

The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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Jacob Morgan 01:14

Welcome everyone to another episode of the future of work with Jacob Morgan, my guest today, Javed Khan, the SVP and GM of Cisco collaboration Javed, thank you for joining me.

Javed 01:26

Thank you so much for having me, Jacob. How are you doing?

Jacob Morgan 01:28

Good, good. So we have a lot of fun stuff to talk about today. But before we get into all the work and tech stuff, I want to go way back to baby Javed.

Javed 01:38

Uh Oh,

Jacob Morgan 01:39

Yeah, I want to know how

Javed 01:41

That was not part of the script.

Jacob Morgan 01:45

I want to learn a little bit about you and from and how did you get to become somebody who's running a multi billion dollar business for one of the world's most known companies?

Javed 01:58

Yeah, so wow, where do you want me to start, I thought you only had 60 minutes. So I'll try and do it in 60 seconds. I did grow up in India.

Jacob Morgan 02:09

Where in India?

Javed 02:10

I grew up in a place called Bombay, which is now called Mumbai. So it was I stick with Bombay because I might get in trouble for saying that, but that's it. That's what it was when I grew up there. But I grew up there a middle class family, middle class background, by third world standards. But like many

other people that you might have met here in the valley, got an opportunity opportunity to come out to the states for higher education. I went to Loyola University Chicago. I had grown up with a tech background. So I got a scholarship ended up doing a master's degree in computer science in the mid 90s. And was perfect timing, ended up ended up in tech and did engineering I was a software engineer early in my career and somewhere along the way accidentally, or I don't know, maybe accidentally ended up doing management. And here I am 20 years later running, running collaboration at Cisco. So that's my 60 second version.

Jacob Morgan 03:19

Yeah, no, it's crazy. Um, so what is it like to run a multibillion dollar division at a company? I'm assuming most people will never know what that feels like.

Javed 03:31

Yeah, I think it is. You know, I enjoy it. I think I think I it is a big responsibility, right, not just not just to your shareholders, because we are a public company. And, you know, ultimately, fiduciary responsibility to making sure that the shareholders invest in Cisco invest in our companies where we are making the right business decisions, but at the same time, it's a very large team and ultimately, the responsibility includes making sure that large group of employees are not just being productive but also growing in their careers. They all have diverse feeling needs. It's a global company. So a big part of my job involves making sure that the teams understand where we are going, why we are going, how they can make a difference. And getting that getting those thousands of people pointed in the right direction. At the same time, making sure that the business is being effective and competing against what is specially in the collaboration space and extremely competitive space. So we have to be extremely agile and and continuously reacting to market trends and changes and the last few months probably have been the fastest that things have changed that I've ever seen last few years.

Jacob Morgan 04:52

For people who are not familiar with Cisco as a company or with the collaboration part of Cisco Can you give a little bit of background information just about the company And how big the collaboration division actually is?

Javed 05:02

Sure. So Cisco WebEx is probably the brand name that a lot of people might be familiar with. The collaboration team is essentially the Webex product is about a \$5 billion business as part of a bigger Cisco. Cisco company, which is about 10 times of size. So Cisco itself is a much, much bigger company in many ways. We are a smaller portion that company, but yeah, \$5 billion plus company is would be a pretty big company in itself. The collaboration team includes the Webex product that many people use that at today, especially in today's environment, but it also includes other products like when you make a phone call, for example, the chances are behind the scenes that Cisco software driving those phone calls, and that's been a big part of our business.

Javed 05:58

You've probably seen video digital devices and conference rooms and increasingly devices at home that you can use to call in to video meetings. So that's another big part of our portfolio. And then we

also make software that drives, top call center agents. So contact centers, as we call them. So if you call somebody for tech support, chances are they're using software, all of that combined enables the world to collaborate. And that is that is what Cisco collaboration does, but a smaller part of a bigger company, which also sells lots of other things.

Jacob Morgan 06:37

Well, I know the past few months have been pretty, pretty crazy for everybody. And so I want to get your perspective on kind of two things a, what has been going on in Cisco so when when COVID started, I mean, what was your reaction? What did you guys do? And the flip side of that is also what have you seen from a lot of your clients who were using your technology so let's start with Cisco internally and how you guys dealt with it and how you handle On the situation.

