

Jacob Morgan 00:28

Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of the future of work. My guest today is Taylor Smith, co founder and CEO of blueboard. And Taylor and blueboard. I have known both of them for a very, very long time I first met Taylor and blueboard, I think it was in 2015, I had an opportunity to visit them when they were in San Francisco. It was a tiny, tiny company at the time, I think it was just Taylor, his co founder, and there were maybe one or two other people in there. And now the company has grown quite a bit. I think you're approaching almost 100 people now, which is crazy, and focused on one of my favorite topics, which is employee experience. So Taylor, thank you very much for joining me today.

Taylor 01:08

Yeah, thanks so much for having me, it's exciting to reconnect. I was looking back at my calendar from 2015, and matter of fact, when we met first, it was just Kevin and I, there were just two of us at the company. We only had eight clients. At that point, I think we had just, we'd almost sent 60 people out and about on adventures, we're stoked about that. And it was it was so long ago that the Warriors had not yet won an NBA championship like in this in this in the 2000s. So yeah, it feels like forever ago, and like you said, things have been really good. We just passed 150 employees, you know, we have hundreds of clients now. We're going to be sending 30 or 40,000 people out and about in over 50 countries this year. So just Yeah, the growth has been really great and really exciting. And I think it's because it strikes a chord, you know, with people and where we are today. Yeah, we can dive into that later. For sure.

Jacob 02:01

When you said 30 to 50,000. And when I first met you, it was how many like eight?

Taylor 02:06

Six, I think, well. So that's number of people that we're sending going out. And about this year, it's Yeah, it's gonna be between 30 and 40,000. And we were, I think, up to 60 by the time or back when we met. So just like it's operating in a whole different scale. And it's something we're really proud of. And we're working hard to keep up with it too, because it's quite quite the challenge.

Jacob Morgan 02:20

Yeah, no, I bet. Okay, well, so for people who are not familiar with Blueboard, I don't know if there's any other company like it, honestly, that I have seen. But I thought it was one of the cooler concepts or an employee experience that I've come across, but I'll let you explain it. What exactly is Blueboard? What do you guys do?

Taylor 02:43

Yeah, so -what we do is we help companies celebrate their employees, but in the way that we just think is the most natural, which is, you know, people show up to work every day. And what do they do, they're spending all their time and their energy, and they're giving it to their company, right. And a lot of us, you know, we'll work on long projects, we'll throw our lives into our work, because we're proud of it. But that often isn't reciprocated from our company. So recognition, which is a huge industry, by the way, you know, it's 10s of billions of dollars a year that companies spend all their employees, we see lots of gift cards, we'll see lots of merchandise, we see lots of electronics.

Jacob Morgan 03:09

Yeah. I used to, I used to get those when I was in the corporate world.

Taylor 03:20

Totally, and it's so well intentioned, you know what I mean? Like no company is, is doing this because they think it's the wrong thing. But what we think is like, hey, there's a better thing to do, you could actually reciprocate and say, Hey, we see you pouring your time and energy into our company, let's give you some time. And like, give you some and pay for you to go do something outside of work. So you can recharge and the way that's like most meaningful to you. So what that means, we call ourselves an experiential recognition company. As a company, you know, you can send a reward to one of your employees in 15 to 30 seconds, they log on, they receive the reward through email, we never share the dollar amount, so it's not transactional, but they'll basically receive a golden ticket that they can use on you know, 20 to 30 experiences no matter where they're located in the world. So if you wanted to recharge by taking your wife to get a couple's massage, that's a great way to use a blueboard reward. Maybe you want to take the kids to a behind the scenes tour of the zoo to feed the giraffes. Because you know, you've haven't had as much family time recently, because you've been working on your your latest book, you could use your blue board rewards to do that. Or maybe you just need to like shock your system and you want a thrill. You can use it to go jump out of a plane with a friend and go tandem skydiving. So our mission is to get people out and about all over the world doing things to challenge their comfort zones, indulge in their passions and to try new things. And the sweetest part of it is if you receive one of our rewards, you don't have to pay for it. It's paid for by your company. And yeah, so that's what we're up to blueboard we're pretty excited about it.

Jacob 04:44

So it literally is an employee experience. Like you're not just, you know, the way some people talk about it. It's literally a cool experience for people and I remember, five or six years ago, you had a James Bond experience. Do you remember that?

Taylor 05:01

Yeah, so that's actually what got us on the map initially is one of the things we want to do is like, hey, employees are superheroes, you know, people go above and beyond. And we were thinking a lot to ourselves, well, who does everyone want to be more like? What would it be like a cool fantasy to live out for a day. And just around that time, like, I think it was six years ago that the new James Bond movie was coming out. And we're like, oh, my gosh, we should run an above and bond campaign nominate a co worker who's gone above and bond and the winner, which we had some, some people out of, I think app dynamics and HP were that were two winners. You got fitted for an evening gown or a tux, you got to jump out of a plane. We had an exotic car waiting for you on the runway. I think that one was some like special convertible Jaguar. You get to drive that the whole afternoon. And then you finish off the night with a bartending lesson where you learn to make the perfect Martini. And so I think there's some, you know, we have fun as a company, because you got to imagine, you know, what people want to do who they want to be, and we try to make that come to life for them. So you have a James Bond experience, got some press and really got us on the map.

