# Transcript: Gloat Book Club— Ravin Jesuthasan and Dr. John Boudreau

**Brian Hershey:**

Alright. Well thanks for joining everyone. We're going to kick things off and get started here. I'm really excited for what is actually the first official Gloat Learn Book Club. So thank you all for being here from all over the world, wow. Norway, Kenya, Canada, England, France. That's really, really fantastic. We are going to be hearing today from two friends of Gloat and two real industry experts and thought leaders, Ravin Jesuthasan and Dr. John Boudreau, authors of the, drum roll, Wall Street Journal Best Seller. Congratulations to both of you. Work Without Jobs, How to Reboot Your Organization's Work Operating System. This is actually the fourth book that Ravin and John have authored together, with some other authors as well. This represents some of their latest work and thinking that we've been teasing out for the last a year or so in various articles and conversations here at Gloat as well. So in a way I feel like we've been building up to this moment for a while. So really excited to discuss the book today and have an interesting discussion with our audience. Welcome Ravin. Welcome John. Feel free to join us here.

**John Boudreau:**

Brian, pleasure to be here.

**Brian Hershey:**

Great.

**John Boudreau:**

Thanks for the drum roll. The drum roll was very good.

**Brian Hershey:**

Yes. Thank you very much. I'm very excited for you guys. We've been waiting for this book for a while and happy to see all the success around it. So guys before we actually dive into the book, do you want to just share a bit for our audience here about yourselves and the dynamic duo? Your four books in together, you guys must like each other, I imagine. Would love to just kind of hear a bit of the story.

**John Boudreau:**

We say liking each other is not always a prerequisite for writing a lot of books together, from many of my colleagues that I know. Although I've liked virtually everybody I've written with. And in this case, Ravin is a terrific friend and colleague and has been for so many years. So Ravin, why don't start telling about yourself? It's such a pleasure to join you today.

**Brian Hershey:**

Oh Ravin, I think you might be on mute.

**John Boudreau:**

I think you might be on mute.

**Ravin Jesuthasan:**

Oh, sorry. That's never happened before. Thank you John, and Brian thanks for having us on. So delighted to be here. So I take care of Mercer's transformation services business. I'm based in the Chicago office. Brian as you mentioned, John and I have written full books together, all focused on the future of work in some way, shape, or form. That's the area that I practice in with my clients, and I also do a lot of work with the World Economic Forum and I sit on the steering committee on work and employment.

**Brian Hershey:**

Thanks Ravin.

**John Boudreau:**

I'm John Boudreau. As Ravin said, we've been together for quite a while. Four books or so, probably 10 years or more. Most recently … so I'm now semi-retired and standing in Santa Fe, New Mexico, even as we speak. Hoping that the firefighters are okay fighting what I now understand from the headlines is the biggest wildfire in the country right now nearby. So kudos to them and all good thoughts to them.

And then most recently, I was a professor in the Business School at USC and a research scientist at the Center for Effective Organizations. I remain affiliated with the Center for Effective Organizations, kind of as a remote research scientist from here in Santa Fe. Before that a lot of you knew me in my Cornell era, which was 22 years at Cornell from the early '80s through about 2002. So yeah, my career has kind of spanned most recently a lot of work with Ravin on the future of work, and before that a good deal of work on the future of the HR profession with Pete Ramstad and other terrific co-authors, Ed Lawler and others. And then at Cornell, a lot of work on mapping the payoff from investments in people.

**Brian Hershey:**

Awesome. Thank you both for those intros, quite the power duo. All of that experience and knowledge definitely shines through in the book. I've got my copy here, my bookmark still nestled about halfway through.

**John Boudreau:**

I was saying, I hope that bookmark represents how far you've read. I mean, that's pretty good.

**Brian Hershey:**

It's an official Gloat Learn Book Club bookmark in there. I hope many in our audience joining us today have their copies as well. If not, we'll be dropping links to get one. But for those of us who are partway through, have finished the book, are thinking about getting into the book, maybe we can start from the beginning. Work Without Jobs, How to Reboot Your Organization's Operating System. Why did you write it? What's kind of new and how does this actually build on some of your previous work as well?

### Ravin Jesuthasan:

Yeah. Thank you Brian. Maybe I'll kick off and then John can jump in. So this book really builds, I think in particular, on our last two books. Lead the Work: Navigating a World Beyond Employment and Reinventing Jobs, which you showed up on the screen a second ago. So Lead the Work explored how work was moving beyond the organizational boundary and kind of beyond the confines of employment while Reinventing Jobs explored how automation and humans can best be combined. Both of those books provided leaders with a framework for decision making.

And as do all of our books, just lots and lots of examples and case studies of those frameworks in action. But at the heart of both those books was kind of the principle and the big idea of deconstruction. Right? As kind of this undercurrent, how to rethink work as a critical foundation for kind of increasing the agility of the organization.

