

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 04:46**

Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of the future of work. I'm your host Jacob Morgan and today I am joined by Ania Smith. She is the CEO of TaskRabbit. Ania, thank you for joining me.

**Ania 04:56**

Hi, Jacob. Thanks so much for having me on.

**Jacob 04:59**

Of course. So for people who are not familiar with TaskRabbit, can you give a little bit of background info about the company? How many employees do you guys have? What do you guys do?

**Ania 05:12**

Sure. So TaskRabbit has actually been around for quite some time. And what we're trying to do every day is to make everyday life easier for everyday people to by helping them getting things done around the home. So we connect people who need help with taskers in their local communities. And so they handle everyday to do so everything from furniture assembly to handy work to home cleaning, event planning, and a lot more. It's it's a two sided marketplace. So you've seen all of those around recently. And through that, we also help to create new work opportunities for people, whether they own their own business, or just want to earn some extra income on their own terms. And we as TaskRabbit, therefore, manage the back end of that business. So we facilitate the connection between the client who wants something get done, and the Tasker who is ready there to help.

**Jacob 06:10**

And how many employees do you guys have now,

**Ania 06:12**

we have a little over 200, close to 250. We, in 2017, are actually closer to 2018 TaskRabbit, was acquired by IKEA. And so in partnership with them, we're really growing fast and scaling, not just within the US, but also in other markets. So we've just recently launched in Italy, which is our eighth market.

**Jacob 06:39**

Oh, very nice. My wife and I both use TaskRabbit. Many, many times over the years. So we're definitely familiar with the, with the service and the things that you guys do there. So we're big fans.

**Ania 06:50**

Thanks.

**Jacob 06:52**

So let's start off with, before we start talking about kind of, you know, the, the work stuff with your story and how you got to where you are, so you can take us way back. really curious just how you were raised? Where did you grow up? And what was your path like to ultimately becoming the CEO of TaskRabbit?

**Ania 07:14**

So Wow, how long do you have now I'm just kidding, I'm going to try to keep it fairly short. But I do have not really a unique story, but a little bit different. And then I was born in Poland and moved here when I was 12. And I moved to the middle of Midwest into a small town called Sioux Falls, South Dakota. And just like many immigrant stories, it's really quite similar. I didn't know any English, so I had to learn it really quite fast. My parents had to work really hard and have multiple jobs to really help ends meet. And it was pretty rough, but also, I think, taught us, my brother and I a lot of skills that are needed as a CEO. So resilience and humility, and really, that grit, and that work ethic to put forth and and try to do our best.

**Ania 08:07**

So I knew that education was very early on, I knew that education was going to be the key to to progress and to move forward. You know, I saw my parents working really hard, which is partly why I love being at TaskRabbit. And really, I've been at Uber and Airbnb, and then all of those sharing economy companies, my sort of soft spot has always gone to the supply side or the couriers, or the host or the taskers in the case of TaskRabbit. Because really I wish that those types of platforms were available when we when I was much younger, and when my parents were trying to make ends meet. And so to be able to provide income to people who want or need an extra income is really rewarding.

**Ania 08:54**

But coming back to my story, with education being really the key I worked very hard to try to do well in school, I went to college, and then I moved out to the east coast. And that was sort of the first time that I realized, wow, there's like a big world. I knew that one existed in Europe because that's where it came from. But I also got to meet some incredible people and mentors who really helped me to move my career forward. I started in consulting and then fairly quickly went on to get my MBA, and then really following a more traditional path, where I, after my MBA, went to banking, then again, management consulting, and then slowly moved into industry.

**Ania 09:41**

I love to travel. So I started at Expedia, spent a lot of years there and really, truly learned a lot. It was my first corporate experience and move back that was actually we were based in London at the time. So move back to the US and started working in Silicon Valley first in retail, and then in in a few other industries that are in few other companies that I've already mentioned. And through all of that, there's been some consistent themes.

**Ania 10:11**

One is, I really do appreciate the broader world. And so by the time I have started at TaskRabbit, I've lived in four continents, I have had the opportunity to work in many different countries, which, which is helpful, especially as we're launching in new markets internationally. And really, the key theme is to be open to new opportunities as they present themselves. And sometimes they don't quite seem as the next step. But they're different and unique. And it's an opportunity to keep learning and growing. So sometimes it's a side move. But it's still really helpful to get to learn a new skill and to meet new people and really try to see what you like, it's really hard to know what you like.