Jacob 06:13

That's awesome. So I guess in your opinion, why are experiences so important now? Because obviously employee experiences in the new topic. I mean, even my book came out, I don't know, 678 years ago now or I don't even remember it's been it's been it's been years. We've been talking about this stuff for years. But it seems like for some reason, over the last little while, there's been a lot of traction. I mean, you're seeing this with your business. You're getting funding, a lot of people are wanting to be a part of it. Like what's what's going on? That's putting employee experience really front and center for a lot of companies.

Taylor 06:49

Yeah, 100% I think we I think there's a few things. And also, you should give yourself credit you were early on on that train, I think if we look back to the first time that we talked in 2015, employee experience was very new nomenclature. And it was just sort of tip of the spear in terms of market penetration. But it's widely accepted now. And I think there's a couple of things going on, I think there's a huge war for talent, right? Now, obviously, companies are really feeling that. And, you know, while they're trying to always acquire and retain, and attract the best new talent, they're also trying to figure out well, how do we keep the great people that we already have and feeling that more than ever. And then I think the last 18 months, throughout the pandemic, and the changes that that's brought to work. It's really highlighted for a lot of people, I think, what their company did over the last 18 months to either, you know, support them through this very difficult time. Or it's actually like say, actually, you figure it out on your own. And so I think there's a big reshuffling, where people are taking a look in the mirror and saying, like, Hey, does this company actually care about me outside of work? You know, before, before COVID, I think it was more normal to have, you know, you could have your work self, and then you could have your personal self, and you could, you could maintain the separation there. But with all of us at home working from zoom, you know that that barrier disappeared. And it's like, our whole selves were thrown into work, and, you know, their babies on zoom calls, there's cats walking around in the background, like you started to get a window into people's lives. And so some companies, I think, jumped at the opportunity and said, Wow, like, our employees are like people and let's support them, let's support their whole selves and encourage them to bring their whole selves to work. And some companies, you know, didn't engage in that way. And people talk, you know, and I think people really got a feeling over this past year on whether or not you know, their company cared for that for them or not. And a lot of people are looking for new opportunities right now.

Jacob 08:47

I love actually the story of how you guys were created. So maybe you can share the story of why you decided to create this company, because I can certainly relate to this back when I had a full time job many, many years ago, when I would be recognizing they would just hand me a gift card or it's like a sweater with the company's logo on it or like a notebook. And be honest, it's not like these things were bad. Like you said, they were well intentioned, but how many people really want to be recognized with a sweater that has a company logo on it? Or with you know, a gift card for? I don't know, it just doesn't feel like the nice or the proper way to recognize people, like you said, who are giving so much of themselves to the organization. It kind of feels like a lazy thing to do, doesn't it? I don't know. Maybe it's just me. Yeah.

Taylor 09:33

Yeah, no, 100% I think, I think it is lazy, but it's also something it's behavior that, you know, it's been like developed and institutionalized over decades, right. So companies have been recognizing in the same way for a long time. And so, you know, I don't I don't blame companies for it. I don't blame managers for it. It's a difficult problem to solve. And I think I can sort of walk you through the founding story how we came to like what we are today.

Jacob 09:53

Yeah. Yeah. I was just thinking, by the way, before we jump into that, I was just like thinking of, you know, for my wife or for one of my kids like, they're birthdays, if I, if I just like gave them a gift card, I'm pretty sure my wife would be just like, what the hell is this? Who are you? So you know, and I would say that being a part of an organization is just like being in a relationship where you should really understand what your employees care about what they value, who they are, and then you should be able to create experiences based on that. So I think that that mentality, that approach should very much be prevalent inside of companies.