That's what we really wanted to do with this book was, and I often sort of smile about the fact John that we started writing this in March 2020. Something else rather auspicious happened that month as well, as we all know. So it was quite, I think, a blessing and a curse to be writing this during a pandemic. Because what we also got to see were a lot of the work we were doing with companies, to respond to the pandemic and how. Some of these ideas were so fundamental in taking this concept of deconstruction and helping them sort of accelerate and transform and respond in far more optimal fashion to the challenges of this pandemic. But also being able to look back at what we've written before, John, and see how taking this idea further really led to a very different way of thinking about and organizing work itself. So that was a little bit of the background and context Brian.

### Brian Hershey:

Awesome. Thanks. Thanks for that context, Ravin. Anything to add John?

### John Boudreau:

No. I think Ravin's pretty well captured it. Basically what we noticed was the first step to see the patterns in engaging people in ways beyond employment was that you very often didn't neatly engage someone like a contractor or a gig worker or volunteer crowdsourcer in a job.

You engage them in part of a job, and they were working side by side with regular full-time employees. And then when we wrote the automation book, the going in question at the time was, "Will robots or AI replace my job?" And of course as soon as you look at the research, you realize that you can't understand this question, and none of the research has ever tried to understand it without having to break the jobs down into tasks and instead ask, "Well, which tasks are going to be automated. And then how are humans and automation combined at that task level?"

So deconstruct the work was kind of the first step in both books, and it was kind of logical then to realize that deconstruction was kind of at the heart of so many ways of seeing the patterns. That's the way I see it. It doesn't really mean that we're anticipating a world without jobs at all, but it means that leaders and others can do better to see patterns, to optimize their strategies, to be more agile, if they free themselves up from the starting assumption that the work we're dealing with is this job that we have.

## Brian Hershey:

Thanks both for that context. It's interesting Ravin, I remember us speaking as far back as March 2020, and just kind of reflecting how almost uncanny it is starting to write this book at that time, and then how interesting and kind of fascinating it must have been to be kind of writing this book as almost the world is kind of catching up to some of the thinking and it just is all happening in real time. I think that comes through in the book as well, which is really, really unique.

So can you describe for us a little bit about this new operating system that we're already seeing emerge? We're talking so much, Gloat and the industry, about skills and what is the actual outcome of the skills based organization. It's agility. It's this new model for utilizing and deploying talent. What does this new operating system kind of mean for you both and how do you best kind of sum up what you mean by kind of this world of work without jobs?

## Ravin Jesuthasan:

So maybe I'll just start with the four principles, Brian, that sort of underpin this new work operating system. So the first, as we've kind of alluded to already, starting with the work. Not the current and future tasks and not the existing jobs or the jobs to come, i.e., how we

organize those tasks. So transcending that legacy of jobs, that's kind of the first piece, that whole notion of deconstruction. Second then is once you've done that, how do you get to the optimal combinations of humans and automation? And that was, I think, with reinventing jobs we really kind of broke new ground with giving leaders just a fairly straightforward framework for thinking about different types of automation and where automation could best substitute. Highly repetitive, rules-based work, the way it could augment the skills of the talent, making them almost super productive. Where does it actually create demand for new or different human skills?

So once you've gotten to that optimal combination, the third principle then is, as John alluded to, how do you think really holistically about all of the different ways in which talent can connect to work? Is a job the best thing? Is an internal gig the best thing? Is an agile talent pool the best thing? Should it be the talent of an outsourcer or an alliance partner? Should we centralize? There's just so many different ways of connecting talent to work. And then lastly, just this notion of perpetually looking for opportunities to take the friction, as we've talked about, take the friction out of how we connect people to work. So progressively allowing talent to flow to work to keep increasing the agility with which talent is connected.

It's kind of funny. John and I over the last, oh gosh, six months or so have just done a lot of events and stuff around the book. You get folks sometimes cynically saying that this title is clickbait. Right? So I think to be clear, we're not saying that jobs are going to go away tomorrow. Actually far from it. What you'll see in the book, and Brian as you've read it you'll see, is we early on build a case for why the growing inability, if you will, of the current work operating system with its foundation and jobs. And most importantly, I think it's traditional one to one relationship between a degree, a job, and a job holder to keep up with all of these challenges that we see in the world of work. Whether it's the threat of a pandemic, whether it's the demands of agility, whether it's the changes in competitive structure.

What we've tried to do with this book is to sort of illustrate that new work operating system, and illustrating it in action with a ton of cases to show the art of the possible. And what you see is this inexorable movement, if you will, towards this idea of work without jobs. So hopefully a little bit of context because I know lots of people pick it up and go like, "Huh? What does this mean? Gig work?"

## Brian Hershey:

Yeah, no, totally. One of my actually favorite things reading in here was the exploration of kind of the Unilever case study. It was just interesting to kind of hear a different perspective on the work that Unilever was doing. Obviously on the Gloat side of things, they were one of the first organizations we ever really worked with to start to bring about this kind of new operating system in the form of talent marketplace and gig work and things of that nature. And I know you both have a relationship with Leena Nair, former CHRO of Unilever, and just some really interesting perspective on that example in particular in this book. But can you both maybe kind of share for the audience kind of some examples ... I know the book is full of them, but maybe we can share a few examples of organizations who are kind of doing this right now. So what are the indications of a future system that you're seeing and excited by?