**Ania 10:14**

A lot of times, they'll say, you know, follow your passion. But that's really hard, because oftentimes, we don't know what our passion is. So I'd like to think more about finding my passion. And really, the only way to do that, for those of us who are not lucky enough who know from when we're three, what we want to be is to try out many new things and seeing what really energizes you and motivates you and helps you think about the impact that you're having. And that has really helped me.

**Jacob 11:30**

You mentioned, this idea of side moves, which I kind of wanted to touch on a little bit, because you said that, you know, ultimately, for a lot of people progress and growth in their career is not always linear. Sometimes you do have to make side moves. So can you talk about how you do that in your career, where there's some opportunities that you took on which were side moves that ultimately allowed you to then move forward?

**Ania 11:53**

Yeah, so there were many. You know, when I kind of take a look back, I think, Wow, it's not that I've been promoted that many times. But I have moved sort of zigzagging around. I'm a good friend of mine once using analogy of a Google map. So she talks about how, you know, sometimes we're just like speeding down the highway and towards our career and like we know exactly what we're doing. Other times, we're kind in a slow country road. Other times we take the wrong turn. Other times, we actually are stuck in traffic jam and really feel stuck in our careers. Other times, we may even have an accident and really have to like pedal back. And, and I think that that's a sort of a great analogy to think about my career.

**Ania 12:35**

So, for example, when I was at Walmart, I really felt like, I wanted to grow my competency in becoming a merchant, I had never been a merchant, I had always done strategy, partnerships. And because I hadn't been a merchant, and I was already at a director level, the VP at the time said, Well, I'm sorry, I can't, you can't have that job. Unless you want to go back to manager level and then work your way up, which did seem very hard because I that would indicate a pay cut, for example. But I found a different way, a side way, I ended up going into merchandising via strategy path and did merchandising strategy, and that allowed me to build the skills and I honestly gained the trust of that team.

**Ania 13:27**

So that then when a next new merchandising role opened, they offered it to me as it happens, I have found a whole different thing that I actually wanted to do, which was to build something from scratch, which I didn't even know was really possible. And I went that down that path, which then ended up opening up the door for me to get into Airbnb. So being open and having goals is good, but those change and that's okay, as long as you're working towards something.

**Jacob 13:56**

The other thing you mentioned is you live in four different continents. How important do you think that was to your success as far as experiencing different cultures seeing different types of people getting that exposure outside of just one particular location? Has that helped you in your career?

**Ania 14:14**

Yes, 100%. Again, it allows you to build resilience and and being adaptable to change. And as we have seen this past year, change is just all around us. The only thing that's constant is change, of course and so for me, I have made sure that I do that continually. So just couple years ago, after I left Airbnb, my husband and I took a gap year to Argentina and pulled our kids out of school and move there as a whole family and I had never been to Argentina. I had been to South America but I never went to Buenos Aires but I really wanted to learn something new I wanted to study Spanish I wanted to pick up some new fun hobbies so I learned how to watercolor, I learned how to do how to horseback ride. And just to take a break from that every day, race was really empowering. And it allowed us to be very deliberate in our choices.

**Ania 15:15**

So we had a lot of time to think about, or do we want to do when we come back. So and it took a little bit of doubt away, because I feel like we had all this opportunity. And we made this choice to do these jobs to live in this city. And this is amazing, to be able to actually design your life in some way. And I feel very fortunate that we have the opportunity to do that. But part of that stems from the fact that we started, we lived internationally, even before we got married. We lived in Africa, we lived in Europe. And so there's always been this pole to keep learning.

**Jacob 15:55**

I'm actually really interested in the gap year that you took, because I think it's an important Actually, it's a pretty important lesson. And I was wondering if we can talk about that a little bit, because I know that a lot of people sometimes struggle with this. So before I jump into my question, I want to get your perspectives on. Why did you want to take this gap year, first of all, and were you worried that taking this gap year might hurt your career in the long run?

**Ania 16:25**

So the idea of taking a gap year was very tied to sort of having children and we thought, okay, at some point where they're a little bit older, can we save up enough money to go someplace and travel? Again, because we had spent a lot of time traveling when we were younger, without kids, we knew that this was really important. And it's very different when you go to a location for a week or two on vacation versus when you go somewhere and get to know the place.

