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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0:01:28 Jacob: Hello everyone, welcome to another episode of the Future Work with Jacob Morgan. My guest today is Victor Hoskins, the President and CEO of the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority. Welcome, Victor.

0:01:39 Victor: Thank you. Thank you Jacob.

0:01:42 Jacob: To get started. Why don't you give us a little bit of background information about you and what you do? And also the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority, and what you guys do there.

0:01:55 Victor: Okay, I have been in the industry they call economic development for, oh, probably about half of my career. And usually in that role, I'm in roles like the one I'm in right now, I'm right now CEO of Fairfax County Economic Development. I'll tell you about that in just a moment. But prior to that, I was Deputy Mayor of economic development for the District of Columbia. And in the District of Columbia, we did projects, like the wharf and city center a lot of the projects that are large scale in nature, creating jobs and that's primarily what we do in this industry is actually helped attract jobs and help create jobs for the local environment. I also did the same work as Director Economic Development for Arlington County. And we attracted companies like Gerber, Lidl, Nestle and the last big one that I did was the Amazon Headquarters with 37,500 employees and about 2 million square feet of office space. And I joined Fairfax County about six months ago. And Fairfax County is an economic development authority, very similar to the ones that I've worked for before. And of course, these days the challenge is talent. So we're focused on talent right now.

0:03:05 Jacob: Very cool. And you recently made quite a bit headlines because Amazon has selected your area to be the location of its second headquarters. And there was a lot of debate and discussion around that. I don't know if you're able to share any of the behind the scenes what it was like to get them there 'cause a lot of people were wondering how did you get them there, what happened? Can you share any of that process? What it was like, were you just in meetings non-stop? Lots of pressure. What was that experience like?

[chuckle]

0:03:36 Victor: Well, it's interesting because the way that the process went is very different from the normal economic development process and what I mean by that is actually the Amazon issued an RFP really, for the whole world to see. And as a result, 238 jurisdictions actually, we're competing for this. That isn't normally how it's done.

0:03:56 Jacob: 230... Wow.

0:04:00 Victor: Normally... 238, yeah. So we were one of 238. It was a serious competition. I think the most intense competition I've ever been into my career. But because it was done differently, in that it went out to all these jurisdictions and they actually... Amazon asked for the jurisdiction to actually submit the development opportunities. And usually it's the other way around. Usually it's developers, submitting. And they bring the... Often they bring us into the process. So this, we were actually up front in the process actually working with the developers in Amazon. No, the meetings weren't non-stop. As a matter of fact, once we filled out the RFP, we had to wait a couple of months. And that was kind of the hurry up and wait, where we produced this 250 page proposal.

0:04:49 Jacob: It was 250 pages?

0:04:51 Victor: Yeah, yeah, it was huge. And these pages were not normal pages, they were like, the 11 X 14 or even bigger. It was a beautiful, beautiful document, and I'm sure everyone... I'm sure a lot of people did produce documents like that. And it really was... What was so great about it though is it gave us an opportunity not to look at our individual jurisdictions, but really to look at the whole of the region in this competition because there are six million people in the Greater DC region. There are three million workers, there's 60 universities, 400,000 actually enrolled in those universities, graduating 90,000 graduates a year. So that kind of statistic you can do when you're competing as a region. But if we were competing as just our jurisdiction, the numbers would not have been that way. And the reality is, economies function is regional economies, not as individual jurisdictions. That's kind of how we look at them. But it wasn't non-stop. We did, they did come into a site visit and during the site visit that was about two days of intense meetings with them, taking them around touring them, introducing them to stakeholders and then it was wait again. So it was another three or four months and they gave us a list of questions. I think it was over a hundred questions and I think our responses were, if I recall correctly about 1100 pages.

[chuckle]

0:06:20 Victor: It was quite a bit of an extensive response.

0:06:23 Jacob: Wow.

0:06:24 Victor: And the thing is, it was a lot of detail that things that companies really need to know. How many technical degrees do you have graduated in cloud computing? In cyber? They were very, very specific...

0:06:36 Jacob: Some of those... Some of those questions 'cause I think people would find that quite interesting, and fascinating, especially for businesses.

0:06:42 Victor: Yeah, yeah. So one of the questions that they ask is "What is the composition of your technical workforce?" So first of all, what is the universe of all your engineering degrees? And then what are the specific disciplines within those engineering degrees? So you may break it down into... You may have software programmer, but that software program maybe 50% of them are focused on Cloud computing, and maybe another 25% focused on cyber, and but basically breaking them down so that they could see how many degrees are resonant in those technical fields in your region. And then what we also did, because we looked at this as kind of a need to produce talent, we actually worked with our universities and made this part of the incentive package that we would... And this came from the state matching funds to expand the number of degree candidates in various

categories. Not just for Amazon, but for all the engineering and technical and tech companies in our region. And I think that really created an advantage for us that we actually were expanding the amount of people in those fields, not just working with the resident degrees.

0:08:07 Jacob: So Amazon was specifically interested in how many technical degrees are available in the area. Are you able to share some of the other, I guess, skills or mindsets that they were looking for. Were they looking for anything around soft skills, leadership, or was it just purely they wanted to know how many technical degrees or talent they might have in technical areas?

0:08:29 Victor: No but they were also interested in just our general population business degrees, law degrees. We laid all of that out, but I focused on those, because those were the ones in particular that we know created advantage for us because we have the second highest concentration of engineering talent in the country second only to New York, and we're just a head of Silicon Valley. So those things became very important in this competition. But the other ones were important too. Marketing and sales, MBAs, really the industries that basically make industry work.