## Ravin Jesuthasan:

Yeah. So maybe I'll sort of jump in and John can pick up as well. So in the book we have the four principles that I just talked about and we have seven fundamental elements, and we show kind of the existing state today of how work is done and then the to be state that this new operating system sort of talks to. Four examples just come to mind, just picking on the first four Brian.

The first is this notion of work as deconstructed job elements or tasks. The case study we had there, talking about work that we were doing during the pandemic, is work that we did with Genentech. The idea was, how can we use this concept of deconstruction to move beyond the job as the marker or determinant of what flexibility and equity would look like? Because everyone is trying to figure out what work post-pandemic should be remote versus hybrid versus onsite. They actually went through the process of deconstruction with the goal of creating a more equitable and inclusive approach to flexible work.

By going beyond the traditional headlines that you often see of, "Well, this person is in an accounting role. They can work remotely." And, "This person is in a manufacturing role so they have to be on site all the time." What they actually did was not on an equal basis, but on a more equitable basis, extend this concept of flexibility to all types of work based on the activities and the tasks and not necessarily the headline of the job. So I think it's a good example of deconstruction in practice, focused on a very topical issue for us.

The second was work automation, optimizing the task level combinations of humans and machines. I talked about our philosophy and belief and examples from the last book of where can it substitute, where can automation augment versus actually transform and create new work. We absolutely love the work that the good folks at DHL have been doing.

The experimentation that they've been doing with a bunch of different types of robotics, all based on an acute and detailed understanding of the specifics of the work. And the thing about them is it's not just one type of automation, but many different types based on the very nature of the work. So that, to us, just seemed a terrific example of that element in action. The third was something, Brian, that you guys do exceptionally well. Thinking of work arrangements as kind of a boundary-less democratized work ecosystem. You, Brian, are familiar with that case study of the insurance company that had at its heart a marketplace as a way of reducing the friction with which digital talent and data scientists connected with work across the organization. One of the really beautiful things about that story as we were writing it was watching the company's use of that marketplace grow, and seeing not just how the marketplace connected people to work better, but the benefits of having an algorithm sit at the heart of connecting people to work.

You get these amazing signals of, "What skills are growing in demand versus lessening in demand and what does that mean for my personal development needs?" You get these other signals of, "What does this now mean for the price, for the market value, of different skills?" And being able to sort of have skill based pay become a much more real phenomenon. It also raised some interesting questions about the role of leaders in an environment where the algorithm is sending signals to people as to how projects are going, et cetera. Freeing a manager up from basics of supervision and coordination to actually leading and coaching and developing the talent within their purview. So that, to us, was just a terrific example. And again, something that the Gloat marketplace does so exceptionally well.

And then lastly I'd say the one case that John and I love, and we're so grateful to our friend Greg Taylor at Providence Health for sharing this, but seeing the workers as a whole person with this array of deconstructed capabilities. The case from Providence … if you read nothing in the book, read that case I would say. But how they deconstructed the work of nurses during the pandemic as a way of kind of enabling them to flow to the top of their license, to be able

to do the work that they came into this profession for that they were passionate about, and then redeploying other tasks and activities to automation and other roles.

The other thing I'll also say is what we've seen with companies that go beyond the headlines of a degree or a job or a title to seeing all of the capabilities, the unique bundles of capabilities and skills, that is Brian versus John versus Ravin, and using that to connect people to work also becomes an opportunity to address diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in a much more agile way. So our friends at the insurance company with their marketplace, the fact that you've got this velocity of projects gives you countless opportunities to address DEI issues. Versus in a traditional job, you typically only have three milestones if you think about it.

When you hire someone, when you promote them, and when you make a compensation decision, those are three milestones that you have over the course of a multi-year career. It makes it hard to keep addressing legacy DEI issues in a systemic fashion if you're limited to that. Versus with these new ways of working, you have many more opportunities and thus the ability to address DEI more systemically and quickly. John, what would you add or modify to that?

## John Boudreau:

I think Ravin's covered some beautiful examples, Brian. Gloat and this sort of movement toward internal talent marketplaces makes it easy to find them. I think one of the things that happens that you and I have talked about and I'm observing, and I hope someone starts to study pretty soon, is when I've talked with folks in your industry how a marketplace kind of devours jobs in a way. So what I love about the work that you and the industry is doing and the enormous popularity, almost enormous requirement now for an internal talent marketplace in the world of HR, is that it is a great sort of thin edge of the wedge. Because it requires leaders to step back and say, "I have this work to be done. I was perhaps going to configure it into a job or go to HR and say, 'Get me a job requisition.'"

I noticed that Carrie posted a lovely example in the chat about a company that wanted to hire someone to a marketing job. And Carrie, bless her heart, really tried to help them understand if you would let that melt and you would let the parts of that job become elements of work, you could actually find other people. You could tap into another market because there are

people out there who can do part of a marketing job, but maybe not all of it. That's kind of the logic.

