

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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00:01 Jacob: Hello everyone, welcome to another episode of The Future of Work show with Jacob Morgan. Today's guest is Tom Rath. He is the bestselling author of many books, including one that I'm sure all you've heard of called StrengthsFinder 2.0. And he has a brand new book, which I had the opportunity to read, it's called Life's Great Question: Discover How You Contribute to the World. Tom, thank you for joining me.

00:27 Tom: Thanks so much. It's an honor to be with you.

00:29 Jacob: So before we jump into all the fun stuff in the book, which by the way was a lot of fun to read, there were some very valuable insights in here. Let's start with some background information about you. How did you get involved with this stuff, with Gallup, with all the work that you've been doing?

00:47 Tom: Yeah, you know I started off... I grew up in a family where my grandfather was a psychologist and teacher, and I started a business when I was young along with a lot of other family members around me. So when I was graduating from Michigan after I finished my undergraduate back in the late, last few years of the 90s, Don, my grandfather asked me to join him in working on a research project that I'd been helping him with over the summers. And he was trying to take all of this information that he'd accumulated on inventories of human talents that he'd done mostly in person-to-person telephonic interviews and put that on the internet, that was kind of the time of the emergence of the internet. So I moved back to Nebraska where Don was to spend some time working with him on this project, which was an amazing and meaningful effort for the first few years. And the project we were working on ended up being called StrengthsFinder and that fed into a lot of the books that you mentioned and that a lot of people may be familiar with.

01:56 Tom: And then about two or three years into that project, I found out that Don was ill with a stage IV gastroesophageal cancer and so, given how close the two of us had been and I kind of become a self-taught expert in fighting cancer since starting to battle cancer when I was 16-years-old back then, we traveled all over the country trying to figure out how to keep him alive a little bit longer and set aside some of the StrengthsFinder work we were doing at the time. Somewhere in the middle of that, we were down in Houston at a Cancer Treatment Center, and Don had always mentioned in his speaking and talks that it was too bad that we waited until people were gone to eulogize them and say all these great things about their life. So I wrote Don a 10 or 15 page letter about all the amazing things that he'd done for me in my life, and I gave it to him in that hotel we were at in Houston. And I was... One thing I learned it was an incredible moving experience. I'm really glad I did that, and I know it meant a lot to him.

02:58 Tom: What surprised me most was a couple of days later, he said, "You know, I've been

reading, re-reading that letter, and I spotted a real talent for bringing things to life with words." That's what he said. And he said, "I think we should write a book about your story and this topic, and I think we should work on that book in the next two months." And it was kind of an interesting asset because I'd never considered myself a writer at all. In fact, I had an AP English teacher tell me to stick with numbers and math. So, if Don hadn't challenged me to work on that project with him under really extreme circumstances there, I don't think I would have ever gotten involved in books and writing. So that's exactly what led to my spending a lot more time in that area over the last 15, 20 years.

03:47 Jacob: Wow, that's a cool story. So this... It's not something that you set out to do.

03:53 Tom: No, not at all. I'm a lot more comfortable with a spreadsheet and a computer screen [chuckle] than I am sharing my writing and stories with people, especially, or with speaking in front of audiences, 'cause none of those are things that necessarily come naturally for me, but Don was very helpful in spotting something that he thought could make a difference for people and challenging both of us to do something there. And that book that we were working on turned out to, it was called *How Full Is Your Bucket?* And it went on to not only do really well as a business book back then, but now it's used in K-12 elementary schools all over the country, which is really fun to see how his work and legacy continues on like that.

04:34 Jacob: Wow, yeah, that's fantastic. And then I guess that brings us to your new book, *Life's Great Question*, which I believe is coming out next year, right? A couple of more months from now.

04:44 Tom: Yeah, it's out in February of 2020. There are actually two books, there's the business book with the application part of it, and website and profile people can build and then there's also a pure story-based form that we've been working on with Amazon Original Stories. It's more just all narrative, that's out in early 2020 as well.

05:05 Jacob: Very cool, and what led you to write this one? And what is this one even about?