**Ania 16:55**

So we have been planning for a long time, mostly because with that, it will be really fun and something unique and different to do. And of course, it will be great not to work for a year in some sense. We also felt that it was going to be challenging to save enough money and to make it work financially. But what helped us is thinking about it what ahead of time, right? So we did have to plan I'm not, you know, independently wealthy like that. So um, Did I hurt my career? Or was I worried? Um, you know, I really wasn't. And I felt like I have the skills. If I'm gone for one year. Sure. Maybe I'm slightly not on top of everything. But I have been working for 20 plus years at the time, and I felt like I could still come back. Now I received different advice on this topic before we left. There are certainly some people who are CEOs today who warned me that it's going to be hard to get back into the market when we get back. But most people were very encouraging. As it happens, we came back to just an incredible economy. And it was it wasn't that challenging to get new roles. I started my role at Uber a week after we landed back in SFO.

**Jacob 18:16**

Wow. A week, Oh, man.

**Ania 18:18**

Yah, I gave myself a week because I felt like, hey, I've been on vacation for a year plus.

**Jacob 18:25**

Yeah, wow, that's Do you think more people can benefit from a gap year because at least a lot of the people that I talked to, I think this idea of taking time is important. And I also don't think a lot of people do it enough. So I'm curious to hear what what you think I mean, do you advise more, it doesn't have to be a gap year. But just I think this idea of practicing self care, taking time for yourself, not being so stressed out about work, because that seems to be a very, very common theme for a lot, I mean especially now,

**Ania 18:56**

Especially now, I fully agree. And I absolutely feel that if you can at all swing it, it is life. It's transformative. And it really shows you that sometimes you kind of feel like oh my God, if I'm not at work, like the whole world is going to fall apart. And it's just unfortunately not true, for most of us. We're, um, we're all we are all capable of doing something else. We all change jobs very often. And this is this changing a job to something else before you change it into a new job. And to be able to take a breather and really reevaluate where you are and what you want to do and who you want to be when you grow up. I asked that question to myself all the time still today. And to have that space to think that through. It's amazing.

**Ania 19:48**

And then also the new people you meet that are probably not the same people who you see every day at work or every day in San Francisco. You're just you're exposing yourself to just a whole new environment and It doesn't have to be a year, like you said, it could be four months, five months. And I think during a pandemic, there's just been a lot of opportunity to do something else and to rethink. And

so I've actually been hearing and seeing a lot more people talking about taking some time off, which is really encouraging. I think, when I came back, I felt so refreshed. But more than anything, I felt so certain that I was doing the right thing. And that that's a really great feeling not to think like, oh, should I be doing something else? Should I try something else?

**Jacob 20:34**

Can you talk about the process that you went through? Because you said you were asking yourself some pretty big questions, and want to get into a little bit more depth around? How did you figure out what you wanted to do where you wanted to live? I think a lot of people, and, again, I don't expect everybody to take a gap year. But a lot of people all the time are trying to figure out where do I want to end up? What do I want my career to look like? What company do I want to be a part of? So what was your process? And trying to identify that? What kind of questions were you asking yourself that helped guide you in the right direction?

**Ania 21:08**

You know, I'm really lucky to have an amazing partner in my husband. And so both of us took the time to process these questions together. And so that would mean literally sometimes going to a cafe at 9am, as soon as we dropped off the kids and staying there till two, and really just talking about these questions like what city do we want to live in? Do we want to live internationally again, while we work? And why and why not? And you know, and you can't answer these questions in one sitting, so you kind of chew on it for a little while, come back to it later. So having that kind of space is important. I do think it comes back to this concept of designing your life in some sense, or being deliberate and intentional about the choices that you're making.

**Ania 21:57**

We all have a lot of skills, which is great, but it's the choices that we make about how we either empower these skills, or empower ourselves to be who we want to be that that tend to be more difficult. But if you take the time to think them through, you know, a lot of times when I coach people or when I mentor, some people we often talk about, I start with a question of where do you want to be in five years? And I rarely get someone who actually can answer that question. And that's okay. And what I always encourage people is to say, hey, just think it through, like, what would look amazing, go look at LinkedIn job postings. Do any of these interests you like, what do you get excited about. And it may change because you're going to continue to learn to grow, but have some sort of a path or an idea, even if it changes next year. Because it gives you a sense of purpose, or I find that it gives me a sense of purpose.

