

The
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Steve Cadigan
Founder, Cadigan Talent Ventures

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Webinar

Moderator: Reshma Saujani
Founder and Board Chair, Girls Who Code
Trustee, The Economic Club of New York

Introduction

President Barbara Van Allen

Good afternoon and welcome to the 622nd meeting of The Economic Club of New York in our 114th year. I'm Barbara Van Allen, President and CEO of the Club. As many of you know, The Economic Club of New York is the nation's leading nonpartisan forum for discussions of economic, social and political issues, and we feel our mission is as important today as ever as we continue to bring people together as a catalyst for conversation and innovation. A special welcome to members of the ECNY 2021 Class of Fellows – a select group of very diverse, rising next-gen business thought leaders.

It's a pleasure for me to now welcome our special guest today, Steve Cadigan. Steve is a highly sought-after talent advisor to leaders and organizations around the globe. As Founder of his own Silicon Valley-based firm, Cadigan Talent Ventures, Steve advises a wide range of innovative organizations including Twitter, Eventbrite, Cisco, Intel, The Royal Bank of Scotland, Telefonica, Salesforce, and the BBC. He is also regularly retained by some of Silicon Valley's leading VC firms such as Andreessen Horowitz, Index Ventures, Sequoia, and Greylock Partners for his counsel on a wide range of talent topics.

Steve speaks regularly to conferences and major universities around the world and his

work in helping shape the unique culture at LinkedIn led Stanford University to build a graduate level class around this groundbreaking work. Steve is frequently asked to appear on global television and is a regular guest on Bloomberg and CNBC. He's also a regular contributor to *Forbes*.

In 2020, Steve was recognized by PeopleHum as one of the top influencers in the world of talent, and an article he published about interviewing was recognized by *Human Resources Today* as the #1 article of the year. Over the course of his career, the teams, cultures, and organizations he has led and helped build have been recognized as exceptional performers by *Wall Street Journal* and *Fortune* magazine.

This month, Steve will release his first book, *Workquake*, embracing the aftershocks of Covid-19 to create a better model of working. And even before its official ship date, it's already become #1 on the Amazon list of hot new arrivals. Steve graduated from Wesleyan University with a BA in History and received his master's degree in Organization Development from the University of San Francisco.

Today's program will be a conversation, and we're fortunate to have ECNY Board Trustee and Founder and Board Chair of Girls Who Code, Reshma Saujani, as our moderator. We're going to end promptly at 4:45, and as a reminder, this conversation is on the record and we do have media on the line. So without further ado, Reshma, the

mike is yours.

Conversation with Steve Cadigan

RESHMA SAUJANI: Thank you so much, Barbara. Well, I am so excited to have this conversation with you, Steve. I will say that during my vacation I was deeply into reading this book and taking notes and highlighting it so this is going to be a lot of fun.

So I want to start with the man. So who is Steve? I see that you grew up in South Africa. You're the son of a minister and a social worker. And, you know, as the daughter of refugees, my parents' background, who they are, what they came from, the struggles deeply influenced everything I've done in my life. I'm sure the same is for you. So tell me about that.

STEVE CADIGAN: Sure. Yes, similar to your experience, I mean I was born in the U.S. but my parents were real adventurers. And my dad, after graduating from divinity school, and my mom decided they wanted an adventure so they went to South Africa with the plan that it was going to be a one-year exchange. And four years later, we were still in South Africa.

This was during the heavy apartheid period and ultimately we were told to leave the

country. And I was probably about seven years old when that happened and there were protests, a lot of American clergy were being asked to leave or forced to leave, and it was very formative for me. I didn't realize it at the time but later to sort of say why are we leaving? And why does the government not want us? And we believe they were listening in on our phone calls, opening our mail, and very suspicious of a lot of Americans that were there at the time. And having to sort of forcefully move away, my younger sister and brother were born in South Africa, and so we all had to, you know, a family of six, my dad didn't have a job, so we wound up settling on the east coast.

And interestingly enough, and this would play into some of my career choices later, I was teased mercilessly in elementary school, first grade, for having a very strong South African accent. And my older sister and I would stay up every night and practice our American because at that age you want to fit in and you want to adapt. And I was just terrified of all the teasing I got which really hurt. My parents say, Steve, we had to like force you to go to school and you were crying all the time.