05:11 Tom: Yeah, the *Life's Great Question* book is the product of... Kind of the last three to five years, I've really been personally reflecting on, given my own health challenges and threats and my mortality, what are the most important things for people to get focused on? In particular, most of my writing and research is focused on that nexus of people and organizations, and how can we help people to lead better lives through the organizations that they're a part of? And one thing I've observed after 20 years of kind of following this area is that we're often so quick to look inward and think about self-development and our own brand and how we can improve personally, and the more I have studied these topics, my big takeaway is that we can get more done and life is less stressful and more liberating when we find real concrete ways to focus almost all of our energies on the contribution we're making to other people.

06:10 Tom: And in addition to a lot of my early days with Don, what's really inspired me recently is every so often you see the famous quote from Dr. King and I think the exact quote is, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is what are you doing for others?" And that sounds like kind of a broad existential question but what I've learned is, I asked myself that question almost every day because it's a really good way to orient my time in the next eight hours, so I ensure that I'm spending good quality time with my kids that will get to kinda grow and live on when I'm not there, I'm working on projects that will continue to grow and books that can continue to produce results when I'm not working on them in the moment. When you start to think about the meaningful

influence of your work each day, it also just takes a lot of the small stressors off your plate where you're worried about things that are often internal.

07:11 Jacob: Actually, well, I'm sure a lot of people struggle with this. It's something I struggle with a lot because somebody that works for themselves, I'm constantly caught up in like the day to day proposals, projects, where's my speaking gig? During my week, making these videos... It's the day to day stuff and sometimes it's a little bit hard to take that big picture perspective of like what are you actually doing to help others? So, I love that quote. I think that's actually how you start the book is with that quote, which I thought was a great one. One are the things that you talk about very, very early in the book, and there are a lot of really wonderful quotes in there, but one of the first things that caught my attention was you said, "Move from you are what you do to you are how you help." And I thought maybe you can unpack that one for just a minute or two and explain what you mean by that?

08:05 Tom: Yeah, I've observed over the years in working with a lot of people to help 'em uncover their talents and develop as better leaders and the like, that it's really easy to get caught up in having your entire identity based around what you do functionally in a given day. So, when I go to a cocktail party or a soccer game with my kids over the weekend, it's people are always asking, especially around here in Washington DC, what do you do? And that's, if you're an attorney, if you're in commercial real estate, whatever it might be that's kind of a part of your identity. And those generic labels people tell me about what they do, honestly, it doesn't tell me much about who they are as a person or why they do what they do, and so I always ask a few more questions to unpack that about what they spend their time doing during the day and how that benefits people.

09:03 Tom: And what I've found is the more that we can help people to get closer to the beneficiary of their efforts in a given day, it just makes us feel better about the work we're doing each day if... To kinda step back, the other... Second reason I wrote this book and worked on this kind of website and application around it is because I'm increasingly convinced that the typical relationship between a person and the organization they work for in society is flat out broken on average.

09:33 Jacob: Couldn't agree with you more.

09:34 Tom: Most organizations are kind of a detriment to the health and well-being of the person, and it doesn't need to be that way. There's a lot of evidence I've uncovered surrounding that, but I think we can kind of get people... My grandpa used to talk about this too, that we can get people done through work, I think he said it like that. And that's the reason I love pouring in my work towards organizations is because I think organizations are just the biggest and most influential social networks in the fabric of our society today, and that means they can be rallied to create a lot of improvement in people's lives if we start to ask those questions.

10:11 Jacob: What is wrong with organizations? You say kind of the relationship that we have is broken. Why is it broken? And has it always been like this or has there ever been a time when things were going well?

10:24 Tom: I think a lot of the basic structure and framework of what exists between people and organizations today is the product of more of an industrial area where I paid you a fee for a service and if you completed said service you received the monetary reward. And in reality, so that contract that exists today isn't that much further evolved in a basic monetary bribe, but we fail to kind of talk about the realities of that in a lot of ways. So that's where we're evolving from. And I think the

question is how quickly can we get to a place where each of us as individuals and organizations start to say, "Are we producing people who are better off when they go home at night?" They're healthier and they're more financially secured, that does matter.