I think once you start to post projects as a leader, you're now in a mindset that says, "Oh, wait a minute. This job I used to have has parts in it. Those parts could actually be done by someone with a certain capability that isn't necessarily 100% qualified for the job I might have posted." You see workers on the other end, and I know you see this, beginning to get very comfortable with connecting with a project that's based on a part of their capabilities. What I love about it is it's often capabilities that were not reflected in the job that they were doing. So this idea that there's a whole person with capabilities that go well beyond the typical definition of a job is also something that is very gratifying to see.

My own prediction is that now that this marketplace mentality, we might call it, has started to take hold, that we'll begin to see it expand, and I think that's what we see in organizations. Once you start to do it internally, you're really just a click away from doing it externally and realizing there are people outside your organization, often in untapped populations. Ravin alluded to this. But I was just at a conference here in Santa Fe called Crossing the Cactus, organized by my friend Jamai Blivin, with hundreds of people that are working on pathways to work for people who have conviction records, underserved populations, caregivers who aren't counted in the normal workplace because they don't show up as job applicants, people from all kinds of backgrounds that are generally untapped because they don't have a degree or something like that. What you see running through that is this idea of breaking up the work so that you can adjust, as Ravin and I called it, adjust the demand curve.

Adjust what you're asking for rather than lament the fact that, "If I stick with this rigid job, the supply isn't matching it. Gosh, I'm only seeing people that are 70% qualified. Why can't I hire anyone?" Well the answer is, why don't you go back and look at the work and see if the work could fit someone who's 70% qualified or someone from a population you haven't tapped yet that doesn't look perfect. So that notion of getting past the, "I have a job. I wait for 100% qualified job holder who has a degree that says they're qualified." That was typical in the nurse world. Providence said, "I'm going to melt the parts of this work. Some of it could be done, like taking temperatures, checking in on healthy patients, that can be a receptionist. Scheduling can be automation. And then by the way, our administrators were licensed

physicians. So let's get the CEO and the Chief Operating Officer of this hospital relicensed and let their capabilities flow so that they can come over and help out the nurses during COVID." And I think my idea is once you see it, you see it everywhere. Once you begin to see through this new operating system of deconstructed jobs, job holders, and degrees, I think after a while you can't avoid it and it starts to just present itself in so many areas.

## Brian Hershey:

Yeah. Wow. Awesome. Yeah, and that's exactly what we see in large organizations. You take this small step and then it sort of goes viral. It gains momentum of its own, and it turns out to be not as disruptive or as kind of scary of a change. It actually becomes something pretty natural once it really takes root.

## John Boudreau:

Yeah. As the chat is saying, Brian, not without its challenges. This is not a thing that generally, and I know you face this all the time ... most HR systems, one of the reasons we wanted to write the book is that we actually heard from several CHROs as they listened to our concept said, "I'm trying to do agility with jobs and I realized the jobs are in the way." Now then the challenge is, "My whole HR system is built on the job as the unit of analysis. We hire for a job at a time, and you're saying I now need to think about a system, at least in some areas, that would melt those jobs." I kind of like that analogy of an ice cube melting, and then the parts that melted could be reconfigured. But what's the unit of analysis?

My own view is skills is great. That's another excellent thin edge of the wedge, it's got people thinking in a deconstructed way about people. We know from research that it's actually a number of components, knowledge, skills, abilities that lead to a capability. So you and I can have a talk, Brian, about the unit of analysis there. I think skills may be a little off in terms of how much we atomize, but the idea that workers and leaders are being asked to think in this atomized way is really terrific. However we really, even now, don't yet have systems that are naturally organized around an operating system at that unit of seeing the worker as a capability, seeing the job as projects and tasks that might be reconfigured.

So I'm noticing in the chat a good deal of discussion about the fact that we're not there yet, as well as once people see this, they can't unsee it. So it's a very interesting moment in time in

terms of the challenges, but also in terms of Ravin and I making this humble contribution, to others like you and others, to kind of putting a light on this idea of a new operating system.

## Brian Hershey:

Fantastic. Have you considered a podcast? Work Without Jobs Podcast.

## John Boudreau:

That's a good idea.

## Brian Hershey:

I'd listen. No, that's fantastic. There were some really good examples that came up in the chat. One I can contribute that we've now actually seen pop up in multiple talent marketplace deployments, we've seen it a few times now, is parental leave. Right? Suddenly you have a full-time individual in a role and they're gone and we had multiple organizations say, "Okay, wait. The traditional process was either we bring in someone from the outside on a temporary basis or we kind of have to think in our limited view of who is sitting one desk over or who is on the team who could pick up the slack." Now they can slice that role into its constituent pieces and staff it as projects in the marketplace, just as another interesting example.

## John Boudreau:

Beautiful example, Brian. I think also it goes the other way. As you think about someone who wants to move to maybe a different relationship with time in the organization, because they have a new child or something like that, fathers and mothers, et cetera, you also have an opportunity to look at the work as they would like to do it and take those deconstructed elements and maybe even bring in elements from other work that could be done in the way that they want to engage from a standpoint of time and place. So as you say, it's a very ... Ravin alluded to this. Not only is agility enhanced by this once you see it, but the idea of being inclusive, the idea of having a conversation about how might we remake the work to fit the kind of relationship you want to have with us. And it might turn out to be a job, but it might turn out to be something that looks a lot more like a contractor or like someone who is an employee, but is working a bit more like a gig worker.