Javed 07:01

Yeah, absolutely. And I think it's been, I've never been more excited, scared and optimistic at the same time in my career, when it comes to work and you know, to some degree personal life too right. So one of the things, and the reason I say that is, we are in this business, that suddenly became an enabling, enabling part of our lives, right? We own the collaboration business, Cisco, fortunately, was already set up very well, because we believe collaboration products, Cisco and blaze are actually set up very well. We all have, you know, sitting in front of this video collaboration device, beautiful piece of hardware. Most employees have that we've got our Webex products that we were already using. We are pretty well connected from a networking standpoint. So it was a relatively easy transition from a work standpoint, right to actually keep staying productive, continuing to work. It was actually a pretty natural transition to most employees at Cisco, other than you You went home and you know, you weren't necessarily one coming into the office. And we made that transition pretty well, I would say we were already about, you know, 40 to 50% of our employees were already remote because of the nature of the work we do and the tech and our technology. So that was an easy transition. The other thing that we found, as we started to adjust to this to this new world was our products were suddenly in extreme demands a WebEx in particular, overnight, within days, was suddenly three times bigger. And we were already one of the largest products out there when it came when it came to businesses. So we had to scramble to scale up. And that meant lots and lots of long hours in this new work environment. And there were lots of people working really, really hard. Now, I always say this, the DevOps engineers, which is I know it's a technical term of the people who keep infrastructure running behind the scenes in so many companies are often the most underappreciated people have been working very, very hard. So we had to scramble to make sure our, our customers were supported. And we had enough capacity. We had enough scale to meet video conferencing needs, communications needs, which was just going through the roof. It was it is demand I've never seen, you'll be the large companies plan for growth, but you don't plan for overnight growth like that. And it was not just about Cisco was our suppliers. It was the people we buy hardware from our supply chains, which sometimes extend into other parts of the country that are being impacted. So that's the work side of things. But I think the other thing that I believe that's important to talk about was, as we got into the first few weeks, the first couple of months, there is a emotional social people aspect of things that we had to pay a lot more attention, especially as leaders. It was it was initially very, initially very easy to overlook the fact that people are being productive, in fact, in some cases more productive. But that that Social conversation, the coffee talks that people are used to the informal exchanges that I think are so important was the other thing Cisco

spent a lot of time enabling. And there's I'm very happy about the investment and all the way up from the CEO to the executive leadership teams made and making sure that those connections would enable through regular check ins. And and sometimes we don't talk about that aspect of the adjustment you'd have to make.

Jacob Morgan 10:29

Yeah, yeah. Well, a couple of questions for you on that. But first, there's a lot of debate and a lot of people still figuring out like, are we ever going to go back to the office? Do you think that when we get through this, which we eventually will, what do you think's going to happen with employees who are working in offices? Is that going to totally disappear? Or are you going to do you guys see that eventually, most people will indeed go back to their offices?

Javed 10:56

Yeah. So I have a viewpoint on it. And anybody who tells me that, you know, they know like, you Exactly what post COVID world is going to look like as you know is guessing to some degree, but we do believe that there will be an increasing acceptance of people working from home right we push the bounds of technology to ask the ones and we found out that certain things you can do just fine from home, but ultimately, we believe that they will, we will always see a hybrid work environment and some some verticals may be able to completely go remote right specially in technology, I think there are certain areas where that will definitely be possible.

Javed 11:32

But are we expect that you will see and hybrid setup where employees are are working from home at times and in some cases going in now there are some employees will be able to work from home all the time. You know, I use the term we use the term work is no longer where you go It's what you do. Yeah. And the focus is going to be on how can I get what I do done and less important is do I physically need to be there. So we are expecting an hybrid hybrid environment going forward. And that's what we're planning for. How much is still an unknown.

Jacob Morgan 12:08

Yeah, you still think there is some value from employees being face to face and seeing each other?

Javed 12:16

Absolutely. So technology today solves a lot of those problems, right? So the video, the advancements in video technology, I'm in VR in this business super excited about the fact that that technology has come so far and has been adopted so far. And I think eventually technology is going to get pretty darn good where that face to face interaction will feel almost like being there. I think some aspects of it will actually get better. So imagine and be surprised people when they say that, you know, sometimes, and and meeting might be more productive than your remote because what technology like AI is capable of doing. But a good example of that would be I use the example of I interest. Sometimes with our overseas teams who are not necessarily native speakers, and our technology today has things like transcriptions, right? So you try and have a conversation with somebody because of transcription, they are able to understand you better, right, they're able to the meeting actually becomes better than an in person meeting. But there are other aspects that I think are harder to replicate. And a good example of

that is that social connection that I was talking about, right? I, I use the example of my my nine year old daughter so she, she is also stuck at home, only child but she's able to hang out with her friends. And I've watched her how she hangs out, which is, you know, it happens to be she's on FaceTime, and really not worried about video, but it's just the audio from the other three friends right to and she's hanging out. And I don't think we've really well solved that hanging out the social aspect of interactions and that's probably an area where I think you'll see a lot of innovation from from technology companies. those use cases. I think I probably should have done better in person. But,

Jacob Morgan 14:06

yeah, you know, that part's tough. So what have you been doing at Cisco to kind of help create and foster that because like you said, You can't just walk by somebody's desk and grab a coffee you can just say hello to somebody while you're grabbing lunch. So how have you guys been trying to foster that kind of just casual interaction with your people?

Javed 14:26

Yeah, this is a high of I cannot thank our CEO and non executive leadership team and our fleenor they've they've set a very strong example of of things you can do so one of the things we do is on a weekly basis a CEO and a staff and you know, by the way, we have 50,000 person company, so not a small plus company, right? So not a small company. The leadership team leads a check in we call it a Cisco check in and it is, it is hanging out. Right so there is the obviously might talk a little bit about work, but if you it's not too Your typical all hands where you know, at the end of the quarter we are providing an update. It is a, you know, topics, top of mind for people. And sometimes there are social topics relevant to what's going on in the world.