11:17 Tom: They have better relationship with their family members because they chose to be a part of this organization. And to be real honest with you, if you look at the arc of my own career, I've spent a lot of time on employee engagement, employee experience type work, and companies have gotten really good at discerning how much discretionary effort they're extracting from us as individuals in a given day, that's almost down to a science, and companies should be doing that. But as much as I've spent 5, 10 years trying to get companies to also measure and prove that they're adding to people's overall well-being and health and lives, they're just not getting there fast enough.

12:01 Tom: So, a key realization for me as I started to work on this book three plus years ago was I think we've gotta challenge ourselves to say, "Each of us has the responsibility to make sure that we're not tolerating a job or a work that's making our lives worse at the end of the day than we were when we showed up in the morning." And we need to start to ask some of those critical questions, ask the people around us, ask your best friend or your spouse, "Do you think I'm a better person because I'm doing this job right now versus where I was a year ago?" And sometimes they can help hold up a mirror where we need it as well.

12:17 Jacob: And this is... I mean this is something I've explored for quite some time now as well. And yeah, I mean this is a huge, huge challenge for a lot of organizations. I think, thankfully, we're starting to see a little bit of movement in that direction, but I'm curious why do you think that this is something organizations struggle with? Is it because they're just focused on the dollars and cents aspects of the business?

12:17 Tom: Yeah, I mean an organization today in most cases is not wired to put those things first. It's... There's been so much worthwhile emphasis on the need to do things that are always kinda have fiduciary responsibility and it's in the best interest of shareholders that's held out there. It's also just sometimes easier for leaders to fall to a bottom line that's easier to find and read, where measuring whether you're adding collective well-being to citizens or people that work for your company, that's hard to do and it's more subjective. So I do agree with you though, that I think one thing is the generation entering the workforce today has much higher expectations about a more holistic relationship and contract with their employer than people did when I was entering college or a generation before me.

14:01 Tom: It gets better one generation at a time and that's speeding up. And I also see... I mean a lot of the, frankly, a lot of the organizations I've worked with in the Bay Area, and CEOs I talked to there, they're kind of almost at that point where, "Of course we care about well-being and we're doing all these things and we're looking at that very carefully." And then, I'll spend time with groups on the East Coast or the Midwest, and it's more one in every 20 leaders really feel like they're doing a lot in that regard. So you can see how... If that's a leading indicator, as it often is in business trends, that will start to shift in an organizational societal level as well. But I think one thing I've been trying hard to do is to figure out anything that we can do to accelerate that important conversation, because the... Right now, my... This is very subjective.

14:53 Tom: Usually, I'll add a million disclaimers if I'm talking about something without research... Without direct research behind it here, but I think most of us are showing up for work in a given day and worried about, I don't know, 30-40% of the potential we have in terms of having the energy

we need to be our best. And so we've gotta find ways to put people's health and well-being and energy first, even just for the sake of productivity and quality and all these metrics that companies are really good at gauging today.

15:26 Jacob: I was just gonna ask you about that because a lot of organizations, you know, they're trying to balance sort of like the productivity and the efficiency of the health... Or the health and well-being of their employees. And sometimes... And I don't know if you've ever had anybody say this to you, has anybody ever said, "Hey Tom, these types of things are expensive, right? Health and well-being programs, looking after our employees, that stuff costs money and we can't show a direct return on it." We're just focusing on kind of being profitable, making more money because that's what our stakeholders and shareholders care about. So are those two mutually exclusive or can one benefit the other?