Taylor 10:12

100% because you're totally right, like, who gives you the gift card as a gift? Right? It's like the aunt or uncle that is sort of removed, and they don't know anything about you. And yeah, and nobody wants to feel that way. And like in company should be on the other side of the spectrum, and especially like your manager that you report to, because like, you know, we spend like hundreds and 1000s of hours, you know, with the people that we work with. So presumably, they should know things about us about how we spend our time and what we care about outside of work. And so, you know, just just pulling the thread of why we started the company. When I worked at Accenture, you know, they were very well intentioned with their recognition. And it was something that they talked about and that they delivered, but it just never felt that great. And so the specific story that I remember is I got placed on this really interesting project in Dallas working for a large company, high visibility role, I was the only, you know, financial analyst working with the CFO of a public company. And it was like an amazing career opportunity. And, you know, many people have opportunities like this in their lifetime, where it's like, wow, I really want to dig in and just do my best work. Because what this will mean for me personally, for my career, and so, you know, I did what any young professional would do out of college, I just drove myself into the ground, I worked 80 to 90 hour weeks, for about three months, I was flying to Dallas. Every every week for months, I was eating cafeteria food, three meals a day, I wasn't sleeping a whole lot. And by the end of that project, I was in really rough shape, I gained a bunch of weight, I hadn't been sleeping a lot, I was sort of a miserable person. And my manager called me into his office and he said, Taylor, you did an amazing job, the partners are and I were really impressed with how much you could carry being so young, and we wanted to recognize you. And he like handed me an Amex gift card, which which was not like a trivial amount, he gave me a \$500 gift card. And like that's why I say that, like it was very well intentioned, you know what I mean? That being said, I'm a pretty analytical person, I'd worked hundreds of hours of overtime. So in that moment, my mind was like, oh, wow, my worth only \$1.25 an hour to my employer, like, it just didn't feel good. And I was talking to Kevin, who's my co founder, and we were living together at the time about this. And he had sort of a funny, funny point of view. He said, like, hey, it's crazy that you're complaining to me about this on a Friday night, like your company gave you \$500. Like, that sounds pretty sweet to me. And he's like, if you think about it, that

means your manager had to go to HR to get a gift card. At some point, they received training from corporate that means corporate has a budget, and he was sort of lining out for me, like, there's all these steps that happened that enabled this to happen. So it's actually like, a great thing that you got a gift card. And then we started brainstorming, we're like, what would have been better? And we decided, if my manager had pulled me aside and said, hey, you've been traveling a bunch? Why don't you take your girlfriend on, you know, maybe take her on a couples massage, this Saturday, we'll set something up for you at appeal spa, you guys can just relax and recharge. And it's important for you to spend some time together cuz you've been traveling so much. I would have been thrilled. You know what I mean? Like, I would have thought Accenture was the coolest company on the planet, like my girlfriend would have thought that I'm sure I would have told my friends about that. And there would have been all this goodwill that came from that. And an experience like that cost less than \$500. And so that was sort of our insight into starting blueboard as a company was managers already want to do like what we can make happen today. companies want to do it. But there's never a scalable way to do it. In fact, uh, you know, if you were trying to send someone and you had an employee that's doing an awesome job, you'd probably try and figure out what they like doing. You know, you might figure out okay, they want to go to a spa, let's get let's look at three of them. Let's find their availability. All of a sudden, you've spent like 40 minutes or an hour and you're gonna give up and you're gonna say, you know what, I'm just gonna give them a gift card and like the whole cycle like reinforces and repeats, that's our whole thing with blueboard is no we will get people out and about to an adventure that they love. And all you have to do as a manager is spend 15 seconds sending them a reward and Blueboard takes care of the rest to the tune of 10s of 1000s of people out and about all across the world. So yeah, long winded story but yeah

Jacob Morgan 11:34

You know. So I mean, so I think this brings up an interesting point, because obviously, I think one of the challenges when it comes to employee experiences, it's very subjective, like what I care about is going to be different than what Taylor cares about, which is going to be different than what Erica cared like. everyone cares about different things. And there might be some people who do care about cash, and some people who do care about driving a Jaguar and jumping out of a plane. So how do you cuz Some people even who are listening to this and watching this are saying like, Taylor is out of his mind \$500 I would have been jumping up and down for joy. That guy is nuts. He's so entitled, blah, blah, blah, like, how do you balance so many different people who work for a company, and being able to create an experience that everybody's gonna care about? I mean, that's at least one of the biggest questions that I keep getting is, how do you figure that out?

Taylor 15:21

Yeah, totally. I think there's there's two ways we can think about it. I think the first thing is that employee choice is really, really important. So when we started the company, it was structured a little bit differently. Like, as a manager, you could like, say, I'm sending you skydiving, right. I'm sending you to language classes. And as it turns out, people didn't like that that much. Because while I may be an adventure,

Jacob Morgan 15:43

I remember that. Yeah, I remember that. Like you didn't really have much of a choice, right? It was just kind of like, this is where I'm sending you.