**Jacob 23:01**

And I think it's also important that this isn't just a question that new, it's not just something that new employees need to be thinking about. I mean, senior level leaders, mid level leaders can also go through this process of asking these questions on a regular basis. So what are some of the other questions that you looked at? So one of them, when you mentor people, you said, you asked them? Where do you want to be in five years? Are there other types of questions that you ask them to help them thinking in this direction?

**Ania 23:27**

We talk about what they're really good at. And then we talk about what they'd like to do. And and sometimes those things overlap, and sometimes they don't, and we talk about those differences. When we sort of identify what are the maybe the the the role that they want to have in five years, Or maybe they want to be, you know, painting in Iceland? I don't know, whatever they want to do. We talk about what skills are needed to do well in that role, or in that space, right? Like if it's painting in Iceland, well, do you like painting? Do you need to learn to paint? And then we talk about what we can do today to start preparing for that. So we try to identify gaps that they have. So if they want to be there in five years, why can't there be there? Why can't they be there today? If it's let's say they are an analyst and they want to become a strategic finance director? Well, why can't they do that today? There's usually some sort of gap in skills. So we talk about what those gaps are and how to ensure that they keep growing and learning those skills so that they're more positioned to take those roles when the opportunity presents themselves.

**Jacob 24:48**

I want to shift gears a little bit to learn a little bit more what what your day looks like. So CEO, you have a company around 220 people. How do you structure and plan your day as a leader of, of hundreds of employees.

**Ania 25:03**

I have an amazing team that helps me, that helps me do that. But really what that means is, is ensuring that my senior leadership team is really focused on the right things. So I spend a lot of time thinking about what should my time look like. And there's really four buckets. So I think about hiring and that's throughout all level of the organization. I think about setting the vision. So what does that look like? What does it look like? Do we have the right strategy? Are we talking about strategy? Do we know where we're going? Do we have a vision? What does that look like? How are we in executing that? And then I talk about motivation. And how do I inspire and motivate this whole group of people. And this is where we talk about everything from goals and recognition to execution and sort of all those things tie together.

**Ania 25:06**

And then finally, I spent a lot of time thinking about how I communicate those first three buckets. So are the right channels do I get to do I get to hear a lot from employees Do I have enough one on one time with not just my team, but their teams and the teams below them and the teams below them, it's really important to me that I get to meet anyone who starts in the company, it's really important to me also that I get to listen to our customers. So whether it's clients or taskers, I either am a customer, but also I spent a lot of time listening to what they have to say, both listening in on calls and really spending time interviewing them. Because every time you talk to a customer, you learn something new. Even when you think you know everything. It's just it's it's not really true. You every single time you talk to a customer, you learn something new. And I think that that's really important, even as a CEO to do.

**Jacob 27:05**

So vision is something that I think a lot of people can can understand, right? I mean, the the CEO of a company, leader of a company is responsible for setting that vision. But I think one of the things that we

don't oftentimes talk about is how do you actually set that vision? I mean, what do you what do you look at you just make something up? Or how do you how do you pick what that vision is going to be?

**Ania 27:25**

You know, that's a great question. And when I came to TaskRabbit, I met with every single employee at the company, one on one,

**Jacob 27:33**

Every single one?

**Ania 27:34**

Every single one, I went on this listening tour, I felt it was really important to understand what's working, what's not working, what we need to change. And one of the questions I would ask is, well, what is our vision? And I got different answers. Or sometimes I got the answer like, well, I don't know what our vision is. So I felt like it was really important for us to think about, well, who do we want to be in three to four years. So I actually have been very deliberate about that exercise and have worked very hard with my leadership team, to define in long form what our vision is. And I'm proud to say that we're nearly done, we're nearly there. But we've been able to take everyone's input along the way. And it's pretty clear path for not how we're gonna get there. But essentially what we will be in three to four years. And I think it's been inspiring for, for me as a leader, but also from my team and their teams to understand what we're trying to get to. And it helps, therefore, for us to help our strategy are sort of shorter term strategies forward, because we know where we're trying to get to, we just need to break it down and work backwards. It helps that process every year, as long as we have this sort of Northstar of what we're trying to get to.