Javed 15:13

Sometimes we've had entertainer, folks from the entertainment industry, and sometimes we've had all sorts of external guests. So that's, that's one thing we've been doing at a company level. But the other thing that I found within smaller groups that some of my managers have been effectively able to do is, you know, using our technology to just hang out to set up a meeting, but it's not really a meeting in the true sense where it's about, and I'm going to start at this time and there's an agenda. It's just hanging out, you know, you can show if you want, you can bring your friends, you can bring your family along, there's a drink or two usually set up for Friday evenings. So we've tried as soon as a lot of those examples out there. I think those things help. There is more we can do. And as I was saying earlier, I think There's room for innovation and this social. How do you how do you get the social interactions going while living out?

Jacob Morgan 16:07

Well, I suspect you guys are going to be one of the leaders in the space brainstorming some some ideas there, which you will see in the coming years.

Javed 16:15

It is, yes. We are thinking about it. It's a hard problem to solve. But we definitely working on it as lots of good ideas here in the valley as well. So

Jacob Morgan 16:26

how do you think what we're seeing now is impacted leaders or how has it impacted you as a leader? Has it made you For example, more human more vulnerable as a leader now people can see inside your house, they might see your child running in the background. So how does it change how you lead your people?

Javed 16:42

Yeah, I think, you know, I've always been somewhat of an introvert, I'm told But one of the things I realized is that this new work environment, you know, you just have to open up Not just your work environment, but your family and, you know, your personal life. And it's just a bit. It's just a new way of working and I found myself get a lot more comfortable with that. Probably, you know, would have maybe asked my reminded my daughter to not come in when this got started in March because I was talking to Jake Morgan. But, you know, now she wouldn't be surprised if she stops by and you know what, it's okay. I think that's that's the end all dealing with that. The other thing as a leader that I realized I needed to do more of was, and I realized this in some of the interactions with my employees, especially the first few months, you know, it was a busy time for us. We get into meetings. We were in this crazy exercise of scaling our infrastructure, you talk to an employee, and you sometimes forgot that there was so much else going on in people's lives right? Not just on the not just work related, you know, stress if I may use that word, but also on the personal front with the COVID, and some of the, some of the emotional stress that comes around it. And I realized this, you know, I had an employee of mine who we had a family member, you know, who had tested positive and you know, this person was trying to avoid that. But the, but it's not obvious when you get on a call and you have a meeting and it seems like a productive meeting. Whereas if I had met in person, right, I think I met the employee in person, I probably would have caught up on those things a lot more we would have, we would have had a deeper conversation about it. And I think those things I found I need to spend more time in this new world because you see people with our clean backgrounds and our you know, background replacement, you don't realize that there might be so much else going on. So also I found as a leader, we have to spend more time making sure we talk about these things.

Jacob Morgan 19:03

What about as far as leading a remote team? Because obviously, it's one thing you know, you're getting it all hands, you're you're talking to people directly. you're engaging them, you're motivating them, you're you're pushing them to grow. It's probably not the same when you're doing it behind the screen. And so have you had to change just your approach or has Cisco and the leaders there had to change their approach when it comes to motivating coaching others inspiring other employees?

Javed 19:32

Yeah, so I think the biggest change would be a lot more frequent check ins outside of your structure meeting and sometimes that takes the form of an informal check in as I was talking about, so spending a lot more time. And it's not just a video meeting, but it's, you know, me sending out communication, whether it's an individual basis or smaller teams spending more time with..one of the biggest change has been I used to visit my pleasure sites, both inside and outside the country on a regular basis, I can't do that anymore.

Javed 20:09

So having a more dedicated checking lipsey for my employees in, in London, our employees in Ireland, right, because they, in some ways have certain, you know, they're they're further along that curve. A good example is my team. And we have a team in Oslo. And they're all back, they've all been back in the office for a while. And so having those check ins are a much more frequent basis. I think that's been a big change. And then the other thing I think we had to do is highlight some of these successes. You know, a lot more often because again, as people go back into their respective teams and their fixed meetings, you sometimes are not as connected into the all the good stuff that's happening across the company.

Jacob Morgan 20:57

Yeah, it's funny you mentioned Oslo, because so I follow a lot of chess. And in Norway, they're one of the few parts of the world where a lot of chess tournaments have gotten back to being over the board. You see people actually like sitting at a chess board together playing where most parts of the world, you still can't do that. So yeah, they're, they're back to full swing over there.

Javed 21:16

Yeah. And I think they got back pretty quickly. And now there's been a little bit of an uptake. I hope that doesn't continue. But that team got back in the office within a few months, and they're happy to be back.

Jacob Morgan 21:28

So one thing that you mentioned, which I thought was interesting is scaling. And I know that this is a challenge for a lot of leaders and companies around the world is how do you scale How do you grow? And for a lot of people they can they have the luxury of doing it over a longer time period. But you guys had to basically scale and grow what over like a couple of days or weeks. Can you talk about what that process was like? I mean, as somebody who's leading this multibillion dollar unit, how do you how do you think through that scale? What was your process or approach.