Taylor 15:51

Yeah, and you know, like, while that is good and great, that then puts the onus and the pressure on managers to feel like they know exactly what their employees need. And what we learned, like overtime and messing around with the product is that, you know, while I may be an adrenaline junkie, that may not be what I need right now. And who knows better what I need right now as an employee to recharge than me. And so we changed how our product works. And now it's as when an employee receives a reward. It's, they can choose between, you know, 25 to 30 options per city that they're in. So I think that's the first important thing, I think that's one thing. The second thing that we spend a lot of time on is like, well, who are the people who get our rewards? What what demographic are they? Where do they live? What do they care about, and we do have an experienced curation team, and that's their sole job is to make sure that we have a bundle of experiences and like meaningful choices to a bunch of different personas that we map to. And so, you know, I can give you an example of a sort of like a more obvious choice. Younger people, people out of college, up to millennials, we tend to value novelty. So if you look at the redemption, stats for younger people, it's all about what can I put on Instagram, what have I done that my friends haven't done, and novelty is a big driver of choice. When you get into older generations, they actually view the choice quite differently, it's less about novelty. And it's more about this idea of quality time. So it's not about oh, I need to go to this painting class, because I've never gone painting before the mentality is, I haven't spent time with my friend in several weeks, or several weeks, several months. And I know that he's really into painting, maybe I should sign up for this. And we could go painting together. So the choices that different generations make are predicated on different axes. And so we've done a ton of research into that. And our product sort of mirrors that decision making cycle. And that's the thing where I can confidently say that, like, hey, people find things that they like on blue board, because we're not just like throwing up everything under the sun. We're not Groupon, just like crawling and looking for every last deal that we can throw in line. We're working with the best, you know, top rated small businesses in every market, that are just amazing at their craft and have this this passion that they're trying to share the world. So I think we approach it in a way that makes it very consumable and very exciting to people.

Jacob Morgan 17:35

Good. Now, is the what if somebody does want cash, can they? Is that just like up to the discretion of the manager to just give them a gift card or a blue board experience?

Taylor 18:20

Yeah, so yeah, blue board, that's one of the things that we're always gonna stick to our guns, like, if you get a blue board reward, you can redeem it for some quality time outside of work. And we don't let people send gift cards or cash to our platform. I think the caveat here, though, that's really important is, you know, some listeners might say, like, hey, well, my workforce is making minimum wage, right? And like they like to them, it's meaningful to get \$500 in cash. And to that I say, I 100% agree. And I commend you for doing that. Because it it comes back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, right? Like if someone doesn't have enough money for rent or to feed themselves, like it would be an egregious thing to say, hey, go fly a plane over the Golden Gate Bridge would just signal that you I totally out of

whack as an employer. Yeah, out of touch. And so like, we do work best with, you know, knowledge workers, and we tend to sell to companies that are in industries where they do have like a substantial budget for rewards, recognition, perks, benefits programs for their employees.

Jacob Morgan 19:22

Okay. So obviously, you work with a lot of different brands and organizations. Can you talk about what are you hearing from a lot of the organizations who want to work with you? Are there certain trends that they keep coming to you with? Are there certain things that they keep looking for? Like, what are you hearing from these companies out there?

Taylor 19:44

Yeah, 100%. I think like one of the biggest words that we've been hearing early on and like getting stronger into this year is the whole idea of employee wellbeing, which I think is really exciting because that again, is speaking to this notion of whole self. And companies realizing that, hey, we can't just create programs that cater to like Jacob, like the worker, right? Like Jacob and his whole self, like Jacob is a husband, he is a father, he is someone who has hobbies outside of work, there's so many different facets to Jacob is, and I think what companies are wrestling with is like, Oh, we have this responsibility and this opportunity to support people's well being just outside of their work selves. And I think that's something where, you know, when you look at the world without context, and, and from that angle, things like blueboard start to float to the top of your consciousness, right? We have companies that spend, you know, millions of dollars on gift cards, and points and electronics. And then you try to you try to tie this idea of how we recognize your employees today to the idea of well being, and like just that the connection, isn't there. Right. And so I think companies are starting to look very authentically at their people programs and look at it through the lens of Hey, is this increasing the well being of my people, which is something that is, you know, drastically different than even three years ago.

Jacob Morgan 20:39

Okay, interesting. So I guess when you say well being what follows into the well being category?

Taylor 21:14

Well, it's a good, it's sort of, so I guess, like the the analogous sort of term that I use this whole self, but well being like, I mean, it means and it's it spans inside and outside of work, right. So like, like, well being could come from like your trajectory at work, you know, the training and learning and development opportunities, you have the mental health resources, you have, like all of these, like help you be a great employee. And then there's a bunch of like, you know, other fringe benefits on the side and other benefits that sort of can support people outside of work as well. And I think what's, what's really interesting in the market right now is the leading tech companies do a little bit of everything, like everything under the sun, there's so many different benefits. And it's challenging for smaller companies that don't have the war chests to really keep up. And so one thing that companies come to us and talk about is like, well, what can I do? I can't do everything. And we always advise companies to look inwards, right? And to really think about, like, Who are you as a company? And what can you offer? If you can offer like the this amazing comp package? Maybe you could be a leader and like flexible work arrangements? Right? Or maybe if you can't, I there's there is basically just a bunch of trade offs you need to make as a company and like, we advise companies that think about what is authentic to you,

and what can you offer that is different, because you never want to try and just offer broadly, like, what's better, and to do more, because that's just like a losing proposition in the long run.

