.

Jacob: When you think of the city of the future, what does the city of the future look like? Because there have been a couple articles that have been written, there are a couple studies that are out there about the city of the future, but what does that actually mean? What does that look like to you?

Christy: Oh wow, what a question. Gosh. Okay, so to me, the city of the future is one that is a mosaic of our world. When you look at it, you look at the people in the city, you see this beautiful mosaic of a variety of colors, a variety of attributes, all of which are welcomed and celebrated. You see a thriving city with prosperous jobs, a variety of job opportunities for people. You see a city where more, really in a perfect world, all

students have access to great education, all people have access to great jobs, and a city that really welcomes feedback from its people, and challenges itself to always be better and improve.

Christy: I mean, just like any organization, the competition never stops, nor does it in cities, right? There's always another city trying to outpace you on an economic development project, or create a better outdoor quality of life, or more bike trails. There's always something, so as a city, you have to pivot, and you have to stay on the tip of your toes, and be ready to continue to evolve, and respond to not only the needs of the community, but to also have forward thinking members in your community, who are thinking about what are the trends, what are the trends in work? What are the trends in community problem solving? And being aggressive and unabashed about solving those opportunities, and maximizing really solutions.

Jacob: So, basically cities compete against each other the same way that companies compete against each other. I mean, is that a fair statement?

Christy: Absolutely, and while it was always that way, I feel like the stakes are even higher now that talent, again, goes back to what we were talking about, that work has changed, that people choose cities first. I mean, many people, not everyone, but a lot of people choose cities first, or even if they don't, and they choose the job, they... A quick second is, "Wait a minute, what is the community like, and how can I envision myself in that city?" And as such, that means cities need to provide more offerings, more opportunities for people to engage and feel a part of the community.

Christy: And so, while that competition has always been there, it's more intense, and I would say to some degree, co-opetition, right? I mean, all of the cities in Tennessee [inaudible 00:35:49], while we compete with some of them, we're also all in this state together, and all of us want the best for Tennessee. Similarly in our region, we are all interdependent on one another, even though we're across three different states, and 16 different counties, what happens in some of our neighboring counties directly impacts our ability in Chattanooga to be successful.

Christy: So, while we are in competition, it's kind of a term I love to use, is co-opetition, because we collaborate and cooperate together significantly, as well, because we see the bigger picture of how we do impact and influence one another.

Jacob: How important is having \$10 avocado toast to... I live in the Bay Area, so that's... We get a lot of... There have been a lot of articles, actually, written recently about the Bay Area, and how it's losing its soul, and \$10 avocado toast. I actually know a lot of people who have moved out of the Bay Area, to places like Colorado, or Austin, places nearby, which is interesting, because a lot of people think of the Bay Area as this tech and innovation hub, but we have our own problems here, so I hope we get our act together soon.

Christy: Great question. Yeah. Well, in fact I was just in the Bay Area in September, speaking on behalf of Chambers for Innovation and Clean Energy, and you know, a couple points on this. So, first of all, love avocado toast. We have it for \$6 here. \$9, depending.

Jacob: That's a deal.

Christy: But yeah, so it's a great deal, and it's fantastic. Tried it at a few of our local eateries. But yeah, it's so important to have that local flair, that local flavor, to keep your soul as a community, and understand your soul, and that's what a lot of Velocity 2040 was about for us, is understanding our soul, and at the essence, who are we, and who do we want to continue to be, and then how do our strategies align with that?

Christy: And you know, those local independent restaurants, that local flair, all of that is so critical to an ecosystem, and a community ecosystem.

Jacob: I feel like the Bay Area is losing a lot of that, unfortunately. What role does leadership play behind this? I mean, I don't know about the inner workings of what's going on in the Bay Area, and why there's so many issues, and struggles, and I don't know, maybe it's the wrong people in positions of power. There are all sorts of reasons for why people are getting upset at the Bay Area, but it seems to me that having the right leadership is also important. Have you ever gotten any pushback on any of your initiatives, where people are like, "Oh, this is crazy, this is a waste of money?"

Christy: Oh. There's this whole... It's interesting, because again, I'm from the outside, if you will, here. And I think it's process matters, Jacob, is what I would say. We have done quite a bit in this visioning work, and the strategic work that is bold for our community, and we wanted it to be bold, but our process was very inclusive. Inclusive of a number of stakeholders, a number of people, and so I think process matters, and leadership matters, to answer your question. Leadership absolutely matters, and one of the things that I've said about Chattanooga, again, as I was saying earlier, our secret sauce really is our ability to risk take and be innovative, and really seize on opportunities.

Christy: And one of the things I'm most excited about right now is the lineup of our leadership. We have some amazing leaders in this community, and key partner organizations, and we are all really rowing in the same direction, and it's leaders who don't really care who get the credit, but we're all focused on the same target, and we're rowing as fast as we can. And that's... That, to me, is impressive.

Christy: We all understand our lanes, to a large part, and where there are gray areas, we try to work through that, and say, "Okay, what parts are you better at, what parts are we better at?" And then let's figure out a solution. But leadership absolutely matters, and tying that leadership towards a common vision, I think is a great thread to have for a community. It helps everyone see what the larger goal is, and how often what we think are differences really are not that far apart.

Jacob: For people listening to this podcast, obviously who live in a city, is there anything that citizens can do to help shape this future city? I'm assuming get involved with their local chambers of commerce?