Javed 22:01

Yeah, yeah. And I think, reminds me of a lot of long nights with many, many people. So one of the things we realized was so I started off, I started getting these phone calls and remember in March, early March from CIO is going Javed, you know, I just send everybody home, is everything gonna be okay? And, and, you know, we knew that we were going to need more capacity, but I don't think we realized till the first I think Tuesday morning, 8am second week of March, that this wasn't going to be 20 30%. Right? This was going to be 100 hundred percent in a few days. Right. So one of the things and you know, software today is designed to scale up relatively, you know, it's automated normally can scale up pretty well. But we ran into some interesting constraints that normally would not be things you would think about because this happened so fast.

Javed 22:56

So a good example of that is you know, even like public cloud providers who actually have computers sitting there that you can just rent, right? You suddenly had so many of these tech companies, asking them for the same resources. And so while these systems were built to scale up, they were usually built

to scale up 20, 30, 40%. And then you started to run into dependencies on suppliers or on vendors that you depend on. Those were some of the bigger challenges.

Javed 23:25

Another good example, is just bandwidth in the US, so everybody went home. And instead of company enterprise networks, which are usually well managed, you know, they connect into our data centers, folks who are coming over their, you know, ISP, right, whether it's at&t, Verizon, or T Mobile, right? All they were coming over mobile networks. So we have to call up some of our vendors, and they were all scrambling with the sudden change. So it was it was a big learning that in revenue, you have to make sure that your downstream suppliers or your downstream resources that you depend on, when they have a similar run on their resources. If I use the term, what does that do to your ability to scale? So a lot of our challenges have to be with that.

Javed 24:13

I think the other challenge was, we depended on Asia for some of these things. And Asia in many ways was in more trouble at that time. Because they had an early ramp up of COVID. So that put some strain over there. But the team did a fantastic job. And he worked really long hours, you know, we, we were able to kind of navigate that. And the other thing, the other kind of decision we made, which I'm very proud of is our customers and new customers, or folks were not used things like video conferencing before. We're wanting to use our products. And we gave that away because the first three months Cisco did not charge for any extra use for both existing customers and new ones because the need was so big, that put additional strain on my team, but the team did a fantastic job of supporting that need. So I'm very proud of what Cisco enabling that and the work the team had to do to make sure we met not just business demand, but other demand for people who are just looking for a solution to stay connected.

Jacob Morgan 25:22

Did you have and I suspect you did, but did you have a lot of clients or maybe prospects as better who, you know, maybe they were thinking of digital transformation over the past few months or years? They were kind of debating, should they do Cisco or buy Cisco products are now you know, a little hesitant? And then once COVID happened, it's sort of the floodgates open and they're like, okay, we get it. We know we need to do it. Like, did you see that kind of like a rapid change in the mentality of a lot of business leaders?

Javed 25:49

Yeah, so so I think I can't remember where I saw this tweet, I think and it's probably out there somewhere, but somebody was saying that the who is responsible For the digitization, digital transformation of my company, is it the CEO is the CIO, or was it Covid, Right? And, and and, you know, I'm going with that right. But I think what, what, what, what, what the sudden change forced was leaders went from going, should I be enabling video conferencing? Or should I be enabling a certain technology to, that's the only way I can stay connected.

Javed 26:26

So people went, immediately went into an survive mode, where suddenly these technologies got deployed and tested overnight, and there were some learning pains. But I feel like companies fell into two categories. So there were companies who had already started on this journey of enabling remote work. And they had a baseline of the stack already enabled. for them. It was a matter of, Oh, I have 10,000 employees. You know, I have 100 employees who had worked on effectively using this, how do we scale it out to the entire Corporation, but I already have this baseline technology in place. And there were others who had not started on this journey. And in those cases, you know, it took a little bit more work, you know, retraining your employees. But once you got through that initial phase race technology and our products product and some of the devices we have, once you go through that initial learning, we were able to get our most of the companies up and running pretty quickly. But it is, you know, nothing, nothing forced that digitization more than the last few months. We've been trying to get people to use video for a long, long time and I think now, video you know, if your video is not on you get reminded I can't see you on video.

Jacob Morgan 27:44

Yeah, well I guess it's kind of crazy, because I guess it sort of makes you think that like, you know, when you're talking to a business leader, and they say, Oh, you know, digital transformation is not a priority. We got a lot of other things going on. All of a sudden this virus happens and this is the priority. So it kind of makes you wonder like, why didn't leaders change before? Like, why did it take a virus or something like this are working from home for a lot of business leaders to realize that, hey, technology is important, connecting our people is important. I mean, are you finding that your clients, your prospects, they just have too much other stuff going on? Do they not have money for this? Like, what? What was their objection to why did it take a virus for companies to evolve?

Javed 28:28

Yeah, so I think the question that be that the leaders may be asked, I think probably, you know, I change those changed the way I described it as people previously. The question was, I want to get on this digitization journey. Does your technology job or Cisco, right, help me in this digitization journey? And by the way after check these three, four or five things off right? And when transformation happens that way tends to be a little bit incremental, right? Am I making my existing life slightly better or at least as well? What COVID did was, I'm down and out. Right, I won't be able to operate. Right. So, so so. So that forced a very different kind of question, which was, you know, this is your technology going about allow me to stay productive tomorrow. And I think in many cases, this technology is out there.