0:09:06 Jacob: Yeah.

0:09:07 Victor: Legal, legal, lawyers.

0:09:11 Jacob: It's interesting that they were asking for MBAs as well, because I think there's a big debate around whether or not people need MBAs. Are those higher educational institutions gonna be around in the next 10-15 years, 20... 30 years? But Amazon was specifically interested in even higher education, MBA, probably even PhD programs, you guys have over there.

0:09:31 Victor: Well, they were interested in all of our advanced degree programs. Actually, let's just put it this way. One of the things that areas are measured on are educational attainment. And if you look at BAs are better in our region, that's 64%, that's one of the highest in the country.

0:12:32 Victor: It's not just Amazon, but actually almost every company that we talk to, one of the things that they want to know is the general education attainment in your region, that's a very important benchmark, and ours is at 64%, and I mentioned that Arlington where I was working that 64% in the region ad that 73% and Arlington specifically, that's a very high educational BA or better attainment.

0:13:00 Jacob: Yeah.

0:13:00 Victor: And then the 38% Masters and PhDs. So, really, they were looking at that all just general educational attainment in addition to the technical degrees. I didn't want you to think that they were only looking at technical degrees.

0:13:15 Jacob: Sure.

0:13:15 Victor: We found this true also with Nestle when we recruited Nestle. We recruited Nestle about a year and a half before we recruited Amazon to Arlington. And they were interested in, again, educational attainment, and as you would expect, because they're product marketers, they were really more interested in a lot of the product marketing skills that were in the market. So, what happens is, each company, once that general knowledge but of what's in your environment but they

also do drill down specifically, especially if they're gonna be developing a specific expertise.

0:13:48 Jacob: Was Amazon at all looking at diversity as well or...

0:13:54 Victor: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I answered that so quickly because it was one of the things that we talked about day one. When we first met with them, it was one of the things that they discussed. And actually the team that came to visit with us was a very diverse team. There were women, men, African-Americans, it was a very Asian, it was a very diverse team. I will say this they were very, very affable. Let me just... And I'm saying affable because I just enjoy being around them. They reminded me a lot of the people in our region, in the DC region. So, I think that there was also kind of a cultural ethos that floated in the back of this that it wasn't just diversity talk. It was actually a desire for it and in an intentionality in it.

0:14:43 Jacob: It seems like those two criteria were very important sort of technical skills, just high level of education, diversity. Is there anything else that Amazon was specifically looking for as far as talent, skills, mindsets, experience that they wanted the people in the area to have?

0:15:05 Victor: After we got past that point, there wasn't a need to go much deeper because after that, it becomes recruiting for them. That was really... The baseline was, is the talent there? Can we access it? Will there be future talent there? What would be able to access that? We were able to answer that question with the Innovation Campuses, the Virginia Tech campus, which is going to be a billion dollar innovation campus. They will help us double the number of degree candidates and technical fills along with George Mason University, which is actually physically be in Arlington. The Virginia Tech campus is actually physically in Alexandria which is about... A site is about two and a half miles south of the Amazon site. The George Mason University campus is in Arlington, and it's about three miles north. But those campuses will provide places for research, innovation, and also production of additional talent for the future.

0:16:09 Victor: So they saw an existing talent base, and they saw a future talent base. That was really made possible by the State of Virginia, which actually put the majority of the investment in educational infrastructure, a billion dollars, they put behind, matching universities that are willing to do this kind of technical skill upskilling. And then we have the community colleges that have also becoming part of this. Amazon and specifically Amazon Web Services has been working very closely with our community college to create a credential program in cloud computing that allows people to... I think it's six months. At the end of this training, they're able to go directly into Amazon and actually become part of the team.

0:16:57 Jacob: Wow. It sounds like they're using an entire region as they're like a direct talent plan, which is really amazing. What's the impact supposed to be for the area? I think it was they're creating 25,000 jobs in the area. And then when is everything completed as far as the headquarters, and all these things that you guys have going on?

0:17:19 Victor: So this is about a 12-year period, a 12 to 15-year. Let's call it 15 just to give it that time because that is a lot of employees. They are looking at anywhere between 25,000 and actually 37,500. They're actually incentives set up for them to go as high as 37,500. They may or may not reach that number, but 25,000 was the base line.

0:17:45 Jacob: Knowing Amazon they'll reach it.

0:17:49 Victor: Yeah, that's what I'm thinking.

[laughter]

0:17:51 Victor: That's kinda what I'm thinking. But the first year, they hired 400. Now we're into the second year of hiring, I believe the number is about a thousand, and then they will ramp up to about 1,500, and they have the first million new million square feet under construction. Actually, it just went through the permitting process is in a design process. It should be delivered, I think in 2023, but by that time, they'll be adding a couple of thousand employees a year, and that'll run for about 12 to 15 years.

0:18:31 Jacob: Okay.

0:18:33 Victor: That's direct Amazon employees, and you ask the question about what is the overall impact.

0:18:37 Jacob: Yes.