Christy: Absolutely. Great plug for chambers. A lot of times, it's interesting, a lot of times people don't realize this. So, chambers are membership organizations. We have 2,000 members

here, and any employee of those 2,000 members are considered members of the chamber, and can absolutely reach out to us and engage, and for younger listeners, a lot of chambers have young professional organizations, where it's kind of that 21 to 40 year old crowd. Great opportunities there.

Christy: A lot of communities have, again like I said, we have Chattanewbies, or groups like that for newer members of the community that are ways to engage. A lot of times you can find [inaudible] meet up information online, via social media, around different groups to get involved in. I would say call your elected officials. Call your city council member. If you have county commissioners, or a county mayor, reach out to them. How can I help? Call your state legislators if there's something you're passionate about, and figure out how to volunteer, how to get engaged. Call your United Way.

Christy: I mean, there are a number of organizations always seeking to find great volunteers, and often thought leaders. Sometimes it isn't, "I need you to help build this house," often it's, "I need your brain around a strategic initiative in the community, and how we can really leverage some change here."

Jacob: Fair enough. Yeah. I mean, simple and straightforward. What about for business leaders who are part of organizations that are thinking about the future city. I mean, this is in their best interest as well, right? Because if you invest in the city, and you can then attract and retain the best people, so what advice do you have for business leaders of organizations?

Christy: Yes, definitely get involved, call on your chamber, call on business organizations. If you're a realtor, there's usually a realtors' association, so they're often association groups. Call on your chamber. A lot of chambers host leadership programs, like we have Leadership Chattanooga. Find out what that's about. Sometimes they have them for newer members of the community, sometimes they're for newer leaders, or developing leaders. Other times, for established leaders in the community, but find out about those. Go online, see what kind of leadership opportunities there are in your community, and see if that's a good fit for you, or some of your senior executive leaders.

Christy: But absolutely, pretty much every community in the country has a chamber of commerce. There are over 7,500 chambers throughout the U.S., so they can always help point you in the correct direction.

Jacob: Great. Great. You're making me want to get involved with my local chamber of commerce here, now. I might have to give them a call after we're done with the podcast here.

Christy: Good. You should. I'm familiar with the San Francisco chamber, for sure.

Jacob: So, what else do you want people to know, either about your initiative, about the city of the future? Is there anything that we didn't get a chance to touch on, that you wanted to make sure that we explore?

Christy: I think for me, it would just be to all the listeners, get involved, get engaged, be innovative. Make sure your community is being as innovative as your organizations are, and don't be afraid to lend your voice, and I think in the world we live in today, I think tone matters, I think the way in which we say things matters, so being that positive, being a positive voice for progress, being thoughtful and respectful about how you make suggestions, and how you approach leaders in the community and elected officials. In a world where people are often being spoken to negatively, people put their names on a ballot. That takes a lot of courage in today's world, and so folks who really want to [inaudible] them, and encourage them, and be mindful that again, we're all passionate about this community, and how can we really dig in and move the needle?

Christy: That's what the future of cities is about. It's about people, and in fact, that's what Velocity 2040 in Chattanooga's all about. It's about people. It's a people focused plan, and I would encourage all cities to be as focused on their people as they can be.

Jacob: Where can people go to learn more about you, or some of these initiatives that you talked about, in case they want to maybe bring something back to their chamber, or their cities?

Christy: Sure. Well, of course we have our website, the chattanooga-chamber.com, so feel free to check us out, chattanooga-chamber.com. There's also information on our visioning process at velocity2040.com, so again, velocity2040.com, so those are a couple of opportunities. Also, chattanoogatrend.com, chatatnoogatrend.com is a publication that we produce, and you can learn more about our specific chamber of commerce. Like I said, there are... We also have a podcast, by the way, I should mention that. Chattanooga Works-

Jacob: You got an award for your podcast, didn't you?

Christy: Yes we did. Nationally award-winning podcast. So, we were pretty pumped about that, but yes, Chattanooga Works, so check that out, and again, 7,500 chambers in the country, so you can always look up, plug in your local city, do a search, local city chamber, and you'll find it, and so yeah, so many easy ways to plug in and find out what's going on in your community, and we couldn't be more excited about what's happening in Tennessee, and in Chattanooga and Hamilton County, specifically, and we're so grateful, Jacob, for this opportunity to share some thoughts with you today.

Jacob: Oh, my pleasure, and by the way, you guys got a couple awards, right? Chattanooga was the first ever city to be named... To be twice named Outside Magazine's Best Town Ever.

Christy: Yes.

Jacob: And ranked one of U.S. News's best places to live, and I also read that your gigabyte, or gigabit network is 200 times faster than the national average, so you guys are racking up all sorts of awards for being a great city and a great place to live.

Christy: Yes, thank you very much. That we are. The list is long, and we're fortunate, so thank you.

Jacob: Oh, of course. Of course. Well, congratulations on all the wonderful work that you're doing. I hope people will listen to this, and get inspired, and maybe they'll want to relocate there, maybe they'll get more involved with their chambers, and talk to their organizations about getting involved with their local communities, as well, because we all live in a city, so it's important for us to pay attention and think about what the future of that city's going to look like, so thanks for sharing your insights and your ideas.

Christy: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much, Jacob, and we welcome all newcomers to Chattanooga.

Jacob: I like it. Next time I'm there, I'll make sure to say hello.

Christy: Please do.

Jacob: And thanks everyone for tuning in. My guest, again, has been Christy Gillenwater, president and CEO of the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce. Make sure to check them out and see some of the cool work that they're doing, and get involved with your own local area chamber of commerce, and I will see all of you guys next week.