**Jacob 28:55**

Yeah, I really like that approach of starting by doing a listening tour, I've had a couple CEOs and business leaders say that that's probably the most essential thing that you can do. Because it's tempting to come into an organization or to be a leader of an organization and say, This is my vision, this is what I think but really getting the insights of people who actually work there is probably a great first step. How has COVID impacted you, your company, your teams?

**Ania 29:23**

So I now we can almost look back, although we're still kind of in it. So I was not here, right one COVID hit. Um, however, I know that it's it's one of the things that has been really important is to think about everybody who is part of it, right? So for us, it's our employees and making sure that they were well taken care of. It means how we think about the health and safety of our community overall, and priority that it became for both taskers and clients, it meant really being able to transition from an in office to a remote first environment. And thinking about how else we can add to the community.

**Ania 30:13**

So we started tasks for good, we made sure that we pivoted the business to a lot of contactless tasks. So deliveries or running errands or things like that, which were really, really important at the very beginning when the pandemic hit. And so we made sure that our taskers had all the PPE that they



needed, and really made sure that for our own employees that we were providing to them the support that they needed, whether it's financial support, to get their workstations and things set up at home. But also, other support around making sure that they can connect with health professionals that making sure that we, we provide a lot of apps and support so that they feel psychologically safe. And that there are others that they can talk to, if they're if they're, you know, doing if they're having a hard time.

**Ania 30:13**

So there's a lot that we can do. I think the biggest thing has been to make sure to communicate, and to communicate frequently. And and to be honest about some of the anxiety that was happening on in the beginning and in some of the uncertainties. And then now, as we're, you know, knock on wood sort of coming out of things, really thinking a lot about how do we do that? Well, how do we make sure that as employees, we come back safely to the office? If that's what we're choosing to do? How do we make sure that our platform overall is ready for the new business that we're seeing in the really amazing growth that we're seeing? And so those are the types of questions that we're thinking through now.

**Jacob 32:00**

I know that you're a big proponent of focusing on putting people first. Can you talk a little bit about what does that actually mean to you?

**Ania 32:09**

Yes. So there's a lot really that, that we need to think about when we think about putting people first. For me, one of the key things has been talking to people listening and learning and really understanding what what's important to them. And so, and it's different for everyone. So you know, for example, I'm an extrovert, so I actually truly miss being in the office, but for many people, and so I love being in the office. But for some people, this has actually been amazing for them not to have to go into the office for others, they don't maybe have the space that they need. They're living in a small apartment in San Francisco with a bunch of roommates. And it wasn't meant meant to be a sort of, let's all get on Zoom together type of space.

**Ania 32:59**

And so I'm really being able to prioritize the well being and then making sure that we stay true and grounded to our mission. So it's it's important that we think about how do we continue making everyday life easier for everyday people. And as a company, we've decided to essentially go fully remote. But that doesn't mean that we're not going to have office spaces, we will. But really, what we have learned through this time is that, at least for us at TaskRabbit, our employees really value flexibility. And as such, it's important for us to provide that to them. So that those people who do want a place to go to they can, and others who prefer staying at home, they can also do that. And so it's that's just an example of how sort of leading with empathy and leading with compassion has been really important to this time.

**Jacob 34:02**

So are you guys getting rid of your San Francisco office?

**Ania 34:04**

No, no, no, we're not getting rid of our office. But we are asking employees to come as as they feel is the need, and then and then don't feel the pressure to do so if they choose to work remotely and forego the commute and everything else that comes in with with being in the office. But we have seen actually, those attitudes change a lot. So we've polled people three times, sort of in the beginning of the pandemic, which was very early, and then in November or so of last year, and also just recently, and the amount of people standing that they want to come into the office, even on a flexible way has changed. And so that leads me to believe that we still don't actually know. So when we all go back and even if you say well, I really don't want to come into the office because I don't really want to commute again in this is kind of working for me. If lots of other people are in the office, you may feel otherwise, right? Or you may feel that I really wanted to be in the office, but you have forgotten the hours of time you're taking and commute or whatever else that may make you think actually, I'm going to work from home this week. So we're, there's a lot of learn and see approach. So we're trying to be very smart about what that really means.