16:06 Tom: So not only are they mutual... They're not mutually exclusive, where even if a person has more energy there's all kind of research showing how much more productive they are in less time and the like. There's also a lot of good work emerging in the last 10 years, and we started to look at this when I was at Gallup a decade ago, that hours number 40 through 60 are nowhere near as good, quality or productivity-wise as hours 0 to 20. And hours passed 60 take 14 out of 15 outcomes downhill. So they're not mutually exclusive as you mentioned. Another... The other thing is to be really honest, and I almost hesitate to say this because I've been involved in some of these industries for quite a while, but a lot of the money, the cash that organizations spend on so-called wellness programs and the like right now, I just... You don't even have to do that.

17:00 Tom: I don't even know if I'd bother because what I've learned the hard way is that if you're spending millions of dollars out of your HR and benefits department for wellness programs to motivate people, to take more steps or eat better or whatever, and you have an executive team that's continually burning through people and expecting people to respond at 10 o'clock at night and 2 in the afternoon on a Sunday, and they're the opposite of the example, I think some of those programs might even do more harm than good. So just don't... I would start in different directions and say, "Before you spend a dollar on one of those programs, make sure that your leaders are good role models because if your leaders aren't good role models, no one's going to feel like they have the permission to go move around and be active or work out more." They're not gonna feel like they have the permission to say, "I can't be there then, because then I wouldn't even be able to get enough sleep to be competent." And so, until leaders become a part of that conversation about well-being, I don't think it's going anywhere.

18:04 Jacob: Yeah, that's funny because I've witnessed a lot of those organizations first hand where they have these beautiful health and wellness centers and gyms and perks and healthy meals and snacks and you talk to some of the employees there and they hate their leaders inside that organization. The analogy I always like to use, it's sort of like making upgrades to the outside of the car, where you leave the engine the same.

18:31 Tom: Right.

18:32 Jacob: We just kind of like paint the exterior, and we put a nice little spoiler on there, we change the rims, but it's still got that same crappy engine that's been in that car for the last 30, 40 years. And yeah, I mean perks, and I think you would agree, are never a strategy. They're just kind of like a little icing on the cake and you gotta start with those workplace practices.

18:56 Tom: It's interesting, the thing I've learned is... And I'm someone who, even though I've written books on health topics, I would never preach or advocate any health ideas or practices to any of my friends or family members, that's just not who I am. And I think a lot of leaders put themselves on that same boat, but the refreshing thing I've learned is that leader... All leaders need to do is just be good role models, and if they only worry about that, that'll take care of 80% of it. And if some people like to advocate beyond that, that's great, but I think it's simple... It's as simple as leaders need to be good examples of those health and well-being practices, and then everything else can flow from there.

19:12 Jacob: Do you have any suggestions for what those types of practices might be? So for some leaders listening to this who wanna be that role model, what should they do, how do they become that?

19:49 Tom: Yeah, and I wrote a book with real... With 100 real specific ideas called Eat Move Sleep a few years ago on these practices, but it starts with some basic things, where I grew up in a real hard-working culture where no leader ever admitted that they needed a whole eight hours of sleep, but yet 97.5% of us do and only 2% of us can get away with less than seven hours over a sustained period of time. So I think talking about how you need sleep, you need thought time as a leader, and you respect people taking that time and you don't expect them to be up at all hours and responding, I think that's a big one because we don't talk about sleep enough in the workplace.

20:30 Tom: But I've spent sometime with the Army's former Surgeon General, Patty Horoho, and she talks about sleep as ammunition for troops' brains in the battlefield. And she compares sleeplessness to having troops in combat who are intoxicated in the field, and how you can't afford that. And we've gotta start to think about sleep like that and talk about it. I've changed the way I deal with my kids in that regard, where I don't send my kids to bed if they're being bad. Think about the message those little things send. And instead the first thing I ask my kid in the mornings is, "Did you get a good night sleep? And if not, how do we fix that?" So I think for leaders to talk about things like sleep, for leaders to show and demonstrate that they value getting activity throughout the day, they're not sitting hunched over in meetings all the time where people don't even have the implicit permission to stand up and walk around a room when you're in meetings. We gotta find more active ways to learn and move around.