0:18:37 Victor: So, we've looked at other markets and jobs like the ones that are being created at Amazon in the income category of basically average salary of 150,000 in these technical areas, usually create three to four additional jobs in the rest of the economic environment so even though they're going to be hiring 25000 the impact is going to be somewhere between a total of 100 and 125,000 because of this multiplier effect and if you think about it just literally just think about yourself, you have a tax person, if you have a legal service you have to pay for that, you have someone does your dry cleaning, you have a dog, someone grooms your dog, you have a dentist all these services we all consume so all of those services will be consumed in addition to that of course retail, retail services so that's the additive effect of this. The great thing about Amazon though is that it also brings a greater diversification of your economy because they are in so many business lines, they are often business lines that are outside of them that support their business lines so they may create Alexa but they may have a unit or they may hire a small firm on the side to do some special design services for that device or they may hire someone to do some special digital services that they don't do themselves so there are also other companies that follow them as a intern environment so we're expecting for the whole region over 100,000 jobs out of this Amazon Headquarters.

0:20:14 Jacob: That's amazing, that's amazing. And so, obviously you're involved with a lot of organizations, they're not just Amazon and so I'm curious just kind of big picture when you think about workplace trends and talent, what are some of the things that you're paying attention to as somebody who is leading the economic development in the county, what are the big trends you're looking at?

0:20:37 Victor: So what we realize is that producing... First of all, we have 400,000 people enrolled in our universities in this entire region, in these 60 universities throughout our region from Hopkins all the way to Virginia Tech, just the whole range of universities and we need to keep more of those people in this region that's one of the things, so there's a real retention effort that we're launching focused on the kids that are in school right now and connecting them directly to companies, whether that company is Leidos or that company is Booz Allen, whether it is North Broman or Boeing we're trying to connect them directly to the companies as they're going through their undergraduate education because what we find and what I think all of us found is, when you work at a place while you're in school you may be going back to that place or a similar company

when you get out of school so really bridging that, making that connection or may not just doing this at the undergraduate level but we also want to look at this at the high school level, trying to get these kids into internships, just to get to understand what companies do and develop their interest early on.

0:21:51 Victor: And then on a graduate side we graduate about 90,000 graduates a year, many of those over half of those leave the region we wanna keep those kids so there's a big retention effort right there. And then the second thing that we're looking at and this is a trend that's extraordinarily important is for companies are retraining their own employees, their existing employees. It is really... It is a huge deal because think about it, if you already have someone with a set of computer skills and they just may be in a legacy language and you're trying to bring them up it's cheaper for you to bring them up than to start with a whole new person that doesn't even understand your corporate culture so that is becoming a big focus of our companies and we see that as a trend. We also see the big growing of talent and I mentioned already Virginia Tech and George Mason University Innovation Campuses as examples of that helping us grow more engineering, more technical talent and then attracting, we believe that attraction is gonna be a very important part for us in the future, a lot of people do not know how wonderful the lifestyle is in this region and we would like for them to know and understand that.

0:23:01 Victor: We all in the Northern Virginia region we just begun to work together to attend jurisdictions now, we're working together as an alliance and what we've discovered all of us is that we have great corporate recruiting websites but we do not have talent recruiting websites so we're developing these talent recruiting websites to get things that you're interested in you, in your family you know that we want you to come here because if you don't tell them that story you may sell them the job but you haven't sold them a place and we live in places not in jobs.

0:23:35 Jacob: That's interesting and it's probably something a lot of organizations can do a better a job of focusing on as well when they're trying to attract people and not just telling them about the job but the areas as well where they're gonna be living so I love that component of storytelling. Interestingly enough so somebody asked this question and he actually is an intern for you and he asked this question live and he said, are other companies in the area, are they worried about Amazon coming in and taking talent away? Which I think is a very fair question, Amazon they have a lot of money, they have a lot of packs, a lot of benefits so are other companies in the area freaking out a little bit about Amazon coming in and saying they want 25000 to 37000 jobs?

0:24:19 Victor: Well, first of all I think it's a very fair question and it is something that has been brought up and it's particularly with our smaller companies and we're working very closely with them to deal with this issue because it is an issue, the ability to offer more salary, the ability to offer stock, the extraordinarily really just the name recognition of the company itself to get that person's resume as they're going through their career is viewed very positively so the short answer is yes, yes, people are asking about it but there's no panic, I don't think there's no one that's panicked about it, what we're doing is, as we always do is we try to methodically disassemble the issue and try to reassemble it in a way that works for everybody. So the problem is things that we can do something about, like connecting them to a university if we can connect these firms large or small to a University and they can get the talent early, that is a very good thing and there's a big advantage of that. It's harder to take someone out of a company than it is for you to get them as they graduate, and have had no affiliation with the company. You probably kinda understand what I mean by that.

0:25:35 Jacob: Yeah.

0:25:36 Victor: The second thing is making sure that we understand what their needs are, because the needs of, for example, in the area of cloud computing specifically, let's talk about that, cloud computing and let's talk about cyber too, those are two extraordinarily high demand needs in this region in particular. The Virginia Tech and George Mason University as well as others, are beginning to focus on those in terms of production. So the more we produce, the more we'll be able to satisfy this demand. But to answer your question, fairly yes, there has been some expressed fear but there's no panic.

0:26:16 Jacob: Okay, that's good to know. The other interesting point that you brought up, is this concept of retraining and up-scaling and I'm curious if you're able to share anything that you're seeing organizations do in the area because you're right, this is a huge issue all over the world. Honestly, a lot of companies are really saying at least that they're gonna really be focusing on training up-skilling. Are you able to share anything of what you're seeing companies do in your area?

0:26:43 Victor: A little bit. I won't name the companies but I will tell you this, that they are in particular, taking their people who have backgrounds that may already be an area of... And I mentioned early in a legacy language, like they may actually some people I think there's some people around that still programme in languages like COBOL and Fortran.