Jacob Morgan 22:43

Do you find that there needs to be some sort of alignment between like, actions and values. So for example, I could be a leader in a company, maybe not treat you very well and then all of a sudden give you a blue board, like, you know, a golden ticket that says, hey, go enjoy this experience. As an employee, you're kind of like, wait a minute, you don't treat me very well. This is all very surprising. So, you know, it kind of like there needs to be I think a light and I don't know if you guys get involved with this, or if you hear this from organizations or from leaders, but it seems like leaders need to genuinely know their people care about them and value them and have some sort of alignment between that and the experience they create, right? Otherwise, it's kind of like, you know, you're not very nice to me. I'm very surprised why I'm getting this. Now. Okay.

Taylor 23:20

Yeah. Totally, totally. And, and, you know, I'd say like, that's just reeks of a lack of authenticity, you know, and the relationships that we build with our, with our managers, and like our employers, it's something that's built off of many interactions, right? And it's sort of like you're making sense of all the interactions that you've had over time, and you're then judging, like, is this something that I want to be part of as someone who's who's great at my job? And I think it definitely needs to add up, and it should be authentic. And that should be best. You know, on the on the other side of the spectrum, though, imagine someone who has looked in the mirror, and they're like, Oh, I have been a bad manager. And I haven't heard about this tool. And like, maybe I should do something nice. So I should use blueboard. So like blueboard could also, you know, it could also represent a company or manager coming to terms with the fact that like, Oh, we actually have done a great job. And we're trying to make things better. And here's a real tangible step that I'm taking, which is actually a nice thing, too. But like, you know, that story arc makes less sense. But I do think just like, in general, if a company decides to use blueboard, it is a it is a good thing. And it is an offering of goodwill, because it doesn't happen automatically. You know, like a manager still needs to take the action to like send the reward and go into the system and do it so there is something good there. But whether or not it adds up with prior to actions is a different question.

Jacob Morgan 24:42

Yep. Okay, that makes sense. So, I guess taking a step back really quick. I'm curious. Just when you look at the world of work and talent and employee experience, what are the big trends that you are paying attention to because obviously, you're running company of 150 people. So you're probably thinking about, what are you going to be doing as a business based on the future? Your clients are probably telling you stuff like, what are the big future of work trends or talent trends that you're looking at?

Taylor 25:15

Yeah, totally, I think one thing that we're consumed with and trying to figure out, and that continues to change every week at this point is the whole return to work question. And you know, where we're gonna end up on the spectrum between being, you know, fully remote and demanding that everyone

come into the office, and it's not going to surprise you, like many companies, we're going to be somewhere in the middle. But we're gonna do something that works best for our company and what we're trying to deliver to our clients. And I think this is something that it really is like a radical change that trickles down to many parts of even our organization. And we're small, we're only 150 people. But you know, in some cases, we have opened up racks that previously would have only been open to our San Francisco and San Diego offices, but we're opening them, you know, remotely across the United States. And we're getting access to a ton of talent that otherwise, like we just wouldn't have seen and wouldn't have considered even a year ago. So that's something that's been a really positive change for us. I think something else to consider that's like interesting around that same fact, as globally, it's changing the way that US companies can interact with global talent, because I think before, it was safe to say, we do all of our development in Ukraine, we have great partners out there and a great team that we've built. And you know, the rate at which salaries are growing in Ukraine is just completely out of whack right now. In some cases, it's double what we were paying just two years ago. And that's because, you know, now companies are opening their opportunities and wider and they're looking globally for talent. So it's, it's going to be a challenge for smaller companies. And so I think where that, like, where that's changing how Companies Act is, hey, if it's gonna get more expensive, but we're difficult to acquire talent, we need to be smarter about how we keep the people that we already have. And so in a lot of our calls, like there is more energy, and there's more talk around retention, and trying to keep our best people just at a volume that we haven't heard in the past. It's definitely top of mind for a lot of companies. And I'm curious, what what are you? Oh, go ahead.