21:25 Tom: I shadowed the CEO of Steelcase, big furniture company, for part of a day about a year ago. And boy it was inspiring the way he just... Every time he's on a phone call he's on his headset pacing up and down the hallway. And he also is intentional about not scheduling back to back meetings in the same room because it forces him to get up and move around their big campus and to have time to decompress after each meeting. Doug Conant, who's the old CEO of Campbell Soup, that I know, he talked to me about the way he just put on his white tennis shoes and walked all over their corporate headquarters for an hour or two a day because it built him relationships, he had all these conversations he wouldn't have otherwise had, and he showed people he valued activity. So those are a few little examples of what leaders can do.

22:12 Jacob: Those are great stories. And they are simple and practical, so it's something anyone can do. Getting back to your book, one of the things that you also mentioned in there, and this is another quote, is, "You can't be anything you want to, but you can be a lot more of who you already are." And I read that quote and most people always say, especially parents to their kids, "You can be anything you wanna be." And I'm sure a lot of listeners to this are thinking, wait a minute, did Tom just say you can't be anything you wanna be? So what do you mean by that?

22:47 Tom: This is what I learned from my grandfather, Don Clifton, who started studying this topic back in 1960. And really it's kind of the way I grew up and learning about this is if you think about it from a very practical standpoint, each of us is born with a very unique and distinct talents and abilities to do different things really, really well. And I mean the good thing is, everybody does have the potential to be great at something I believe. Or at least everybody has the potential to be better than a 1000 other people at something. But to say that any of us... To say that... I always grew up dreaming of being the next Michael Jordan, but gravity and genes and skill and all kinds of other things told me that that was not happening by the time I was about 16, no matter how much I wanted and tried. And I think it's once you've realized that even if you can't literally be anything, there are a lot of areas where you can be great then it feeds into a healthier mindset.

23:53 Tom: And it's also, the bigger thing that's challenged me in the last 10-20 years that I've looked at this, is we need to think about that equation from the perspective of how we spend our time because what I've realized is that if I spend my time trying to be a little bit good at everything, it almost eliminates my chances of being great at anything in life because if you try and be well-rounded essentially, which is the other end of that continuum, you spread yourself so thin that you're just a watered down version of yourself. So it's about focusing your time and efforts where they will yield the greatest return.

24:32 Jacob: And so, I guess if you were giving advice to a child or to somebody else, you wouldn't say, "You can be anything you wanna be," but you would use that exact quote, "You can be a lot more of who you already are."

24:44 Tom: Right. And I've seen this from day one with... My kids are now eight and ten, but you can see it when they're three or four the way... My son just has this curiosity, and asking questions that just won't quit and will never stop, and does that better than anyone I've known, and he has a distinct personality and distinct talents that are just night and day different from my daughter, who's more quiet and inquisitive. And I have to literally put my face between her and a book to get her out of that book 'cause she's so deeply focused in there.

25:19 Tom: There are these things that you see at young ages that kids start to do so well without any... With the same environment. They both have the same nurturing environment essentially. And I think the really exciting thing is to begin to help kids at a younger age to capitalize on the areas where they're already naturally excelling. The study that Don had Gallup ask people, I think it was almost 20 years ago now, was, "Let's say your child shows up at home with the following grades: An A, a C and F, which grade deserves the most time and attention?"

25:47 Tom: And in every country, Gallup conducted that study in seven countries, in every country the vast majority of parents obviously said the F deserves the most time and attention. But it's a trick question, because if you really think about where that young person, an example, the young woman, let's say, has the most potential for success and development and growth, 10, 20, 30 years down the road, I'd bet all my chips it's in the area where she's getting an A when she's in grade school and not an area where she's getting the F.

25:47 Jacob: Yeah, well, that speaks volumes to me because I was never a good student. So... That sounds a lot like some of my grades. No, and I think that makes a lot of sense. We tend to very much focus on the weaknesses in ourselves and in our people, instead of focusing on the strengths, and that's one of the things that I talk about as well in my upcoming book on leadership, coming out

in January, is great leaders typically do that and they do a very good job of that. Very much related to this, and this is gonna be very controversial; I know a lot of people are gonna be sending questions or asking about this. There is a big sort of culture now, and you typically see this with celebrities, with people who are very successful, and every time they get an award or every time they get a platform, they always say, "You can follow your dreams, follow your passions." Where do you stand on that? Would you give that advice to somebody of just follow your dreams, follow your passions?