Javed 29:17

So I think the leaders were forced to ask a business continuity question, which is, Will I be able to even operate versus Are you going to help me become, you know, more productive? I think that's what for? Yeah. Different kind of bar. And and I think it's not just about it's, it's not just about video and collaboration. It's also other verticals, right. So doctors who were forced with, I don't want to go into the room, because I don't have the necessary equipment. Where can technology help me solve that problem? And that's a question nobody was asking before, right. Same thing applies to other verticals like manufacturing right. Do I have to go into the office to do what I used to be doing. And I think that's what's accelerating the transformation.

Jacob Morgan 30:05

Yeah, it's interesting that the question changed from like, is this going to help me transform to this is going to help me stay in business? which is sort of interesting. Like if this would have happened, I don't know, 10 years ago, or 20 years ago, I wonder what the impact would have been on businesses around the world? I mean, I would imagine it would have been just completely catastrophic, because we just wouldn't be able to get things done. Like we would just have, would just shut down.

Javed 30:28

Yeah. You know, I think I have a two views on that. Right. So one is Yeah, I mean, I what, how would we have managed that maybe we would have been on phone calls or something right now, but the flip side of that is not that I would want this to happen, right. It's something like this 10 years ago would have completely changed the trajectory of innovation to right while we might have struggled mightily at that time, I think it would have forced some of the innovation sooner. So we may have been further along, right. So I look at it Two ways, you know, events like this actually accelerate future innovation even further. But that could have been a different outcome. But that is me speculating.

Jacob Morgan 31:12

Well, in general, when you look at how the world of work is changing, obviously technology is a part of it. COVID, you know, we've been seeing with other black lives matter, a lot of a lot of issues happening in the world, I mean, work and leadership is clearly changing. What are some of the big trends that you were paying attention to or that Cisco as a company is paying attention to as far as how work is evolving?

Javed 31:33

Yeah, so I think the big trend, obviously, is what is the mix of remote and in person work, what's that mix going to look like? Because I think it has fundamental implications on what we call the office space today, like not just physically, physically but also from an actual business standpoint. I think that's that's, that's, that has big implications for a company like Cisco because it's not just about collaboration. We sell a bunch of Other gear, right, which, which, which is now moving from campuses to maybe data centers and, and the cloud.

Javed 32:08

I think the second thing, that trend I'm seeing, and this is a little bit technical but important is security. Right? So we used to have IT departments with larger security teams focused on protecting the enterprise. And that enterprise usually included large campuses, in addition to, you know, cloud software. Now, you've gone from 8000 offices, sorry, 8 offices to 8000 offices now. Right. So a company that used to have eight, let's say eight large offices now has employees working from home and each home now they came in office. And I think that's, that has far reaching implications on security, which is something we are spending a lot of time on, because companies now have not just people with their assets, their IP and living in various locations. that are that are pretty disparate. So that's the other big trend we are seeing.

Javed 33:05

I think there is also, specifically to collaboration, the one of the things we're watching closely is you can't be crouched over a laptop for eight hours a day. You know, watching video, right? So I think that that there is a physical aspect, physical fatigue aspect to it. So that's the other thing we're kind of looking to improve. And then the the other thing is remote work, just extending on that. When you have an environment where you're got background noises, and people walking in and out, you know, how do you make sure that that meeting, that interaction continues to stay productive and effective, so the tools you need, need to expand beyond video. So you'll see a lot of investment and I want to whiteboard have a whiteboarding session with you which I can do you know, and so, you'll see those kinds of technology start to get better as well.

Jacob Morgan 34:03

You you guys obviously work with a ton of companies, a lot of different business leaders. But what are some of the biggest challenges that you see from these organizations from these leaders who are trying to go through this transformation that, you know, they want to embrace digital transformation? What are some of the common or the big challenges that you keep seeing pop up?

Javed 34:24

So I think the, the the Initially, I think a lot of these companies went to what I would call a survive phase, right, which is they were just trying to survive, I've sent employees home, how do I make sure they are being connected and connected to being productive? They're being effective? I think they're, most of these companies are now starting to think a little longer term. So they're moving from what I call to survive phase to a thrive phase. It's like how do I accept the fact that this is the new world, and some form of this is going to continue and how do I continue to be not just connected, but how do I make my interactions more productive?

Javed 35:03

So companies are looking to reinvent their workflows, whatever that workflow might be right? in technology, the answer seems to be a little easier. But if you're in manufacturing, or if you're a small business, how do I reinvent my workflow of interacting with customers on how I sell using today's technology? And sometimes the answer, you know, isn't obvious. It involves connecting existing pieces of technology. You know, I use the example of healthcare right, which is healthcare, fundamentally, is going to change because of Covid even after even after things get better. So we are starting to see companies move from that survive phase to thinking about now that I'm here, how can I be more productive than before using the tools that I have and if I don't have the tools, let's go and invest in those tools. And that is, that is a big kind of mindset shift. CIOs are going through as we speak.