Jacob Morgan 27:18

Yeah. I was gonna say that's been in the news a lot. I mean, I have a team of 10 people that I work well, 11 people, and we're all virtual. And I mean, I have freelancers who I work with, and people who listen to the show and know that, but they're based all over the United States, I have people in the Philippines, I people in Serbia, and Macedonia, somebody I work with in Bangladesh, and again, a couple people in the United States as well. And I mean, for me, as a business owner, a small business owner, it's been great, because I've been able to attract and retain top talent, you know, I have a designer who have been working with for, I don't know, 678 years now that I randomly found online. And you know, he's still an integral part of the team. So for me, it's been, it's been huge. But we've been seeing a lot of this, like debate, like you said, return to the office, should we have hybrid work, I, we've seen some people who are even quitting, just removing themselves from the workforce altogether, because they don't want to be part of organizations who aren't putting the voice of the employee first, so to speak. So I think it's a very interesting, I don't want to call it like an employee revolution time, but that's kind of what it feels like, it feels like employees are getting a lot more voice, a lot more power, and they're starting to really speak up. And I think they're doing so now more than ever, because COVID is, you know, in a lot of cases and actual matter between life and death and safety. Whereas before, it felt like for a lot of leaders, probably as a matter of convenience, or as a matter of, you know, productivity and you know, it was it wasn't as big of a case as much as it is for safety in life and death. Like that's the biggest case that you can make. Right? So it's I'm very curious to see like you what will happen over the next year or so. I mean, I don't know. Are you seeing a lot of your clients? Are they opening back up their offices or moving towards hybrid work?

Taylor 28:27

Yeah. A lot of people most are moving towards hybrid work, we have some that have gone fully remote. You know, one of the and that's interesting, too, because that provides new opportunities for us as a company, you know, it's like, we're the only company as far as I know, that's able to deliver like a personalized experience in so many countries in so many cities. And that actually like the way the world of work is going bodes really well for us, because we're set up to support remote workforces where if someone were tried to, you know, compete with us tomorrow, they would have challenged building up the inventory and marketplace side. And so there will be like new vendors and companies that pop up that are very well suited for this, you know, remote workplace. Yeah, I'm really interested to see like, how many, how many and how long it takes for people to come back into work and what this whole transition period is gonna look like because, you know, early on, when people have like strong opinions, it's a world of extremes, right? Like, it seemed like it was going to be a war of remote first and remote only versus like five days back in the office. And it was like a very extremist sort of conversation. But now like, we're in the deeper part of the conversation, where, how does this actually all look with rubber meets the road, like when we're back into more of a normalized state. And one thing that I think is interesting for your listeners to think about that we think a lot about the company is remote work really represents on one side of the spectrum, the ultimate convenience. And I'm very much like a rah rah in the office type of person. And I realized that I loved working from home five days a week, like just the convenience of being able to like, Oh, I have a short break here, I can go for a walk, or I can do my laundry, or, I can even roll out of bed a little bit later today. Because I don't have to log on until 830. These are all conveniences that I just wasn't used to. And I was like, wow, there's a lot of meaning to this. I think on the other side of the spectrum, you have the whole idea of like connection and in person connection and the value of being around other people and what that means for you like the, the argument of like whiteboarding and being in a room together and like what does that mean to like, be together as a team, because we're social creatures. And I do think a lot of people who are pounding the table for remote work, are actually undervaluing connection. And, you know, not realizing what they're going to miss out on. But, and I'm not saying again, five days a week, but being in the office a day or two a week, to be, you know, around the people that you're presumably working on a mission with for your company. And so I do think people are overvaluing convenience. I think it's like a natural human trait, right? Like phones, we could and should be more connected people than ever, but we feel more alone and isolated than ever. And to me going to a fully remote workforce is going to leading us further down that path. And I just don't think people realize that right now. So I'm hoping that people leaders out there are able to, you know, stand up for what they believe to be right. But I do think like a healthy amount of connection in person with co workers is a really healthy thing. Even though it's harder to see, especially after the convenience we've been afforded over the past year and a half.

Jacob Morgan 31:49

Do you guys still have all of your offices? Or have you guys gone at least temporarily, fully remote? Wow.

Taylor 32:17

We, none of our offices are open right now. And we're, you know, we've had some soft openings, just to like let people get into office. But we're not expecting people to be back in the office until next February, which is our fiscal year start. And then it's it's not going to be five days a week. It never was. We are actually a four day a week in office company. And we're going to reduce that even further. We just don't know exactly logistically how it's going to work yet.

Jacob Morgan 32:43

Interesting. Actually you brought up something just there. So four days a week in the office or four days work week. It's also something that's been in the news, right is a lot of companies well, experimenting with 40 work weeks.

Taylor 32:52

Yeah, I knew as soon as I said that, I knew I wasn't crisp enough. So we weren't one of the four day workweek companies where we had worked from home Wednesday's always says, like a day to break up the middle of the week, we could go get a doctor's appointment, go do your laundry, whatever you needed to do at home. And that's just set a really nice working cadence. But I do think the four day a week, concept is interesting.

Jacob Morgan 33:28

So shifting back a little bit towards employee experience. You know, one of the questions that and I don't know if you get this question a lot, but it's oftentimes who owns it? Who's responsible for the employee experiences at HR? Is it operations is it leadership teams? So how do you how do you answer that and help people think through that.