**Brian Hershey:**

Yeah. And I think we both know Unilever doing some pretty cool stuff there and some other organizations as well-

**John Boudreau:**

Indeed.

**Brian Hershey:**

-with flexible employment models. Okay. So a lot of questions coming in the chat kind of around this topic. Ravin, you mentioned this a little bit at the end of your commentary. What does this mean for leadership? Implementing a system like this, as just kind of one of the, I think, kind of focal points in an organization's culture that faces a lot of change. What practices do leaders need to shift away from? What do they need to really lean into?

**John Boudreau:**

Ravin, I think we thought I might take a first shot at that. So Brian, if I may, and then I want to let Ravin get a word in edgewise here. There are a lot of interesting questions about leadership. So let me give due credit to my colleague, Jonathan Donner, who was kind of the head of leadership and talent development at Unilever for many, many years, a little bit before you connected with them Brian, and then went on to work with the UK Health System and is now a very close colleague of mine on several projects. Jonathan and I were talking about this idea before the book was published, and we ended up writing a book for Sloan Management Review. Just very quickly, here's kind of six things that we observed, and there's going to be lots more.

One was that leaders, instead of just being digitally savvy, will really need to become fluent with the technology, particularly the algorithms and the matching platforms that are embedded in the kinds of things that you do Brian. We think that leaders will need to move from just, "I understand how to use the HR system. I'm savvy digitally," to, "I really am a master at understanding how the technology of these platforms, whether internal or external, actually work." The second one is from process execution. "I have these five people, they work for me. They're in a job that has been fitted into this process," to really more project guidance

where the workers are free to move from one leader to another to flow to different projects. So the difference between thinking about a fixed process and a set of jobs attached to it to really thinking about projects that are fluid, that are deconstructed from the level of the job, and guiding workers through those project opportunities in conjunction with the other leaders.

A pretty obvious one, and this is something that my organization design colleagues like Sue Mormon, Stu Windy, Chris Worley, the socio-technical systems group, from a hierarchy to really an alignment and empowerment basis for the way that authority works, the way that a relationship works. No longer is it, "I have five people. Each of them is in a box. That box has a job description and its lines come to me. Nobody else gets to use them. I know they report to me, and we have a kind of yearly connection with each other to see how they're doing, et cetera." Now those people are shared, they flow to other leaders. So a very different mindset about rather than, "These people report to me," to, "How can I empower them and how can I align their work, including the work I need them to do, with what the organization needs?" Number four, from a kind of technical idea of workers in jobs attached to processes or things that they do to more of a humanistic idea, particularly about work automation. Rather than automation as a technical ... automation first, let's say, and then we'll think about the people to a much more beginning with the people, as Ravin and I wrote in Reinventing Jobs, and how they'll combine with automation.

From an episodic focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity to a continual focus on that. We noted that these systems have immense opportunity to enhance diversity and inclusion. Imagine if you counted diversity and inclusion based on projects. Where a leader might see instead of 20 people that report to them, they're going to touch 100 people. That means there's real opportunities for leaders to express values like sustainability, diversity, inclusion, et cetera, multiple times. It also means that if leaders aren't doing a good job, that's going to be revealed very quickly in the marketplace. It means that leaders as a group are going to be sharing this talent and so there's going to need to be a consistency of values, of perspectives, of alignment, et cetera, that we really haven't seen. Because the job almost gives leaders a crutch to say, "Well as long as these people that report to me understand what they should do, I guess we're in alignment." That's going to be very different when people can flow.

And then Jonathan and I felt the foundational pillar is really this thing called purpose led work, which I tend to think of as a mutuality of the organization's purpose and the individual's purpose and the idea of exploring how to make that mutuality work well.

## Brian Hershey:

Fantastic. Thank you for that perspective. I never really thought about that implication of once we kind of move away from people in boxes, the implication for a manager now not as someone who can be a certain way, transmit certain knowledge only to a certain group in the organization. You might touch ... if you have a team of 10, you might now actually touch a team of 100 individuals in the organization. Yeah, that's very fascinating.

Okay. So beyond leaders, I guess we're thinking of business unit leaders, business line managers. Can we talk a little bit about the implications for, I assume a lot of our audience today as well, HR leaders? What are the implications for HR leaders who are ushering their organizations into this kind of new normal, agile work, skills, capabilities based work versus job titles work? How do they need to evolve? How do their skills need to evolve as well?

## John Boudreau:

I think you're on mute Ravin.

## Ravin Jesuthasan:

Oh, sorry. I was suggesting that if you wanted to sort of kick off and then I can sort of jump on.

## John Boudreau:

I will Ravin. I think I'm going to kick off a little differently than I might have. I'm going to leave it to you to talk a little bit more about the specific kinds of skills and development that you are seeing. I would say this is the way I think about it. We talked about four principles, Brian, and people can go back and look at that. But things like think about the work first, think about combinations of humans and automation, et cetera. I think my orientation is that if you're a leader in HR, CHRO or a leadership team, you can take the whole talent life cycle from sourcing to selection to development to careers to engagement to rewards and you can look at it and say, "How would it be different against these four principles?"