[overlapping conversation]

0:27:08 Victor: 'Cause that's what I was programming when I came up, and that was a little while ago. But it is a legacy language that in some small areas, is still around, but taking people who have older languages and moving them into newer, moving out of SQL server maybe into SaaS making that migration from even languages that are not that old, because the new languages are so in demand.

0:27:35 Jacob: Yeah, and I guess the important thing is that they're related areas.

0:27:40 Victor: Yeah, exactly.This is something that I found very interesting. And one of our... One of the executives who actually sits on the board of the community college, he actually went through the cloud computing class himself and got certified and this is what he told me, he goes, Victor. Surprisingly, it was not as quantitative as I thought it would be, it was actually a lot of writing. And the programming is writing and a lot of the sections of code now are packages that you assemble. He basically said it was a lot less programming than he imagined. He thought he was gonna be a software programmer. That's not what they do in these programs. They make you able to work in their environment to fix things that are broken or gone aerie.

0:28:37 Jacob: What about the impact of technology and AI on jobs? Is that something that you're finding organizations in the area are concerned about at all or are you concerned about this?

0:28:49 Victor: So there are some studies out there right now. McKenzie's got a big report out. I believe Busalon has a report out and it's speaking to the jobs that are in threat and most of those jobs are jobs that have a repetition to them, or a moderate need for analysis, and it is not the high order thinking, but it is definitely AI and the expectation is that a lot of those jobs will disappear. I think the one that has probably been sited the most is underwriting in insurance. Apparently there is a methodology that they've developed that allows through algorithms for them to do better

underwriting for insurance, which reduces the number of employees that are in that area. So just like with the...

0:29:40 Victor: I think it's gonna kind of feel like what happened with bank tellers, I don't know if... You probably don't remember the ATM machine coming in. Now, that you do everything on the phone, I don't even think you even go to ATM machines. I might be dating myself, but I still go. But I remember when the ATM machines came in, I said to myself, "I don't wanna use that, I wanna talk to a person. And then, after awhile it became, Hey this is pretty convenient, especially just to get cash or just to... And boy, when the deposit... To make a deposit or check deposit or cash deposit. And then eventually, those ranks, shrank in banks. But those people are now doing different things now, a lot of them have been retrained to do other functions in the bank, some of them have actually changed careers, but the bottom line is that we go to this process that they call creative destruction all the time where jobs disappear and new jobs, come up.

0:30:36 Victor: Dr Schumpeter back in the late '20s, early '30s, postulated this theory of creative destruction, and essentially what he was looking at was like the carriage, of course the carriage is disappearing and the car's coming in, or the... Think about it. How many black Smiths do you know? There used to be millions of blacksmiths in the United States.

0:30:57 Jacob: Even people that were delivering ice.

0:31:00 Victor: Yes, there were ice delivery people, right? Milk delivery, milk delivery to your house. I just find that amazing. But when... That happens in our economy. What has consistently happened also is the creation of new jobs, but it demands new skill levels. There was something I read the other day. In a report from Kon Ferly that spoke about the amount invested in our country in physical capital and the amount that is invested in educational capital and on a physical capital side, it's about 45 trillion estimated in the United States in physical capital. But listen to this on the educational capital side, it's like 250 trillion.

0:31:08 Jacob: Wow.

0:31:08 Victor: Yeah, 250 trillion, yeah, it's like five times as much. And that tells you what our country does, our country doubles down on education, and it is something that I think we're gonna become better at. I love what some of these companies are doing these days by making their industry accessible to students in school, in elementary school, in high school. That is a new thing. I love the fact that there are these robotic competitions all over the place now, and that used to be strange. There now these... What do they call the hacking competitions where you actually compete.

0:32:22 Jacob: Yeah, the hackathon.

0:32:22 Victor: Yeah. These hackathons. They compete to hack into something. To me, it's unimaginable how creative our country is. And look, I know, and then I will acknowledge this, that yes, there is this disruption, and it always happens, but I think that as in the past, I think we are ingenious enough with our joint knowledge to really bring this together and figure out how to do it, how to support it.

0:32:52 Jacob: What are you seeing companies doing over there as far as attracting and retaining talent? Are they really focusing on crazy perks and benefits, slides, and free food, and unlimited vacation, or what are the organizations they're doing to really get the talent to show up?

0:33:10 Victor: I'd like to go work there. [laughter] The place you just described. But no, it's interesting, I think that... Let's just talk about a couple of things. One, a great work in environment is almost table stakes. You have to have a great working environment. The millennials and the Gen Z, they really want a nice work environment, and that is clear, also flexibility. And I think this is something that even the government has embraced now, mobility and flexibility in work hours to avoid heavy commutes, and also to take advantage of really workers that you might not even be able to access. I'll just give you one example. When I was in Arlington, we had one of our people have to relocate to Austin, Texas. And he was so good that we actually kept him on staff. He's still on staff in Arlington after like four years down in Austin, Texas, because he was that good. He works remotely. He comes in every quarter. It's unbelievable, and his work is digital.

0:34:14 Victor: He does digital design and websites, and videography, so his work is digital, but the bottom line is this. He does not have to physically come. That is important to people, the flexibility. And then what I would say is, I don't know about that... I think the food in the snacks are nice. I think people appreciate them, but then they're not the closer paying people well, in ample vacation time. I think those two things are something that markets adjust to on their own. They find their own top or bottom as it may be. And so, I don't think anything's over the top though, except every once in a while I do hear about a data analytics person that was hired at a salary that you go, "I have been even made that much a year yet."