But that was a big part of my childhood and very, I went to a school which was mostly diverse. I was in the minority, someone who is Caucasian. I played basketball in sixth grade. I was the only one with white skin on the basketball team. And this was a big part of what was important to my parents, was being raised in this more of a diverse culture and climate. This is sort of working-class Connecticut. I know some people may be in

the nicer parts. We were up in Danbury, Connecticut, which is where we settled and where I basically lived until I graduated college, but that was a big part of my journey.

I went to college with no plan of what I wanted to study, and I graduated with no plan of what I wanted to do with my life. I chose history because I loved it more than any other subject. And I wound up coming to San Francisco after graduation because the woman I had fallen in love with was living in San Francisco so I arrived here to start an adventure, really following love. And like a lot of big decisions in our lives are pretty random, but that was based on being in love with someone who lived out here. She went to law school. The relationship didn't survive law school and I found myself in a place with no family really and trying to figure my way out.

I found this company called Esprit, which at the time was a really hot women's fashion company, and they offered me a position to be a credit and collections person. I was really good at collecting money, but I didn't love it. And so I applied to business school and that's when they offered me the opportunity to go into recruiting. So I'm probably 23 years old and I discovered very quickly that, as someone who loves sports – I played a lot of sports in schools – that everything I loved about sports was everything that I loved about human resources. Helping identify the best team, helping figure out which teams play better together, what kind of leader is the best fit for what kind of employee and so forth.

And so from there I went from a fashion company to an insurance company and after four years there I went to Silicon Valley in '94. And that's when things just got really exciting for me and I fell in love with the dynamism of Silicon Valley and how fast we made decisions. So in the insurance industry, I worked for Fireman's Fund for four years. You would have a meeting to decide who is going to come to the meeting. What I found in the first day on the job at Silicon Valley, we would meet in the hall, have a meeting, make a decision, and go back to our cubicles. And I just loved that. I loved that pace and it just resonated with me.

So for the last 25 years I've moved around quite a bit to a number of different organizations, but I've also lived and worked in Singapore for two years. I ran human resources for Cisco Asia for two years and then I was recruited from Asia to go to Western Canada. And I lived in beautiful Vancouver for four years for a small semiconductor company.

So I'm proud that my journey and my childhood prepared me to adapt. I love new changes and I'm sort of a change junkie – if you will – which has served me well during the pandemic. But living in different cultures and having parents that are sort of let's be open and try new things and being sort of inviting of diverse experiences has sort of really helped prepare me. In my last regular job, I was the first head of human resources, as Barbara mentioned, for LinkedIn, taking the company from 400 to 4,000,

which was just a crazy, crazy ride, and we might have some time to get into that later. So, yes, that's a little bit of the journey.

RESHMA SAUJANI: So before we get into LinkedIn, did you feel like growing up in between these cultures, was it basketball and sports? I mean what led you to being obsessed about HR and culture and talent?

STEVE CADIGAN: I definitely think the imprint for me was, I played three sports in college and it was a small school, it wasn't Division 1 or anything fancy, but I played baseball, basketball and tennis my freshman year, and what I've always loved is not just the competition, it's studying how people handle certain situations. Who plays well under pressure? How does someone celebrate victory? How does someone handle a setback or defeat? It's always just been a fascination for me. And I had no idea that I could turn that into a career, if you will.

And I mean, in a way human resources is really just a subset of what being a leader is about. Right? Like we're here as leaders to help people realize something greater than they could on their own, as a team, as a group and so forth. And that just, you know, reminds me of a conversation we had around the boardroom at LinkedIn one day.

Someone came in, I can't remember who, it might have been the CEO, Jeff Weiner, and he said, okay, do you love to win more than you hate to lose or do you hate to lose

more than you love to win? And so for the next hour we debated this. And I found myself stuck because neither answer felt right to me. And I said I get more out of giving someone assist and watching them score and the thrill of them achieving something than I do the win or the loss thing. It's kind of not how I view that whole question.

But I don't know, it's hard for me to say, and as the son of a minister, you know, I was the only male on the whole male side of my family that isn't an ordained minister. Like grandfather, great-grandfather, uncles, all ordained ministers. My parents are like, where did we go wrong with this child? But I think I'm doing similar kind of work. I'm trying to help people find their path and that's just so inspiring.

RESHMA SAUJANI: You're ministering right now. You're ministering people, you know, at work. So that kind of leads me to my next question. You were the first Chief HR Officer at LinkedIn. You've built this amazing culture but you've never built a culture before. This is your first time. How did you do it? And for those who don't know, why is LinkedIn considered to have this incredible culture?