The other overarching thing, and this is something that I'm now beginning to work pretty closely on with my early colleague, Pete Ramstad, who is now kind of returning to the field. We get a lot of questions about how can HR capitalize on the wind in its sails. Clearly HR is more visible, has a great deal more stature, has taken on an immense array of new things like health and wellbeing and empathy and diversity and decolonization, et cetera. Clearly there's greater wind in the sales. The analogy I like to have is I hope it doesn't just produce crashing into the rocks faster. And so the profession needs to develop, I think, frameworks like the one we're talking about today, but lots of others, where they teach workers and leaders how to think about this work relationship. I hope this book is one humble contribution to that.

And then the second thing is to hold leaders accountable for their own talent decisions in the same way that they're held accountable for decisions about things like money, technology, et cetera. They don't get to blame finance if they didn't make their cashflow target, but very often they do get to blame HR if they didn't meet they're hiring targets. I think we need to hold leaders more accountable for using frameworks like this one to creatively deal with those issues.

### Brian Hershey:

Very interesting.

### John Boudreau:

Ravin? Ravin, what is your thinking?

### Ravin Jesuthasan:

Yeah, no. I think John has said that really well. I think something else that we've talked about in all three of the books, as work itself changes, HR's remit really has to change. I think more than ever this profession, this function, has the permission given what it's done the last two years to shift from that legacy role of being just a ... I don't mean to say just in a pejorative way or to minimize it, but from being a steward of employment to increasingly being a steward of work. The progressive organizations we've talked about, the Unilevers of this world, et cetera, Brian. That whole team, Leena and her team, all think well beyond the boundaries of what

might have traditionally defined that function. They're thinking well beyond that. They're looking at the business problems and they are absolutely partners in helping their leadership team address the problems by fundamentally rethinking work and how people work. I think that really has to be at the heart of kind of the mission if you will. And Lord knows, we have permission now given all the great work that has been done.

## Brian Hershey:

Awesome. Thank you. Thank you both very much for that perspective.
Zooming out a minute from organizations that are making this transformation. I think one of the really powerful things that comes across in the book, certainly folks who have spent more time with Gloat and have come to our conferences, this stuff is really happening. That's the cool thing. When I think about you guys starting to write this book in March 2020 … I mean we are only a little over two years into the future, but it feels like we're ten years into the future already.

We went through a wormhole because we're now working with organizations in over 30 different industries, Fortune 500 companies, leading organizations who are at the cutting edge, Unilever and so on, but some of the most traditional or kind of conservative organizations in the world are also doing this. I think in many ways because they're finding themselves with the greatest need to do this. And so it's just been really fascinating hearing you all talk about this. I'm just thinking in real time about all of the real kind of battle stories and learnings and everything from organizations that are already taking this journey.
So my next question for you both is, what does this new approach to work mean for society more broadly and for worker communities? And actually I'm going to just add here, your colleague John Donner appears to be with us right now, which is fantastic. Next time we'll invite him on.

## John Boudreau:

We'll get him to unmute. That's right.

## Brian Hershey:

But he said something really, really fascinating which, I have to be honest, I've not spent an enormous amount of time thinking about. But now I want to. So maybe having you on here is a really great excuse. John is sort of asking you now that we're in this new world, let's place ourselves in this world where employees are atomized whether that's skills, capabilities, whatever that is, a worker achieves in a way the greatest utility when they are ... Jonathan uses the word versatile. Diversified into what they can do to maximize that utility. So in some ways there's implications for how does the worker in this new world actually make themselves sort of most valuable in this economy where versatility is suddenly maybe at a higher premium than a specialization possibly. It's a really interesting thought. So what are your thoughts on what this means for society and for workers?

## John Boudreau:

Ravin, maybe I'll jump in quickly on this idea of versatility in the worker. Again, I'll refer everyone to the Crossing the Cactus conference if they want to see a bunch of people much smarter than me that are working on this. But Brian, I think you're right. As soon as you suggest, and I think it's inevitable, that all workers, not just those coming into the market. But I think those of us that are semi-retired, those as you mentioned that want to have a different work relationship for a while perhaps because of the birth of a child or other caregiving responsibilities, that is so much better facilitated if you can think about the worker as a set of capabilities that we can match to the things that we need. And so I think probably one of the biggest implications here is that workers of all types, those early in the market, late in the market, would be encouraged to think about themselves as that portfolio of capabilities and really to step back and almost list, "What are all of my capabilities?"
Ravin, I know ... why don't you talk about that example where when you thought there were five and there were actually 22? Go ahead with that one.

## Ravin Jesuthasan:

Yeah. This will be a great advert, Brian, I think for the power of Gloat. We've seen results from work at the World Economic Forum that when you ask the average employee what his or her skills are, the length of that initial list is only about seven. Versus when you have an algorithm inferring what skills a person has based on their work history, the projects, the people they've

worked with, the different qualifications they might have and certifications, it's closer to 23 as a starting point. Which then obviously leads to a much, much richer conversation because you're now then in the process of kind of narrowing down a list versus starting with it, which just puts you at the other end of the continuum of richness, if you will.