Jacob Morgan 36:03

So I want to switch gears a little bit and talk about some of the people's stuff specifically looking at leadership. I'm curious, when when you look at promoting somebody to be a potential leader, what are some of the things that you personally look for in a potential leader?

Javed 36:20

So I think, obviously, for my area, you know, some base level of technology understanding given the nature of the job is table stakes, right? So the tech industry especially, you need to understand the

underlying technologies and innovations. They have some degree. So that means table stakes, but outside of that, I value leaders. I use, I use the term an encoding, I should know who this is when I'm coding somebody, which is a leader is somebody who gets people to do things that they otherwise wouldn't. Right and It's, it's leaders, we're able to communicate effectively, where we want to be going and then get people to follow you. I think that that, to me is a big, big trait. And but doing that with the second thing I look for is empathy. Right, which is, you know, especially in today's world, you know, if you just took that code by itself, there is a non empathetic way of accomplishing the same thing, right? Getting people to do things that they otherwise wouldn't do, but are you able to do that with empathy and bring people along? Right, so those are the those are the kind of three things I'd say right basic, basic technology skills to do the job and then and then being able to motivate people.

Jacob Morgan 37:41

You mentioned technology. And this is the you know, today I like to say that every company is a technology company and every leader I think, should have some understanding of technology, which is interesting because in the past technology used to be an IT thing and everybody would say I and I'd sit go to the CIO, go to the CTO, go to the Take people. But today if you're a leader, you don't have the luxury of doing that anymore. Do you?

Javed 38:07

So, so, yeah, so technology is anybody's everybody's job. In fact, I think, you know, technology's become a part of our education systems, if you think about it, right. So technology even up until two decades ago or a decade ago, right was, you learned it at some point as you got into college, or beyond. Now, everybody grows up. In fact, today, you have a two year old kids running around with iPads, right? So So technology has become a way of life. It's how you grow up. So I think your comment is very fair. It's like technology. What is technology? I think the definition has changed. And it's like learning the language English as you grow up. Right? technologies become a part of our lives and I think we use it in different contexts sometimes in here in the Bay Area, but ultimately, technology is But everything that everybody does does today.

Jacob Morgan 39:03

So for leaders, and if you have any advice or suggestions on how they can become a little bit more fluid with technology, is it as simple as just like testing these things out and playing around with them?

Javed 39:14

Yeah, I think I think, you know, most leaders being hands on would be my piece of advice, right, which is, even as we went through the space here, where we rolled out new tools, or a leader rolled out new tools for people to communicate, I think being a hands on user of those things. Using those day to day, I think is a good way to get more familiar. I found most leaders, you know, who are successful are already pretty savvy with technology per se. Right? But the best way to get more familiar, so just use it and not be scared.

Jacob Morgan 39:54

Yeah, no, that makes sense. I want to also get back a little bit to you and sort of how you make decisions and choices as the leader of a multi billion dollar unit to have a process for how you decide

on which investments you want to make. Which, which strategic direction that you want to take. What is your process? Like when you're making these pivotal choices? Do you have like a framework that you use? Or how do you approach it?

Javed 40:21

Yeah, so that's a, that's a good question. So I think that is, when you when I have for me, I run a large company, a large large group, which is multi multi billion dollar ones that has two sets of investments that I have to normally trade off, right. So one is there are existing businesses that are thriving and flourishing and growing and, you know, well established. So you need to make sure number one, that you are continuing to invest in those businesses while measuring the investment needed. So based on the trajectory of that business, how well is it doing the competition, the opportunities You have to continue to feed those businesses so that they can continue to thrive. So that was a big part of the investment decision I have to make.

Javed 41:09

But the other piece of it is, and I think that's what you were trying to get to is how do I now decide? What are the bets you need to make? So that's the next three years, five years, ten years, you're generating those billions of dollars and, and that is a combination at a company like Cisco, a combination of internal r&d investment, which is deliberate, deliberately focused on what we call our horizon two or three. So what idea even though high risk is it has a good good shot of becoming the next billion dollar business? And then the third thing I'd say is, you know, you're always looking for others out there who, who have a head start or have an idea that's already proven itself and in many ways, it's a risk reduction exercise. So the the investment is kind of distributed across those three buckets, and it's driven based on some level of data, but sometimes you also have to take an educated risk. Some of those things will not work out. But you have to place that second and third bet on a regular basis.

Jacob Morgan 42:19

Have you ever had to make a bet that on something that didn't work out?

Javed 42:23

Absolutely, yes. Yes. I mean, I wouldn't want to call it out here. Live, but

Jacob Morgan 42:28

Well maybe without naming what it was, can you just explained, like, how did you deal with it? We made a bet on something and it ended up not going well. I mean, a lot of people would say, Oh, they know that's a failure. Clearly you didn't get fired. But how did you deal with making the wrong choice because that's something that a lot of leaders struggle with is dealing with a mistake or with a something that might be perceived as a failure?