27:18 Tom: You know I... As I have aged, I guess, to put it frankly, one of the things I like most, I get most excited when I feel like something I've kind of assumed or believed for a long time is proven wrong. I get up each morning and read hoping to prove myself wrong at this point. So 10 years ago, I would have said, "Yes, that's great advice." The more I've studied this topic and looked at a lot of recent research and studied people who have spent a lot of time digging in into this in more depth than I have, I think that following your passion as a primary goal, excuse me, is a little bit perhaps misguided in that we're better off following our contributions and where have we done things that have made a difference for other people that can have a positive influence on the world, because if you really get into looking at passions, I might be very passionate about my golf game, or my obscure stamp collection, or whatever it might be, but if that doesn't serve the world or serve a broader purpose for the world, I'm not sure it's as sustainable or as valuable for society over time.

28:41 Tom: And so one thing I challenge myself to do, which I hadn't spent time on before, and I kinda ask people to do and walk through as a part of the book *Life's Great Question*, is to start with what the world needs, and then map back and say, "How can you leverage your natural talents," like we were just talking about, "to best meet what the world around you needs?" And I think if you start with what you can contribute and what the world needs, you're essentially starting with a more meaningful end in mind than just starting with passion.

29:18 Jacob: Yeah, I think that's great advice as well. I mean, I was in the same boat where I always believed that kind of follow your passions, follow your dreams. But the more I sort of progressed in my career, I realized that it's better to just bring your passion with you to the work that you're doing if you can, instead of just trying to chase that. But you know in my case, I'm passionate about chess and racquetball. And you know, I gotta be honest, I don't see a bright future in my chess career or my racquetball career. So instead, I bring the passion that I have for certain areas into this kind of work, in the leadership and employee experience stuff. And so I tend to very, very much agree with you that that's probably not the best piece of advice that we wanna be giving people.

30:02 Tom: And the other thing is, yeah, I think as I've gotten older, and with some of my own challenges and health threats and everything we talked about, I think there's more and more desire to spend an hour of time and energy on something that can continue to grow in your absence, whether that's a project you're working on that yields dividends for people who go through a program or read a book or an hour you invest in somebody's development who looks to you for leadership at work, all those things kinda get to live on and they'll keep growing, I mean hopefully, for generations to come. Whereas the great racquetball game will live on in the glory in your mind but it might not have an influence a generation from now, right?

30:50 Jacob: It's probably... Yeah, that's... I don't think anybody in a generation's gonna be looking at my racquetball videos on YouTube. As much as that would be nice, I don't think it'll happen. The subtitle of your book is, "Discover how you contribute to the world." How do you discover that?

31:12 Tom: That's really where I spent a lot of time working on, is how can you help people to unpack that in a really practical way? And one of the things I quickly realized as I started working on this is that our current means for summarizing our life's work, e.g. A resume, couldn't be less personal and more sterile if we tried to make it so. And as I realized just how insufficient those means are that what I've been trying to assemble as an online activity for readers of the book, so everybody who reads the book has a code to go build this profile, and that profile asks people some of the more meaningful questions. So what are the big roles you play in life that you wanna be remembered by? So, for me, that's being a dad, a husband, and a researcher.

32:00 Tom: And what are the life experiences that have most influenced my work? So, I've put those into the system. And then I say, "What are my natural strengths," like we've been talking about. And then I go through a series of questions that ask me about how I want to contribute in my current work. And I think as people go through those activities and it puts together a nice one-page baseball card of discovering how you contribute to the world, I hope that not only is that insightful for each reader as an individual but most importantly that they use it to have a discussion with a peer or with a loved one, ideally, with a team they're working with, to say, "Here's how each of us can optimize our contributions to this effort, so we're not all doing the current default, which is running 1000 miles an hour in the same direction and hoping things turn out well." You have a more practical and scripted conversation about how each person can make a complementary contribution to a team, if that makes sense.