[laughter]

0:35:01 Jacob: Yeah, the data analytics, the people's times, some of those. Well, that's fine. Amazon is one of those organizations that actually has that money to pay somebody 250,000, 350,000 for one person for one job and data signs.

0:35:16 Victor: Don't get me surprised how many smaller companies can also do that, too.

0:35:20 Jacob: Really?

0:35:21 Victor: I had a number of... Yes, I had a company that only had 10 employees that were hiring people like that. So...

0:35:27 Jacob: Wow. That's nice.

0:35:30 Victor: Yeah, because the yield per worker is so high. It's like... I don't know if you've ever seen the numbers on the gaming industry, but the dollar in revenue, gross revenue per employee, is one of the highest in the world. I saw one estimate at 500,000 per employee. I saw another at 750, and for one company over a million in revenue per employee. So, it depends on what they are doing and how that affects the overall company. I'm sure that the person that came up with Alexa had to be genius. [laughter] That's right.

0:36:08 Jacob: He was worth his salary.

0:36:11 Victor: Yes, he was working whatever they paid him. [laughter] Alexa is in everybody's house, it's in the hotels now.

0:36:17 Jacob: Yeah.

[overlapping conversation]

0:36:17 Victor: You can always unplug it though. You can always unplug it.

0:36:20 Jacob: Yeah. Thankfully I don't have one up here. Otherwise, it would would be going off. What do you think this means for organizations? So, there are a lot of people who listen to this podcast. They are the leaders of organizations. They're either mid or senior-level leaders. What do you think all of this means for them as far as... Well, you've seen what Amazon, what you've seen with companies in your area. Do you have any advice for what they should do or think about based on your experience?

0:36:47 Victor: Well, what I've found is that if the company has a solid culture, a transparent way of working, has a considerate relationship to its employee... Look, let just tell you what I do. Okay? And I told these people when I came here. I said, "Look, I like to have fun at work. I hope you like to have fun because that's the only reason I come to work. I come in and have a great time, and I want you to have a great time, too. And by the way, if you're not having a great time, tell me what I can do to help you get there. Is it do you need coaching?" Listen, I'm saying this. I know that these companies are saying this to their people. One thing that I do that a lot of people who are in a public sector can't do, but I do this on my own, and my wife and I have agreed to this. I actually buy meals for my team. I have about 40 people on my team, and I will buy lunch for everybody...

[overlapping conversation]

0:37:41 Jacob: Out of your own pocket.

0:37:43 Victor: Out of my own pocket, yeah. And you know what? They realize that's a lot of money, and they realized that I'm making a sacrifice. That is the kind of thing that you do. When I was in Arlington, I paid for coffee, sodas, any caffeinated drink anybody wanted to buy. We would order at the beginning of the month. When it ran out, we reorder. I did that for almost five years. And the county couldn't do it, but I could do that, and employees appreciate that. See, what I'm talking about is like, you really investing in them in an authentic way. People knew that I wasn't showing off. I could have just spent the money on myself. They knew that I thought about them and what they wanted and needed. When I heard they couldn't get drink the coffee in the office, I was like, "That's absurd that, but I'll pay for it."

0:38:29 Victor: The county is fine with me paying, so that's anywhere but the bottom line is that, I think that leaders need to look at their employees and as much as possible, be supportive. I'm one of those people. I like a fun environment. We celebrate every quarter We celebrate everyone's birthday that was born during that quarter. So we have a quarterly birthday cake with everybody's name listed. It's just fun. Everybody likes cake. I don't have anybody that threw the cake out. So and no, we just don't tell people's age.

[laughter]

0:39:05 Victor: We really focus on like the fun of it but bringing celebration and joy in your work, and we have some long nights sometimes and some long days. And they see me put that time in and they know that I'm working as hard as them and they know that I will do anything. And I think that when you lead by example, that's the most powerful thing you can do to retain your employees. You

treat them like you wanna be treated. You lift them up like you wanna be lifted up. You are fair to them like they're fair to you. I tell my people, "Look, I don't need you to do 16 hours a day, I don't want you to do six... I want you to do eight. Give me eight good ones. That's what I pay you for. That's all I need." And you know what, these people here, they deliver eight good ones. And the thing is, that doesn't mean I'm never gonna lose anybody. And just like any other company, that doesn't mean they won't lose a person but I'm telling you, they would lose a lot less if they focused on what's good for the employees, which is also what's good for the team, not so much for the the individual. It's really for the team.

0:40:07 Jacob: Yeah, it's funny, I love that you do, that you get lunches for your team, because it's... Although it's a greater financial cost, it's a relatively low effort thing that you, and even... A lot of leaders don't even have teams of 40 they maybe lead teams of 10 or 20. And so although it is a small, well, in your case, a little bit of a larger financial cost, the effort and the impact that it has are huge. It's not a lot of effort to order and get lunch for people, but the impact that it has for employees, knowing that you're looking out for them, that you care about them, that you're personally sacrificing some of your own income for them, probably speaks volumes to them. And I'm sure they really, really appreciate that. Are you? Do you do the same thing with your time? So if employee need help, if they want coaching and mentoring from you, how do you approach that?