Javed 42:54

Yeah, so so I think so. So so bad in a company like Cisco often is comes with a Set up financial metrics around it right? I'm gonna I'm gonna, the reason I'm placing this bet is we made some assumptions around, what's, what the payoff is going to be. And we accept that some of those are going to be

failures. Because if there was no risk, somebody would have solved that problem already, or we would have solved that problem already. I think if you start with that assumption, it becomes a lot easier to then analyze when you get to the other side of it.

Javed 43:31

So a couple of investments we've made, for example, in terms of technology, we felt that it was going to be a product or a feature that was going to become a billion dollar business or 100 million dollar business but it only turned out to be a our customers decided they were not going to pay for it, but they wanted it for free. Right. So that's an example of a bet there. You learn from it. I think you go back to your assumptions and the biggest learning I usually like to take is what were the assumptions we made that? And why did you make those assumptions? And can we get better at kind of making those assumptions so that the mix that we make has a better shot. But you have to accept that, that some of these bets, especially the horizon two and three are going to be are going to be, you know, might not turn up. Now we can we try and not the bigger the bet, we tend to make sure that that risk level is a little lower. And that's why we like to make some of these bets earlier, smaller bets earlier where the risk might be higher. That's that's usually financial calculation. That doesn't make sense.

Jacob Morgan 44:41

And what is it typical day look like for you?

Javed 44:44

Nowadays, typical day is like, I come into this office of mine and sit in front of this beautiful video device that I have for and actually, I was hoping to, so we have one of these fancy Cisco Video devices which makes it so I'm not crouched over a laptop, as I was suggesting earlier, the fatigue factor is a lot less than I'm sitting in front of this fancy video device. So I spent most of my time here but it's usually a meetings that are no check ins on projects and teams. One of the things I like to do is I will deliberately schedule a couple of meetings to be phone calls. Which I know I schedule these in my team was really my job you know, you work for WebEx and why are you scheduling a phone call? I call me on my cell phone. What I do is I I step out and go for a walk so that I get my my my steps and so I've switched my routine around to do that. The The other thing I try I'm pretty disciplined about is making sure I go get my my mind My one at the end of the day, but the day is typically catching up on projects, checking in on team members. spending a lot more time just checking in. And then yeah, so I think that's, that's kind of my busy day, usually.

Jacob Morgan 46:17

Is video conference and meeting fatigue is a real thing.

Javed 46:23

Yeah, so i think i think i think like, obviously depends on your day, right. So, not everybody is on a video conference all day. But I think managers and leaders who are spending more time in meetings, I think, have a lot more of that. I think. You know, we've actually seen data around just, you know, physical stress and if you look at some of the hardware that people are starting to buy and buy hardware, I'm talking about your office setup, and, you know, tables that adjust so that he can stand up and down. So that is There's been a significant increase in spending in those areas. And I think it's an important thing

from a purely physical health standpoint, that that is important. You know, not everybody can afford these, but we've got these devices, which are a separate device. So you're which, which, so you're not necessarily trying to crouch below a laptop screen and you can kind of pivot between the two. It does make a make make make a big difference.

Jacob Morgan 47:26

Oh, yeah, for sure. I couldn't agree more. And I'm curious, do you have any advice for people who are listening or maybe early on in their career, but who want to grow and advance and maybe one day run a multi billion dollar division like you are? I mean, what what is it that has allowed you to become successful any particular techniques that you use any practices that allowed you to grow and excel?

Javed 47:54

Yeah, so I think you know, what's worked for me is you know, being curious and just being willing to learn, right? So I think I did not, I don't, I did not set out to be a manager as an example, I started my career as an engineer and thought I was just going to be coding for, for most of my life, but as I got in, you know, got into trying out, leading a small team, or learning to, you know, learning to lead. I think just being curious and trying those things out has been, has has been has helped me out a lot. The other thing is just learning from other people who do that better. Right. So a big part of me, transitioning from an engineer to becoming a leader was watching other leaders motivate and speak and inspire. And while I might have thought that that might, that might be something that I wouldn't be doing, I think watching them learning from Then being curious about the techniques and, and and how leaders lead, I think has been a big part of, of my success. So be thirsty.

Jacob Morgan 49:10

Have you had any coaches or mentors during your career that kind of advise you or guide you?

Javed 49:16

Yeah, I think I've had quite a few, I think, you know, managers along the way, who've and I found some of the best mentors have been mentors who have been brutally honest about what what you do well, and what you don't do well yet, reminding you that, you know, you, reminding you so that you are confident about continuing down that path. So it's my best best mentors have been people who have given me the feedback on what I'm doing as well and how I can get better, but lots of them along the way, and usually in the form of, you know, leaders or managers that work for

Jacob Morgan 49:58

And they've been brutally honest with you.

Javed 50:02

Yes, I think it's, I think that is super. And I try and do that with my with my team too, which is you want to be. And you know, brutal sounds like a tough word, but at the same time leaders who believed in you, but we're being honest about what you what you what you can prove. And I think that that's that's that's that's really important.