Taylor 33:50

Okay, no it's a it's a really good question. It's something we wrestle with, because similarly, so recognition is a subset of overall employee experience, you would be amazed to know the various teams that various companies that own recognition, it's different in every company. And, you know, we see the same for like this idea of employee experience, even though it is a newer concept, it has legs and companies are doing their best to deliver it. Instead of, you know, isolating, like, who should own it? I think like, the clear point here is there should be an owner. And I think in some companies, there isn't an owner and it's, you know, it's a no, I think they do it, I think they're part of it. If you don't have like a cohesive strategy and someone that's owning it, it's really hard to deliver and it's hard to be thoughtful about like what employee experience means to you as a company. So I think like I hope I'm not sidestepping the question, but just having an owner is step one, and there's a fair amount of clients that we talked to were like there is no clear owner, which is why it's hard to deliver in the first place.

Jacob Morgan 34:51

So it's not always HR

Taylor 34:53

Okay for the heavy majority, it is HR but HR be taking on a variety of names at this point, which could be, you know, your people operations. We've seen chief culture officers, we've seen human resources, like there's so many terms now. But I would say broadly, yes, definitely under the HR umbrella.

Jacob Morgan 35:15

Okay. Yeah, there's a lot of people related things that are out there. You know, one of the other questions that I keep getting asked is, how do you balance just like fun stuff versus creating deeper

change inside of an organization? Because obviously, it's one thing to give somebody a cash gift, or cash or gift card or blueboard experience. But it's another thing to really take a step back to create employee experiences for people where you're under you understand the moments that matter, you understand culture, and physical space and technology? I do you find that you're a part of those conversations too, when it comes to designing employee experiences. And that blueboard is maybe like, a part of it, or people just coming to you for you know, the recognition piece.

Taylor 36:00

Yeah, 100%. Our best customers, you know, come to us because of that. And they have a holistic strategy, where they want to do what's best for their people, and it's thoughtful, and it's intentional. And blueboard can be a major part of that strategy. So I wouldn't say that anyone necessarily buys blueboard by accident, if you know what I mean. And, and I would think in the best case of scenarios, like in the way that we talk about what we're offering, which is like, hey, support your employees, whole selves, like, you know, let people spend quality time outside of the office and the way that they choose, like, just like marketing like that, and like talking about what we do, I think spurs a lot of thought for organizations, because like, like you said, in the beginning of this call, like, for some people, it's a stretch. It's like, Oh, that's wild, like what our company even do that. And, you know, they might take us as a data point of like, something that's newer, and like hot and meaningful in the market right now. And that might actually inform their higher level strategy. And then they may come back to us as a customer call it like two, three years later. And we actually have a term for that we call them boomerangs. We have so many large companies that first heard from us engaged with us spoke with us at a conference three plus years ago. And then they come back, and they're like, Hey, I heard this was really inspiring. And we'd, like that's, that's, that's great, right? Because we're helping spur that conversation. And so I think it happens in those two ways.

Jacob Morgan 37:23

One of the things I always tell HR professionals is, you know, I always thought that HR is it's a very, very exciting place to be in. But at the same time, Never before have we needed HR to not think and act and be like HR. And so I think moving away from a lot of this traditional human resources to focusing on human transformation from not having a seat at the table to having a seat at the table. Like there's just this big transformation happening in the world of HR. And I think it's exciting that there are companies like yours out there that are helping HR professionals just think differently about what's possible when it comes to employee experience, because it's so easy to get stuck. How old is HR, I don't even know how old the field is. But it has not changed in decades. And so I think now it's finally getting a huge, huge wake up call, which is great for everybody.

Taylor 37:34

Yeah. Yeah. 100%, it's great for all of us, you know, that, that are working for a living, which is most if not all of us, you know, what I mean? And I think your your comments about the field are right on. And I think what's what's new and exciting is now like within the field of HR, like, there's this whole idea of like creativity, that you can have to create employee experience, because employee experience doesn't create itself. Like you need to create it thoughtfully. And so there is a whole new set of paths for people who are dreamers and creators and who wants to be super strategic and have more like, they have more like lateral ability to move within HR and to like shake up how companies operate in a way that's

like so different from like what you said, which is like the compliance nature of HR from the past. So yeah, that was a great, great time, even friends of mine, you know, that that I've known from, you know, my days back to the Cal, and people who have gone into finance and management, consulting and things that like early on in career seemed like a really great path. I have friends now that are in HR and strategic roles and companies that are like loving it. And I do think like a few decades ago, those people wouldn't have found themselves in this field, which which speaks volumes and something we're really excited about.

Jacob Morgan 39:23

Yeah. Well, maybe to wrap up because when you're the top of the hour here, for people who are listening and watching, do you have any advice or suggestions for them if they're starting to think about employee experience and what they can start doing for their people? What What should they be doing? How do these conversations begin?