33:02 Jacob: Yeah, no, it's funny just how lame and outdated a traditional resume is, and it's, I don't know how many decades old a resume is, when those things were even created, but it's still very much what we use now. And the scary thing is now that we even have algorithm and bots who review resumes of human candidates to look for certain key words to decide if those people even deserve a chance to interview with the company. And there's no focus at all on your purpose, on your contributions. It's really just about these key words and the skills that you might be able to bring to the company. Very impersonal indeed. You actually broke your book up into three areas, which were create, relate, and operate. And I know we just have 15 minutes or so left. Can you give maybe a couple sentences about each one of those just so that listeners can start to think in terms of those three buckets and what they should start doing?

34:01 Tom: Yeah, and those three categories you mentioned were just a product of my reflection about, what are the three things that any team we get together from a work standpoint, essentially needs to do. There are a lot more things they need to do, but what are the fundamental things you need present around each team from a contribution standpoint? The first one you mentioned is we need to create something, we've gotta find a way to put something together. And that's an interesting example because most times when I join a team, we kinda form teams with like-minded people. And so I end up on a team with a lot of people who wanna create stuff. And then because we're just all stuck in this, we wanna create new things and have a vision about what's next. We spend all that time in that area and we don't spend as much time in that second kind of team category, that's about relating to one another.

34:53 Tom: And that's the one spot where I think most work teams, they're the most deficient, where they don't spend enough time having people who are dedicated to saying, "We need to build stronger relationships and continue to grow so that we can keep connecting one another and having a bigger influence on the world and energizing our efforts on a daily basis." And so that's a piece that's often absent and then the third area, the team has to operate and execute and get things done.

And so, we often just jump into things and forget to look at that as well, and any successful team has to have people who are essentially achieving and getting things done, and they've got to have people who are figuring out how they adapt to changing environments and organizing our efforts so they can scale and reach more people over time. So that's a real quick synopsis of some of the core elements that we need present around a team. And you don't even need the online tool or the book to...

35:53 Tom: I think for any time you're bringing a team together to just sit around and say, "What do we each want to contribute, and how can we kind of balance that out, so we get the things done that we're supposed to do?" 98% of teams I see today don't even have a basic expectation of one-on-one conversation like that, but they need it.

36:15 Jacob: Yeah, no, they should. Both individuals and for teams, I think it's very helpful for everyone. You talk a lot about purpose in the book, and I've talked about purpose with several podcast guests in the past as well, is purpose something that you find and who is responsible for your purpose?

36:39 Tom: I think that finding purpose and finding your greatest contribution is almost always a journey, and it takes a lifetime. And then it's just about how far you've made it along that continuum. I often joke that I've, but it's true, I've never met anyone who just fell out of college right into the perfect position. And I've also never met anybody who experienced a career growth pattern that was just perfectly linear and a nice smooth growth curve. It's almost always you take two steps back, you take three steps forward, you take a step back and it's spiky and it's bumpy. And I think finding your purpose and contributions over time is spiking and bumpy as well. And it's why it's also important to not view your career progression as kind of an all or nothing thing where, "Oh, this job is just all bad. I need to find a whole new one."

37:38 Tom: I think in most cases, there's more room for growth, kind of honing the job that you have into one that you can grow in and love over time as there is jumping from one job to the next. And usually, we just don't take enough time to step back and say, "How can I see the meaningful contribution being produced through my current work, and how can I adapt my day to contribute even more and to have higher well-being in the process in a job that's..." I think we're actually thinking about purpose and a job that's more sustainable over time as well, where it's not run, run, run to burn yourself out and then fall back, but you create a curve that you can at least smooth it out as much as possible over time.

38:20 Jacob: And there's a lot of conversation now with leaders helping their employees find that sense of purpose. Is it up to the leader, is it up to the company, is it up to the individual or who's ultimately responsible for helping you find or discover or uncover what that purpose is, what those contributions are?