0:40:58 Victor: Yeah. So thank goodness, I just hired an EVP who was taking a part of the slack on the coaching side. So when I first got here, I've been here six months now. So my first really five months here, I was, my time was really eaten up a lot with not just the work but also with coaching. And now I'm dividing that between myself and my EVP and eventually I'll be, we will also be sliding some of that to our VPs. But ultimately, what we also want to do is get them formal coaching because some people need more coaching than others, some of them just need a little check up, direction, decision, a book to read. And by the way we do, we read a book a quarter. I recommend the books... Oh, there we go. That's what I'm talking about. Yeah, that looks like a good book there.

0:41:45 Jacob: Shameless plug. Shameless plug.

0:41:47 Victor: I love it. I love it. I love it. But that's what they need to do, that you need that... I told my staff this morning, we actually were going over one of our books, it was Blue Ocean Strategy. And I told them that the brain needs three things, okay. It absolutely needs three things. One, it needs a vision or a goal. You need to be shooting for something. Two, you need instructions to get there. And three, you need inspiration. So my job, I give you vision, okay, these books give you instruction, and I give you inspiration. That's what I'm here for. And so that's what I try to do every day but I divide my time right now with my senior staff because they are the most impactful, because they affect my junior staff. And there are probably five people in the organization that I work with a lot. And then after that it gets a little bit less, a little bit more diluted but that's just a matter of just having enough time. And I think that within the next year, as we kind of divide the organization up and these responsibilities up and then move some of this to formal coaching, I think that we will, I will have a lot more time to spend with folks.

0:42:58 Jacob: How do you inspire your team? Are there any techniques or practices that you implement that maybe leaders listening to this podcast can try out with their teams?

0:43:07 Victor: Well, one of the things that I do is, I actually try to understand what motivates that individual. For example, there's a guy on my team who just, it loves advancing developing

technology, and we have this eSports initiative that we've been working on and I saw that he really liked this a lot, I let him lead it. He's been leading it. He's fantastic. He's working with my communications director. He's working with me and other people, working with these eSports companies. He's just been on a tear. I think what you have to do is you have to see the people, understand them and feed what makes them go, because the same thing doesn't make everyone go. And so searching for that and really listening to them, and you can hear it, you can hear it in the tone of their voice when they talk about something. I have one person on my team, she is so jazzed about diversity. She is just really, really into making it happen for everybody.

0:44:12 Victor: She wants everyone to have a shot. And what I've been doing with her, I said, "Okay, why don't we work with these technology companies to give everybody a shot." small and diverse businesses. So during the month of May, we're gonna do a region wide series of events. I'm working with our tech companies, using their platforms to help small and diverse businesses grow. So what I do is I try to find that thing that they like and I use that as inspiration. And one of the things that I do a lot is I watch what I say to people. I am not big on criticism. I will give you a critique, but I'm not big on criticism. I will not criticize you. I will only...

0:44:53 Jacob: What's the difference between a critique and a criticism?

0:44:55 Victor: Okay. So, here's a criticism. You did a lousy presentation, that's a criticism. Okay? So, here's a critique. You know the introduction of your presentation with crystal clear, and the first section of your three points were spot on, but the second and third, I got lost and I didn't quite understand the conclusion. Why don't we do this? Why don't we talk about that second and third piece, and then how that can build to get a final tight close, so that when your presentation's done, people are ready to take action on the thing that you want them to take action on.

0:45:36 Jacob: Yeah, that's a very big difference.

0:45:37 Victor: That's a critique.

0:45:38 Jacob: Yeah. So, what about people? So, the critique obviously takes more time and more effort.

0:45:43 Victor: Yes.

0:45:43 Jacob: The criticism is very easy to do. You can do it in three seconds.

0:45:47 Victor: Yes.

0:45:47 Jacob: So, what about the people who are saying, "You know what, I'm busy. I'm a busy leader. I don't have a lot of time to sit there and critique my employees, and give them all of this feedback, and coaching, and a hand-holding. I just want you to get stuff done."

0:46:01 Victor: Yeah. Well, it depends on how they manage their team. So, this is one of the things that I do with my team. So, I told each of my directors, I wanted them to give me a 18-month strategy. That's like seven or eight people. Okay? I said, "I want a 18-month strategy." And in that...

0:46:16 Jacob: Is that people strategy or a...

0:46:19 Victor: Oh, no. No, no, no. Achieving your objective strategy.

[laughter]

[overlapping conversation]

0:46:23 Victor: Okay. You're going to get me square feet. How are you gonna give me my square feet? You're gonna give me a job? How you're gonna get me my job?

[laughter]

0:46:30 Victor: I'm an outcome-guy.

[laughter]

0:46:32 Jacob: Got it.

0:46:33 Victor: That was really all about production. And so, what I did was, I gave them an idea of how I thought their presentation should look. One of the guys did a nice presentation. We sent it around, and they all tried to put it in that format. So, we did a first session. And as you might expect, it was a little bumpy. It was a little bumpy. I gave an overall critique, not a criticism, overall critique to the group. And I say, "So we're gonna get back together next week with these revised." So they came back the next week, and guess what? They were all better. Oh my God, they were better. And then I said, "Okay. So, I'm going to need part of this material for my commission, my board retreat. So, what I want you guys to do is to make sure, but then we have this finished by our retreat." So, they got one more turn, one more bite of the apple. They all improved again. And I will tell you something, by the time we did our retreat, they were phenomenal. They were great. They were fantastic. And then I took two of those presentations, actually three of them, one was mine, and then two from my team, one for my communication director, one for my director of talent initiatives, and they did a presentation to my overall board.