Taylor 39:43

Oh, how did these conversations begin? That's always a tough one. I think the best conversations, you know, they start from a high level. And they start from an aspirational sense in terms of what type of company do we want to be and also like, Who are we as a company and getting like really solid on that, from a core level, and also engaging like leadership in terms of like getting, and maybe uncovering the truth of who you are as a company, so that you can figure out the best way forward. And so, you know, I, you're going to be glad you didn't ask me a question about company values, because I could talk about company values for an hour, or the idea of having a mission that's meaningful to a lot of people or how to pitch people on a vision, these foundational things, I think, really set the tone for who you are as a company. And once you can look in the mirror and say, Yes, that's me, that's accurate. Then you design your programs and your employee experience around that, which is how we get to the authenticity that we were talking about earlier. So I do think it starts with, you know, a long look into the mirror, You know, the good parts, the bad and the ugly, and just coming to terms with who you are as an organization where you want to go? And then yeah, you come up with a path forward that is, above all else authentic to who you are.

Jacob Morgan 41:01

Perfect Well, before we wrap up, why don't you share maybe one or your favorite one or two experiences that you guys offer? Is there? Is there any any that come to mind that you think are super cool or crazy?

Taylor 41:12

Yeah, you know, instead of going the route of like, the craziest things that you you can do, because like, you know, we can do a lot of that, like, we could send you sandboarding in the Moroccan desert, you know, we could send you to chase the northern lights in Iceland, one of the things that I think is really powerful....

Jacob Morgan 41:29

Oh is pretty hardcore stuff, man.

Taylor 41:31

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. But like, so we do the exchange, but I'm going to focus on the simple because I think that's something that's really powerful. I think, you know, all of us have things that we're interested in that we want to do that we don't necessarily make the time for. So I'm sure like, you know, three or five people who wants to take their 200 hour yoga teacher training, or there's people who want to learn Mandarin or Spanish, and there's all these things that people want to do. But often in life, it's really hard to take that first step, and to actually go to that first yoga class or to sign up for the Mandarin training. And so what I like about blue board is that people can choose simple things, like taking a surfing lesson, like I used to blue board reward, to take a surfing lesson when I moved to San Diego, and like that one hour class gave me then the energy and the momentum to Oh, I bought a board eventually. And then eventually, I went once every two weeks, and now I'm surfing two days a week. But you know, if my company didn't pay for me to go take that first step, I wouldn't be surfing two days a week. And so like we see hundreds of people a week doing things that represent one step towards something they've always wanted to do, whether that's taking a cooking class, because they've always wanted to learn how to make pasta, right? Or they're taking a boxing class because they that's the first step towards them getting in shape, like blueboard can represent just a small nudge and step in someone's life. That is then taking a big step in terms of who they are as a person. And at the end of the day, their company is the one that happened like how powerful and awesome is that? So that's why I love what we're doing. Man I, I get a kick out of it. We have, you know, 1000 people almost out every week now across the world blue boarding, as we call it, hashtag blue boarding going on adventures on behalf of their companies, and we're just really excited about that. And yeah.

Jacob Morgan 42:31

Yeah. Yeah. That's super cool. Well, where can people go to learn more about you and Blueboard if they want to check it out for themselves and their company, anything that you want to mention, feel free to do so.

Taylor 43:12

Yeah, for sure. I would definitely check us out it's www.blueboard.com blue, like the color board like a surfboard, on Instagram, where at Blue board Inc, I NC and hashtag blue boarding, has now 1000s of posts of employees going on adventures all over the world so you can get a taste of how people are living their lives outside the office. But, Jacob to ask you real quick. We always ask people, a blue boarding moment means a time where you've challenged your comfort zones, indulged in a passion or tried something new. What's a blue boarding moment you've had over the past I don't know year or two.

Jacob Morgan 44:01

Playing in a chess tournament. Yeah, I've been passionate about chess for a long time, but I never actually played competitively in any tournaments. So we're still out of my comfort zone. And, you know, before the pandemic hit, I was playing regularly every Tuesdays and now that I moved to Southern

California, I'm gonna get back into it again. But it's the most uncomfortable thing I've ever done is sitting across from somebody else and playing a game of chess for four to six hours.

Taylor 44:31

Yeah, that's ultimate vulnerability, right? Because that's just you, yourself out there against someone else. I love that. That's great. Thanks for sharing.

Jacob

So that's my blueboard experience.

Taylor 44:42

Totally awesome, man. Well, this has been great to catch up. Thanks again for the opportunity. I'm glad to hear you're doing so well and you're enjoying your move of your own and that things are going great for you.

Jacob Morgan 44:54

Yeah, likewise, it's been great speaking to you and catching up. And thanks everyone, again, for tuning in. Make sure to check out Blueboard, they're pretty easy to find. They're all over social media as well if you use the hashtag and my guest, again has been Taylor Smith, who is the co founder and CEO of Blueboard and I will see all of you next week.