## John Boudreau:

Yeah. I think that's such a beautiful example, Ravin, that the algorithms are beginning to infer skills. There's tons of startups, Brian as you know, about skill inference. The idea that not only leaders, which you might say, "Well, they can kind of be understood to be a little bit unaware of the full capabilities of people. They haven't been called upon to think that way. They think in terms of jobs, HR sort of sees people in terms of jobs and future jobs."

What's interesting to me is even the workers can use assistance in expanding their own thinking about, "Well, what would it mean that I did this project or something like that?" And the algorithms seem to be unearthing that, so I can foresee a future in which the algorithms are supporting a much better level of thinking about the full set of capabilities. So it isn't just you go back and make your list on a sheet of paper, but actually you may be involved in a system where algorithms will say, "It looks like you probably have this skill and if you do, or this capability, this thing is available to you." So I think, for me, that's a very significant element of this. On the worker side of workers really beginning to say, "What is my full potential and where would I like to add to it?"

I'll just add one more thing on both sides. Now that we're beginning to atomize, I'll call them, capabilities and match them up to atomized parts of the work, I'm hearing a much greater discussion now about the need for leaders to have frameworks, and workers too, about what that portfolio concepts mean. I'll refer back to a book I did quite a while ago with Harvard called Retooling HR, and in that book I suggested that you could think about capabilities like a financial portfolio. There are some that you want to buy and hold. Capabilities that are likely to be applicable across a wide array of situations, a wide array of automation, progressions, et cetera. Things like soft skills that people talk about. The ability to think outside the box, the ability to work well with other coworkers, leadership, that kind of thing.

At the other end though, there may be capabilities where we day trade that we know are going to pop up, they're going to be visible and necessary for a while, and then they may go away because of rapid advances. And for me, that's a fascinating thing to think about how platforms like yours, Brian, are going to allow people to day trade in a way.

To say, "I know this is just for six months. Where can I find it?" And then once I've found it, I'm getting out of that market. I'm moving on to something else. That has always been seen as kind of pejorative, I guess sort of exploitive. But I think these systems allow that to happen in the natural flow of work, with individuals often volunteering for one of those day traded things.

So the worker begins to say, "There's certain capabilities I want them now, but I know I'm going to have to move beyond them. There's others that I could develop for the long run." For me, clarity about that and teaching leaders, "This is HRs role." Teach leaders to think like that about these capabilities. Get them to use their smart brain where they already understand portfolio theory.

## Brian Hershey:

I love it. I actually ... it reminded of just this morning I was having a conversation with an HR team, oil and gas industry, global enterprise. One of the questions that was asked was, "Is there any limitation on an employee's ability to actually share what skills they have with our system?" The answer is actually no. There are processes that go in the back end and in the experience to validate skills and measure skills and look at things like proficiency of certain skills, but there's absolutely no limit on what an employee can tell us their skills are.
And one of the reasons for that and that we were illustrating was, we've seen so many incredible examples of what we call kind of hidden skills being deployed to work in an organization.

So you think about we have one example of an individual at a manufacturing company that listed photography as a skill in their profile. Their day job had nothing to do with photography and they ended up taking photos for the company website and for different products. Those skills were put to work. So we're thinking about, "Here's the skills you think you have in inventory based on what your employees are telling us and based even further on what our AI

can inference." But even what our AI can infer an employee has based on other skills they have, based on their job title, they have even more that we don't know about. And so capturing all of that, it just takes your skills inventory and blows it up even further. Maybe some of those skills you never tap into, but some of those skills you do tap into it's free inventory that you can put to work in incredible ways.

## John Boudreau:

And really fulfilling for the worker too I think, Brian. I'm reminded of a sort of an example pre this book, but just pre this book, with my colleague Gary Randall at Disney. They were experimenting with the talent marketplace and they put a project out there that was the voiceover for a trailer for an upcoming movie. They said, "Who might have some talent doing voiceover?" And somebody who that was not their job, a completely different function said, "Well, I'll put myself in for that." And sure enough, let's say they were whatever a web designer or a programmer, and they got to do the voiceover for this trailer for the movie. And you just think about the connection to the purpose of Disney, to the fundamental entertainment element of Disney.

And I know lots of examples in your world, Brian, of people who stepped up to a project that was very purpose led with a capability no one knew they had and certainly wasn't reflected in the job. I know Unilever's favorite example, I think, was a woman in finance started doing diversity, equity, and inclusion projects, ended up with a job in diversity, equity, and inclusion. So just it works the other way as well. Not only a source of untapped, as Unilever calls them hidden hours, especially when it's voluntary as it is right now there, but also a source of opportunities to extend someone's purpose and for them to get more fully engaged through their employment or work relationship.

## Brian Hershey:

Absolutely. And true story, I have to tell it because it's too good. Actually here at Gloat we have many videos on our website with a voiceover. That voiceover is actually from a member of our customer success team, Jonathan Rocks, shout out to Jonathan Rocks who listed voiceover skills in his profiling we use here at Gloat. We were able to tap into those incredible voiceover skills. So fun kind of little Easter egg about some of our marketing activity.