0:47:48 Victor: Well, it depends on what you're doing. Now, I have the next 18 months plan in every one of my divisions. That was worth my time. I'll probably spent a total of maybe six hours, if I think of the sessions themselves in the feedback that I gave them on the whole thing. Is that too much time? No, I think it's just not enough thinking about what you're trying to achieve. Now, for me, that was time well spent because some of these programs are so good. They're really on automatic pilot for the next 18 months.

0:48:21 Jacob: Yeah. No. I think that makes sense. So somebody's asking, can you talk a little bit about building resilience as a leader? How do you overcome any road blocks or setbacks or challenges that you're faced with?

0:48:36 Victor: Okay. I missed part of your question. You're gonna have to ask your question again.

0:48:41 Jacob: Oh, so somebody asked, "How do you deal with resilience?" So overcoming challenges, obstacles, failures, and road blocks.

0:48:50 Victor: Okay. So how do I overcome obstacles?

0:48:55 Jacob: Yes, obstacles, failures, challenges. How do you stay resilient?

0:49:00 Victor: Oh chill. Yeah. Okay. So, if I heard you right, I think you said, "How do you overcome obstacles, challenges, things that disrupt your achieving and objective? Yes?

0:49:12 Jacob: Yes. Yes.

0:49:14 Victor: Okay, great. So, the thing is, what I try to do is, I try to help my team realized that really, the obstacle is not really an obstacle. It's actually what the work is.

[laughter]

0:49:26 Victor: [0:49:26] _____ is because there's an obstacle. If they weren't problems to solve, there would be no need for you. That's just the... Look, if I wasn't solving a problem, why would I be here? So, I don't view problems and challenges as things that are in the way. I view them as an opportunity for me to move forward. And I know that sounds a little bit... Like a little exotic, a little like a puzzle. But here's the reality, when you solve a problem, what that does is that re-positions you. And I view these... I view a problem as an opportunity to re-position myself or reposition my organization. And because I talk about problems as opportunities more than I do about as being a problem or a challenge, my staff has picked that up, and they view them as opportunities. They're looking at them the way that I look at them. You see, what happens is, leaders transmit in our words, our somewhat the kind of personification of the culture in your organization. So I view our job to solve these problems, and because our job is to solve these problems, I don't view that as a problem. I view that is the opportunity to do the great work we can do, and I always tell them this, I said, "Listen, what this situation is, is the opportunity to do your greatest work. So let's think through this together and let's figure out how to make this the greatest solution possible at this time. And what I find is that, because I speak of, I don't speak of those problems, I really speak of them in the affirmative as opportunities. Did I answer your question?

0:52:45 Jacob: Yeah, yeah, you did. You did answer the question. I think that, that's good advice for people. Well, we only have a couple minutes left. So maybe we can talk about what some of this means for individuals who are not in leadership roles. So just people who have entry or mid level jobs, people who are just employees, the average employee that's out there. Do you have any advice or guidance for some things that they should be doing or focusing on?

0:53:11 Victor: So, what I tell my people that I've... Some of my folks asked me, "Victor, how have you been able to move up in organizations? How did you go from this position to that position?" And I tell them the same thing that I would tell any student that's in school. You know that assignment in front of you right now? Just do it as best as you can. Just do an excellent job, not an average job, do an excellent job. When you get an assignment, what I find, I can give two people the same assignment, and what comes back can be a totally different outcome, just based on how that person approaches the assignment. One person may get and say, "Okay, I'll get this done." And they check the box. Another person gets the assignment in ages, do an extraordinary job.

0:54:00 Victor: And I will use an example of this so it's not so abstract. Let me give you a very specific example. Individual, I asked them to do some research on a particular segment of our economy. And they came back with a report. And the report was very general. I asked a person in that same division to do a similar report. It came back with nothing but incredible observations, taking the data and turning the data into knowledge, not just handing me an obvious conclusion.

This segment is growing fast in that segment. What is that? Why? Did some research, looked into the industry, looked at the multipliers in the industry and said, "Oh, this is the why we have this resident in our region, and it is playing off of that segment of our economy." To me, those were the same individuals, but one, I'm thinking about promoting and the other I frankly think that they will be a researcher for very long time.

0:55:06 Jacob: Yeah.

[overlapping conversation]

0:55:07 Victor: And that's... And so we, every day, every day we were at a job interview. Every day is a job, and this is what I tell them. I feel like I'm at a job interview every day. Every day, I'm at a job interview, which means that I have a chance to make a good impression or bad impression. Me, I choose every day to make an extraordinary impression. I throw my body and my mind into everything that I do. Listen, I was at that brown bag talking about that book. It was the last thing on earth to discuss before I go six feet under. I mean, to me that was a moment to explain something to them that I do wanted to talk to them about since I got there. And this is, this moment right here, this is the greatest moment in my life right now, you know why? Because you only have these moments so do them in an extraordinary way. Do not be average.

0:55:55 Jacob: I love that approach of every day's a job interview. I think that's a very good way thinking about it. What about people who have or who might be listening to this and saying, "I have a difficult leader. I don't get along with my leader. He's rude. He's condescending. He's kind of a jerk or she's kind of a jerk. I don't wanna do great work for them."

0:56:16 Victor: I'm only laughing because I've had that boss.

0:56:18 Jacob: Yeah, but what would we do?