38:30 Tom: Companies absolutely need to do more and leaders need to spend more time helping people map that out. But I think the ultimate accountability lies with each of us as individuals. And until we take the responsibility and the initiative to say, "I'm going to make sure that my life is better off because I chose this work. And I am going to make sure that I'm making a meaningful contribution and feel like my job has purpose because of this work." I don't think that any of us can afford to sit back and wait for even a good leader or a great organization to do that for us.

38:30 Jacob: I love that message. Don't wait for others, you gotta step up and do something

yourself. Maybe one of the last things I'll ask you here is something else you mentioned in the book, and that is that the big assumption is that you have to do something, you have to work. And I think that's the assumption that most people have, is that it's something that is essential, they have to do it. Why is that assumption wrong, and what do you think we should be shifting that conversation to instead?

39:50 Tom: Yeah, I think if you start your day and look at, just more... I mean, go granular in terms of looking at the tasks that you often undertake in a given day, and we're all gonna have to do things each day that are not that fun. And it's interesting, one of the really good questions that Gallup has asked for a long time is, "I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?" And if you really think about the semantics of that question, it's not saying, "I get to use my strengths all the time, the whole day I'm at work," it's "I have a chance to do what I do best for a little bit of a day."

40:33 Tom: And so we just need to find a few moments in our daily routine and tasks where we can say, "Here's exactly how my daily efforts yield a positive outcome for another human being." And we've gotta find more ways to see that clearly each day. A few things that fascinated me as I got into some of these research is, even in restaurants and food service, if the person preparing the food, the chef or the cook can see the customers instead of being walled off behind concrete, they make better quality food that the customer's rate as tasting better and it's more nutritious.

41:10 Tom: And even in a profession like radiology, where I've spent enough time with radiologists over the years that I would assume they know that they're helping people battle cancer and that's meaningful work, right? But when radiologists have a simple photo of the patient appended to the radiographic record, they write more thorough and in-depth reports and they're more accurate in their diagnosis over time. So we've just kind gotta find little ways to bring the humanity back into that daily routine essentially.

41:38 Jacob: Well, to wrap up, do you have any advice or parting words of wisdom, maybe for employees and also for leaders inside of organizations, what should they be doing to help answer this question?

41:53 Tom: I would say for leaders, we need to have a much bigger and broader and richer conversation about contribution in the modern workplace. And I think the future of work, to the topic of a lot of your work, I think the future of work lies in a much healthier and more mutual and reciprocal relationship between people and organizations, and it's up to leaders to help people start getting ahead of that today. And the leaders who do that are gonna find that their organizations have a huge competitive advantage and a much greater value proposition to employees in the future.

42:36 Jacob: Starts with leaders. And then what about if you're not a leader? Is there anything that you can start doing as just as an individual?

42:44 Tom: I would say, at an individual level, start when you think about your own health and well-being, follow the tried but true metaphor of putting your own oxygen mask on first, because if you don't ensure that you're in a good place physically, psychologically, minimizing stress each day, there's no way you have a chance to be your best for other people. So, I would start with that and then begin to map out, once you can be fully energized, how you can make even greater contributions to other people each day without sacrificing your own health and well-being.

43:20 Jacob: Perfect, I love that advice. Well, where can people go to learn more about you, the

book? Anything that you wanna mention for people to check out, please feel free to do so.

43:33 Tom: Yeah, people can go to tomrath.org to learn about any of the books and topics that we've talked about. The contribify.com website is the new application where readers of the Life's Great Question book can build a profile around where they best contribute over time and start that discussion.

43:53 Jacob: Very cool. Well, Tom, thank you for taking time out of your day to speak with me.

43:58 Tom: Thanks so much, it's been an honor and a fun conversation.

44:01 Jacob: Yes, yes, it was a lot of fun to talk to you and thanks everyone for tuning in. My guest again Tom Rath, make sure to check out his brand new book, Life's Great Question: Discover How You Contribute to the World. And I will see all of you next week.