Jacob Morgan 50:24

Yeah. I mean, Cisco is also a very unique company as a whole in terms of culture. I mean, I don't know if this is still true, but I remember I was talking to Francine Katsidis, your chief people officer and this was maybe two years ago. And she was telling me how you guys got rid of like annual employee engagement reviews and you and performance reviews and all that sort of stuff. So how is a leader now? Do you work with your people to see if they're engaged or happier? How do you evaluate them if you don't have an annual performance review? what's the what's that process like for you?

Javed 50:59

Yeah, so I know And Fran's a fantastic leader. She's She's very instrumental in some of the improvements we've made here abscess going how we do these things. I think going back to you know, you want to be honest with your employees, but being empathetic as you do that is the key. Right. And I think this is where Cisco encourages those honest conversations with your employees, whether they are performing or not. But making sure you're having those regular conversations.

Javed 51:29

Now, in many ways, the annual performance review system avoided that because it deferred that conversation to a moment in time. And those are always almost surprises, right? So by eliminating those, it's forcing managers. The only thing Cisco does a very good job at is evaluating managers themselves. Right. So making sure that managers are being trained and being supported to have those conversations because especially in tech, you have this scenario often they're good strong engineers, sometimes Become accidental managers, because they're high performing. But they have not necessarily been coached and trained to have those brutally honest conversations yet be empathetic as you're having those conversations.

Javed 52:14

And I think Cisco's got a fantastic framework around that. That's one of the reasons why, you know, you're always coming up on those great places to work list. And it's important to do that in good times and bad times. Right. So I think you want to make sure that that company culture is consistent, that things are going well and not going well. So the employees expect, and know what they're gonna get.

Jacob Morgan 52:40

yeah, no, that makes sense. And it's not even just for engineers and coders. I mean, even in finance, right? I mean, you can bring in the most amount of money you get promoted, even though you're not necessarily good at leading other people. So yeah, it's it's tough. I think leadership is definitely changing. But yeah, I mean, I know some of the amazing work that you guys have been doing at Cisco for years, as far as how you think about people and leadership and you've been driving a lot of the a lot of change, which I think is totally Fantastic. Well, we only have a couple minutes left, maybe we can wrap up with just some advice that you might have for let's look at two groups. So advice for people who are not in any kind of management position, where maybe early on in their careers, but you know, they're they're hungry, they want to grow, they want to develop, what advice do you have for them?

Javed 53:30

Well, so I think, I would say, love what you do, especially folks early in their career, right. I think I ended up where I ended up because I, you know, I, I feel like I I always asked myself, am I enjoying what I'm

doing? And if you're not, you know, don't hesitate to make a change. Because especially early in your career. There's so much in front of you. So I think that's probably the biggest piece of advice I could give based on my experiences. And your second question was for managers.

Jacob Morgan 54:09

Yah second question was more for people who are in a leadership capacity and I love the love, love what you do, because I mean, life is short. So you consistently are depressed and angry and frustrated with your job. I mean, why? Why bother doing it day in and day out? So you really do need to enjoy the work that you're doing. The second question is more around people who are in a leadership capacity where they are responsible for others. And obviously, they are concerned with how the world of work is changing. They want to be good leaders, they want to adapt, I mean, what should they be doing or thinking about to become better leaders?

Javed 54:44

Yeah, so I think something especially relevant today, I would say is having more of the social conversations with your employees today, right. So as leaders I found you know, I am what I am because of the Work that my team does otherwise, you know, I can't, I won't to be effective, I'm productive. So day's work where people are spending so much time away from their teams, my biggest piece of advice that I'm giving my team is, you know, set up that informal phone call or set up that informal meeting and spend more time just talking to your employees about what's going on.

Javed 55:24

Because the rest of it, I think we've got a system and processes you're able to measure, you're able to be effective, but But in today's world, I think spending more time their employees making sure you're understanding what else was going on, and what else they need beyond just the tools that work, I think is a big part of leadership today. And the biggest learning I've had in the last few months, you'd be surprised that how much else is going on in typical person's lives and how it might be impacting their ability to be productive and

Jacob Morgan 55:54

Got to be that human leader. Know your people, not just as as workers but as human beings. I love that advice. Well, Javon, where can people go to learn more about you and Cisco? Some people watching listening might not know, but Cisco and I actually we recently collaborated, pretty awesome video. And I think the URL was futureofwork.webex.com. Cool stuff on there.

Javed 56:20

Yeah, please go visit that site. There's lots of information about technology and, and talks from smart people like yourself. And there is also free tools and so on. You can also go to Webex.com and find out more about just the work that Cisco has been doing.

Jacob Morgan 56:38

And if people want to follow you, or you on LinkedIn or Twitter or any other things

Javed 56:42

on LinkedIn, and on Twitter, it's Javed_Khan or you can find me on both.

Jacob Morgan 56:48

Very cool, well thanks for taking time out of your day to speak with me. I really appreciate it.

Javed 56:54

Well, thank you. This was fun. Have a great day

Jacob Morgan 56:56

Yeah. Thanks. And thanks, everyone for tuning in. Again, my guest has been Javed Khan, SVP and GM of Cisco collaboration and I will see all of you very soon.