[overlapping conversation]

0:56:22 Victor: Yeah. Yeah, I have had bosses that come in swearing, yelling and screaming at me and other staff members when I was a junior staff person and I thought everybody goes through that. The key was how did I respond? What I did... You know how I responded? With extraordinary work. Even when it wasn't appreciated. I did this one project once. And it took me, oh, six months to complete it. And listen, I knew it was extraordinary when I finished it. And he basically took and said, "This is just gonna make us do more work."

[laughter]

0:56:57 Jacob: Wow.

0:56:58 Victor: I was like, "Well, there's an interesting answer." Well, about six months later, I got promoted. And then eventually I got promoted over him. You see, what he was looking at was the work as a problem. I was looking at it as an opportunity. Even though people are difficult, you have to look past them because that person is not always gonna be your boss. You're gonna run into a guy who is going to make or a gal who's gonna make your life incredible. This is one thing that I tell people when they work for me. I said, "You will never, you will never work for anyone else that will be more fair and more kind than I am. I will help you get where you wanna go. That's what I

am here for. I absolutely believe that and that's what I will give you. And by the way, you will never have this experience again until you work for me." And you need to know this. I have had 5, 6, 7, 8 people work for me multiple times because when I go someplace else they go, "Hey, Victor's over there. I'd like to work for him again." And what does it do, that gives me some extraordinary people to work with. I mean, it really does. So it pays for you to overlook because all leaders aren't made the same, but you are gonna find great leaders in your presence and when they're in your presence, at least that bad leader, let you know what a good leader is.

0:58:21 Jacob: I love that advice. I guess even as an individual, you need to have resilience, that if you're working for a leader who doesn't appreciate you, who doesn't maybe value you or respect you the way that you wanna be valued, you still need to show up every day and do an amazing job because I guess the mentality is that that situation is temporary, that leader is temporary. And like in your situation, you got promoted above that post.

0:58:42 Victor: Man, he was upset.

[laughter]

0:58:44 Victor: Yes, I did. And by the way, I never expected that.

0:58:48 Jacob: So he was upset?

0:58:50 Victor: Yeah, oh yeah, he was upset. But it was too late. [laughter] Because he set the die. Trying to avoid doing work in a way that it should have been done. And what I did was, I just did the way that I thought it was right to do. And even though it was for him, he took credit for, but that was okay, I was good with that. That's he's my boss.

0:59:11 Jacob: So other people noticed.

0:59:13 Victor: Yeah. Yeah, exactly, other people noticed. And they went, "Hmm, next time an opportunity comes up, I think I'm gonna tap that guy." And they did it. And I do the same thing. I look for people who want to give their all.

0:59:25 Jacob: Yeah. I love that approach. I think it makes a lot of sense because it's easy for a lot... A lot, of people out there... I'm sure you've seen the research on the high levels of disengagement. It's easy to give up or to lose hope or to get frustrated, but I think the key is like you mentioned, you just have to keep going and keep doing an amazing job regardless of the situations or circumstances. 'Cause other people will pay attention.

0:59:48 Victor: Yeah. It's a form of professional integrity, is the way that I look at it.

0:59:52 Jacob: Yeah. Well said. Well we're pretty much out of time. I don't know if there's any last parting words of wisdom that you would like to share with anybody before we wrap up, but if so please feel free to do so.

1:00:06 Victor: Okay. Just the last thing that I'd like to say is that I think we all really benefit of having an attitude of gratitude. And it's one of the things that I even talked to my team this afternoon about it. Being grateful for what we have, in this country we have an enormous amount. I mean, where I started in my life in public housing to go to Ivy League schools to do the things that

I've done professionally, both on Wall Street and a main street, there's no other country in the world that I would have been able to do that. This is an incredible country and we should be grateful to live in it. Our food chain is probably one of the best, our water's clean. This is... We don't realize how good we have it. And I think having that attitude of gratitude is the most powerful thing you can take to work every day. And I know I have that attitude and I try to display it to my employees, and I think it's the thing that's the most wonderful thing about our country, is that we can have that attitude, and it truly is justified. It's a great country.

1:01:14 Jacob: I love it, I love it. Victor, where can people go to learn more about you or any of the work that you guys are doing with the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority. Anything that you wanna mention for people to check out, please feel free to do so.

1:01:28 Victor: So you can go to F-C-E-D-A.com. I'm sorry. Fairaxcountyeda.org. Fairfaxcountyeda.org. Of course I'm looking at my communications guy.

[laughter]

1:01:43 Jacob: Yeah, we're gonna keep you in check.

1:01:45 Victor: And we can find about all the information about us. Yes.

1:01:48 Jacob: Okay.

1:01:48 Victor: You can keep me in check, right. Yep.

1:01:50 Jacob: Got it. Well, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me, Victor, I really appreciate it. Your energy is contagious, your enthusiasm, I love it. And I think you gave some really great advice not just around what organizations are doing but just your personal leadership style and approach. I love it, so I hope a lot of people learn from it. Thank you very much.

1:02:08 Victor: Jacob thank you so much and I can't wait to get your book.

1:02:12 Jacob: Hey, there you go. It's gonna be available in a week. Another shameless plug.

1:02:16 Victor: Beautiful.

1:02:17 Jacob: Yeah.

1:02:17 Victor: Well, thank you so much... I look forward to it.

1:02:19 Jacob: Thank you, thank you. And thanks everyone for tuning in my guest again Victor Hoskins, he's the President and CEO of the Fairfax County Economic Development authority. And I will see all of you next time. Have a wonderful day.