**Jacob 35:27**

I still think there's tremendous value in in person. You know, I agree that a lot of organizations are definitely shifting more towards a flexible work approach. But I think 100% virtual for everyone all the time is probably not the best solution for a lot of companies, you know, there for for leadership for training for trust, building relationships, I think there's still a lot of value for the in person. connections and working in person. But I do think that flexibility is something that organizations need much more of. So I very much like your approach. So kind of a tricky question for you, when it comes to putting people first who comes first customers or employees?

**Ania 36:10**

It is a tricky question, because there was no right answer, they both come first. Um, to me, if we if we don't have our employees really, there at the core of what we do, believing in our mission, believing in the vision, what we're trying to do, it's going to be very hard to please our customers. That said, though, it's really important for us to continue to listen to customers, and to make sure that we're providing the service that they expect and that they want. Otherwise, none of us here as employees will still be here and, you know, in the future. And so it's important for us to really think about both of those groups. But if I had to be pushed, I would say it's really important that our employees really understand the value of the work that they're doing.

**Jacob 37:04**

Yeah, that makes sense. I know, one of the other things that you mentioned earlier is you're a big proponent of getting feedback on an ongoing basis. And I think this is relevant not just for top executives, but for anybody to get feedback from their teams. Can you talk about the approach that you take when it comes to getting feedback from your employees and also from your customers?

**Ania 37:24**

Um, yes, so this has been evolving, and something that I've strived to do for years now in my career. And what I found works best. So first of all, feedback is a gift. So if anyone is willing to provide feedback, excuse me having the strength to, to accept the feedback, you may not agree with it, but

having the strength to accept it, to think it through to see how that may or may not help you, is really a big skill. And I definitely feel like I did not have that skill early in my career. The natural, the natural response was always to get defensive, right, there's always some sort of excuse, it took me a while to to recognize that the person really was trying to be helpful.

**Ania 38:13**

And so I worked very hard on trying to get feedback, I found certain things work better. So generally, just asking people to provide feedback tends to be hard, because people don't know when and how, and, and so on. But I tried to ask questions differently, like, Hey, what do you think is my biggest blind spot? Or in that meeting, what do you think I could have done better? Or, hey, I've been struggling with this. And I'm thinking either this or this, what do you think would be better, and this is why this is a struggle for me. And through those smaller conversations, it's easier to learn a little bit more about what's working and what's not working. In the end, it really is about being self aware, and being open to different suggestions. And even though you may not like them. And I'm also a big believer that not all feedback is created equally. And it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to take all the feedback, but you certainly should listen and understand where it's coming from.

**Jacob 39:18**

You talked about self awareness, which comes up a lot from various interviews that I do. How do you practice self awareness?

**Ania 39:29**

That's such a tough question. So first of all, I I work on that every day. I so it's not sort of an ever ending thing. But and some people are naturally I think much better at this than others. I definitely fall in a group of not being as self aware, as I always wish that I was. I think one of the biggest things is listening. And it's really truly listening and being able to understand how we respond, and how will you react to situations, having close confidants, who can pull you aside and say, Hey, you know, that didn't come off really well. And so to do that, really, you need to be able to build trust. And you get to that radical candor that, you know, a lot of us have been talking about. And I think that's really helpful to practice self awareness and having empathy for those around you.

**Jacob 40:29**

And I think you mentioned something interesting, which is, you know, you can't always get defensive, right? Sometimes, when people want to give you feedback, and I know, I'm like this too, like, if, if a friend or if my wife gives me feedback on something, my immediate responses, like, you know, the walls go up, and you know, defense, defense, the guards come out with the shields. But the truth is that, oftentimes, when you get feedback, it's not people trying to come after you, they're genuinely invested, and they want to see you succeed and grow and do better, and they're trying to help you out. Not necessarily tear you down. And it's hard, especially I think, for leaders, right, because you're higher up on that, quote, unquote, corporate food chain. And sometimes there's this mentality that people shouldn't be giving you feedback or criticizing you or telling you anything,

**Ania 41:18**

But that would just assume that I have nothing left to learn, which is obviously very untrue. So I think one of the biggest qualities of a good leader is having the humility to being able to accept the feedback and it's not always going to be positive. And that's okay. I and I think having So, you know, people talk about is when you're in a fast growing company having this grit and the speed, but it also has to come with humility, because otherwise, the first two can sort of trample on people, if you're not careful on understanding and having the empathy and and compassion of understanding where you can meet everyone else and where they are, which is usually probably someplace else then where you are.