### John Boudreau:

Pretty soon Jonathan is going to have his own following, just like people who read audio books. You can now search on the reader because you like the way they read. So good for Jonathan.

### Brian Hershey:

Yeah. Cool. This leads me to our last question. And then we'll see if we have a minute or two, we always seem to run out of time to cover all of these questions coming in from the audience. So how should leaders get started building this new approach to work, keeping in mind not everyone can start from scratch? We get that lot, complex global organizations. Are there any small steps with big impacts that HR professionals can implement to get the ball rolling?

### Ravin Jesuthasan:

Yeah, and Brian I think as we respond to this we'll pick up on some of the great questions that are being asked by Lisa Ross and Jennifer Dole and others. So John, the change we're talking about is so significant. It is so fundamentally different from the legacy of how most companies work. So it's really important to start in a way that doesn't disrupt the integrity of kind of the operating model we find. So starting with a prototype or a pilot is really important. And I think that the trick becomes then to identify these trigger points, and some of the trigger points that John and I have seen is where we've got a bottleneck in the process. It might be something like a talent shortage, it might be a process issue, but we've got a pain point that leaders uniformly recognize and know that the way we've solved that problem in the past, or the traditional rules we bring to bear, are not going to be sufficient. We need something different.

The other would be, as we illustrate in the book, when someone's gone out and identified some new technology. Before they drop in the technology, or in the case of the book they had already dropped in the technology and we had to sort of do some triage, but let's make sure we get the best from this new piece of automation. So I think identifying the trigger points is really important. I think once you've done that, then going through the four principles we talk about, the seven elements. But I think the most important thing for this is, even with a

prototype, that it's not a one and done. Right? Because what you want to do is make this a journey, not just for the issue you're addressing, but for the whole organization.
So have business leaders actually observing the prototype, participating in it.

Make sure that you're not just fixing the problem, but you are addressing all of the issues and enablers. When you think of a marketplace, Brian, we've talked about this, thanks to the good work you guys have done, you've made the technology part easy. Right? But what organizations struggle with are the new rules of the game. It's things like budgets, it's things like headcount planning. It's things like, "Hey, I've got to keep my team busy. My team doesn't have time to take on assignments and projects on Gloat.

So how do I make time?" So putting those rules in place, we've found, are really important to getting to some of these successes. So looking at all of the moving pieces, the people, the process, the culture, the technology, the leadership issues, et cetera, and then kind of going back. So creating that proof of success and then finding a way to extend it. So we've found that to be kind of the way to start introducing some of these pretty significant changes, but doing so in "a safe way", if you will.

## John Boudreau:

I think that's an important point Ravin. I've come to like this phrase. Right now, Brian, no one is going to come to you and say, "I need that new work operating system." Now Ravin and I hope ... the book was the best seller, maybe that's just a little bit away. Workers will come to you and bring the book and say, "This is what I need, this new work operating system." Or your leaders will come to HR and say, "This is what I need." But that's not happening right now. So it's more a matter of hearing something and then realizing this might be what they need.

So someone is saying, "Our automation is changing so fast our job descriptions can't keep up." That's when HR or whoever it is that's leading and advising them might want to step back and say, "Well, wait a minute. Could I offer assistance with that by saying, 'What if we freed you from thinking about a job?'" I can't fill my job requisition. Again, we've talked a lot about that, "Well, what if we freed you up from the job requisition and said, 'Maybe we can shape the work to fit the people that are available or to fit new populations that we could tap into.'"

When someone says, "You know what? We've made diversity, equity, belonging, and sustainability everyone's job." That kind of means it's no one's job. Well, could we free that up from needing a job to being projects that we could pursue? Very much like Unilever did.
So Brian, I think for me, the idea is that people listening today and maybe others begin to have this work operating system as a tool in their mind and then listen carefully for, as Ravin beautifully said, those trigger points where leaders and workers are already aware that they need something. So you're not pushing a string uphill, it's just a matter of giving them a language and maybe a vision of what it might look like if they were freed from the traditional system of jobs, job holders, and degrees.

## Brian Hershey:

Fantastic. Gentlemen, thank you both so much for what is always a really fun and really stimulating conversation. Everyone, Work Without Jobs is available. Check it out. It's a fantastic read. Seriously Ravin and John, thank you both so much again. And thank you for kicking off our Book Club series with a bang. Reminder to everyone, it is recorded and it will be available on gloat.com/resources. Join us for our next Book Club, which is coming up pretty soon. It's coming in June with Lynda Gratton who will be discussing her book Redesigning Work. So first we did Work Without Jobs, now we're going to re-

## John Boudreau:

Big shout out to Lynda, who is a good friend and colleague of mine for a long time and was very, very kind to offer superb endorsement for the book, got a lot of attention to it. And I absolutely agree, Lynda's work design book is a beautiful compliment, I think, to the book that Ravin and I have done here. So yeah, please give Lynda our best. She's a valued colleague.

## Brian Hershey:

Will do. Thank you John, thank you Ravin. Thank you everyone for joining us.

## Ravin Jesuthasan:

Thank you all.

**John Boudreau:**

Thanks.