**Jacob 42:07**

How do you make tough choices? Is there a framework that you use, or a series of questions that you ask yourself when you're trying to make tough career business choices?

**Ania 42:18**

So from a business perspective, it's a little bit easier, honestly, I went out, it's my thinking has evolved when I was younger, it was all about data, right? So I would just ask for more data. And I would dig in, find, and do more analysis. I'm hoping that eventually, it's so clear that it's very obvious whether you do a or b. Over time, I realized that, you know, data has played lesser and lesser role in almost every decision that I make. And so much of it really just comes from I don't know, that inner feeling that I guess people call it wisdom or experience or something where I feel like it's okay to, to go in direction A and I may be wrong, and often I am wrong. But it's better to make the decision quicker and to learn if I'm wrong, than to continue to ask for more data and more analysis, and just kind of get stuck and being unable to make a decision.

**Ania 43:13**

If the decision was so easy to make that I already would have been made. So usually by time they come to me there are, now it's easy to make. My my preference is for speed. The decisions when it comes to people end up being much, much more challenging, I would say, and I think that's likely to be the case, always in your career. Those decisions have full impact on people. And so I would say I spend a lot of time and a lot of sort of often sleepless nights trying to figure out sort of what the best outcome is for everyone. And I find those decisions to be much more difficult.

**Jacob 43:55**

It's interesting that you said that, as you have become a more seasoned leader, you actually rely on data less because I remember so many times, there was this big debate right now you have more data, you should only make decisions based on data. But then I also heard an interesting quote from somebody many years ago, and I can't remember who it was. But they basically said that you can use data to paint any picture that you want. You know, data is pretty much a paintbrush, and you can paint a good picture or a bad picture. It's all about how you present the data. You know, you could look at the positive side of it or the negative side of it. So oftentimes just having more data, it's not going to help you make the better choice. You can justify any choice.

**Ania** 44:38

Brian Chesky always talks about sort of the revolving door. So either you have these decisions that are revolving we can turn back or some that are really hard to unwind and those are really hard to undo. Those take a little bit more time I would say in our tougher, tougher to make but most of the decisions that we make are easier to unwind. And really, it's about trial and error. And if you don't have the freedom to actually make those decisions, which means sometimes you're going to fail, and sometimes you're going to be wrong. And that's okay. That's the only way you're going to learn and grow. And so I think it's important to distinguish between the two.

**Jacob** 45:17

Yeah, no, I like that approach. And it's, I think it's a little bit counterintuitive for a lot of people who are listening or watching this, listening or watching this. But it does make sense when you think about because there's so much data, that you could use data to justify any decision and any choice that you make in life. Right? I think that experiences really...

**Ania** 45:37

I sometimes talk about this. When my husband and I, when he graduated from Business School, we were trying to decide where to live and was a different time he had some job offers. And we, I decided that we're going to build a model, because I said, Well, you know, companies do that. That's how they make decisions. So let's do that. And so we put four cities across and all this criteria and rated at all. And then it popped out the answer, which was very much so the wrong answer. It's not where I wanted to move. And so I was like, well, the wrong weights, we use the wrong weights. And so I rejigger the numbers, and then it popped out the answer that I wanted. And I really do think sometimes leveraging data can work that way.

**Jacob** 46:19

Oh, no, that's a great story. And you're right. I mean, because you, like you said, you assigned different weights, you spin things the way that you want them to be. And I think a lot of people forget that you actually can do that with data. We have a couple minutes left. So in the last few minutes, one of the questions I wanted to ask you is when you think about your career, over the past few years, have there been any pivotal moments or experiences that you think most shaped your career or who you are as a leader.

**Ania** 46:45

Um, yeah, and you know, a lot of that comes to working with people. So finding the right people that you really aspire to be. And it doesn't have to be your manager, it can be your peers. And so there are some pivotal moments, where I've had the opportunity to work with some incredible leaders, with whom I really connected and learned a lot from and, you know, we're sort of stuck in the trenches, usually trying to sell something.

**Ania** 47:19

You know, one of these occasions was when I was at Walmart, and we were working really hard and trying to understand how big of a threat Amazon was. And, and this is in 2010. So Walmart at the time was not investing as much in digital as it is today. It's doing fantastic work today. But back then it was

sort of an uphill battle to convince folks in Bentonville how important digital is and what digital means. And they sort of wanted us to look at amazon.com versus walmart.com. And I remember looking and saying, Well, actually, it's not that it's, it's amazon.com versus Walmart, and what that really meant, and really, it was with the help of the leaders who were working on that project, that we were able to reset the strategy.

**Ania 48:13**

But those types of decisions and how that works has stayed with me forever. And I'm still in touch with with the folks who I was on a team with. So it really is personal connections, where you feel like there's this win, but the win is as a team, because of all those sort of different points of view that you had while like working late at night one night and able to figure something out, that then makes the makes progress much easier.

**Jacob 48:41**

So that was a pivotal moment. It sounds like that shaped your progress in your career?

**Ania 48:47**

I'm yeah, for me, really, it's thinking about every role. Who am I working with? Am I having fun? Am I having an impact? And am I growing and learning and really in that moment, I felt all three stars were truly aligned. So it's, it's important for me to always be trying to find those moments, oftentimes, I get two out of three, sometimes one out of three. And when that's happening for too long at time, it's probably time for a change. And so to get to three out of three often means that things are going really well.

**Jacob 49:23**

Have you ever had a huge obstacle or challenge that you had to overcome? And can you talk about how you overcame it?

**Ania 49:30**

Yeah, yes, many. So I mean, I guess the one that really comes to mind is early on having to learn English so having to go to school or not speaking any English was certainly challenging. But I think that has sort of set me up to be able to accept it when things aren't going well and really look at challenges as opportunities, and so they present themselves every day to all of us and and many times when you see obstacles, you don't necessarily recognize them as opportunities. But that's exactly what they are.

**Ania 50:10**

And so you know, whether that's not there was, even in my professional career, there was definitely setbacks where I didn't get the promotion, or I didn't get the role that I really felt that I needed. But it led me therefore to look at things differently and look for something new and different. That then led to another bigger opportunity. So it's, it's about continuing to try.

**Ania 50:37**

I know, for example, there was a role at Airbnb that I was really trying for. And in the end, I didn't get the role. But then that meant I got to do something totally different, which wasn't even on the radar,

which was awesome. And it allowed me to launch a product at Airbnb that has turned out to be a fantastic opportunity and learning for me, I got to actually manage a product launch, which is not something that I had done before, which helps me today when I oversee the product team, and certainly helped me at Uber as well. And so, again, there was many setbacks. But all of those really are opportunities, if you know how to have you sort of strong and resilient enough to see that angle.

**Jacob 51:22**

Maybe the last one or two questions for you, for people who are listening or watching who are looking to become better, more effective leaders. Is there anything that you have done on a regular basis leadership, tip, pack strategy, whatever you want to call it, that has made you a more effective leader?

**Ania 51:39**

I think we've talked about this before, but for me, the biggest thing is learning to be a better listener. And really being able to sort of connect the dots as as you're listening to more people, you're starting to see trends and drivers and understanding what is causing what and really thinking about the impact as you're building out the strategy. But really, a lot of that comes from first listening, whether it's to your employees or your customers, or, you know, other industry experts. I, you know, or even like podcasts like this podcast, I listened to a lot of them to continue learning from leaders today. And I have done so forever. So another hack is for me to find some authors or people who I really enjoy and appreciate. And so I learned from them a lot. So for me, someone like that is Adam Grant. I've been following him for years. And I really like his latest book, I think is his best one yet. And so I i really like continuing to learn from others.

**Jacob 52:51**

I love it. Well, Ania where can people go to learn more about you or TaskRabbit anything that you want to mention for people to check out, please feel free to do so.

**Ania 53:00**

So of course you can go on TaskRabbit.com to learn a lot more about who we are as TaskRabbit the types of jobs that we do, whether especially now as we're getting ready for spring cleaning, a lot of people are moving so feel free to go on TaskRabbit.com And you'll see a lot about who we are and what we do. And I encourage you all to try to service.

**Jacob 53:24**

Well thank you very much, Ania, I really appreciate your time. And thank you again for sharing your your insights with all of us.

**Ania 53:31**

Thank you for having me on here, Jacob. I really appreciate it and I really enjoyed our conversation.

**Jacob 53:37**

Yeah, likewise and thanks everyone again for tuning in. My guest again has been Ania Smith. She is the CEO of TaskRabbit and I will see you next time.