STEVE CADIGAN: You know, I don't know how many people who are attending or watching this have ever been in a place where you join a group and there is no culture. There is no shared sense of what the culture is. There's always a culture, whether you believe it or not, but there's no, hey, let's get together and say who are we and what are

we about. I thought that was going to be like an open goal shot. How hard can that be? Because I'd been in six different industries, I'd seen lots of things that I liked and I didn't like. I'm like, wow, I'm going to be able to build something. Except I'd never done it before and I didn't realize how challenging that was.

And it reminds me of a story, my first day on the job at LinkedIn, Reid Hoffman walks by. And this is a really interesting experience for me which really shaped my view of culture and building a culture. He walks by and I'm like, hey, Reid, it's me, Steve, you know, your new HR guy. It's my first day on the job. What's really important? Like tell me what should I focus on? And he says culture. And I said, okay, I got you, I've lived in South Africa, Asia, Canada, six different industries. I got your culture. And he looks at me with this look of disappointment and I'm like, oh, no, it's the first day and I'm going to get fired, like what did I say?

And he says, Steve, let me ask you something. What culture do you want? And no one had ever asked me that, Reshma. My entire 30, you know, 25 years going into LinkedIn, no one had ever asked me what kind of culture do you want? I was in a big organization, fine-tuning, adjusting, tweaking cultures that were there before me, and no one had ever asked me that. But before I could even think, the words just came out. I want a culture where people do their best work, where people feel inspired, where people have a life and they learn more than anywhere else they could work. And Reid

literally looks at me and goes, me too. He gets up and walks out of my office. And I thought, what is this, some kind of Yoda moment? Like what was that?

And so truly one of the benefits that I think I've learned over time working in smaller technology companies is when you're growing a company, it's easier to do that when you invite people to help you build a culture than it is to say this is it, read the tablets. And so I really struggled at first, honestly, this was really hard. But when Reid said what kind of culture do you want, and it gave me the trust when I said this is what I want. He goes, me too. And then when we would ask new hires what kind of culture do you want, it would almost always be the same thing. And as a classically trained North American HR person, you never ask employees what the culture is because all kinds of crazy could break out. And it didn't break it out. And so that was a really incredible experience.

But it's also hard because when we were building that company, I had Google refugees, Yahoo refugees, Adobe refugees, and what everyone came to the table with, Reshma, and I'm sure you've experienced this in one iteration or another, everyone came to me and said – and stop me if you've heard this before – I would say what kind of culture do you want? They would say I don't want that and I don't want that and I don't want that. No, what do you want? So people, I think, generally have a better read sometimes of what they don't want than what they do want and that's a reaction to some negative

experiences they may have had around career stifling or too much bureaucracy or things like that. So what I feel very fortunate to have had was a leadership team of co-executives, my peers, who were willing to try new stuff and learn.

RESHMA SAUJANI: As you talk, you know I spend a lot of my time with Girls Who Code, thinking about diversity, inclusion and how do you actually change culture, especially cultures that are often built without women and people of color. A question for you, if you had come to LinkedIn five years later when it wasn't a blank slate, or quite frankly, any company, can you change culture once it's baked?

STEVE CADIGAN: I think it's a lot harder. Yes, that's definitely my learning, and I've taken this in my portfolio of where I want to spend my time is I would much rather help build cultures than change cultures. It's so hard. You've got, you know, pattern recognition. Look, now we've got all these people saying we've got to go back to being in-person and they can't really articulate, well, why? Because we were more productive when we're at home, we're more engaged, we're more excited. Because that's all they know. And that is really hard.

And, you know, when I see so many of these executives saying, well, we have to do that. Yes, but that's kind of tone-deaf to the reality of what we just experienced. That, to me, is sort of emblematic of this challenge, which is it's really hard to change. Really,

really hard. And a lot of these big companies that I've worked with have built a paradigm that drives keeping people for a long time like out of a belief that the longer you stay, the more we trust you, the more you trust us, the more value you add, the more knowledge and muscle you have, the greater the impact.

But particularly in Europe where they have very strong employment agreements and protections of employees, if you were to ask, and I've asked multiple executives of some of the largest firms in Europe what's your biggest problem? We need to change and the cost of changing my staff is more prohibitive than I'd like it to be, so we can't, which is a real frustration for a lot of executives. But I think it's that, you know, someone once told me who are the hardest people to change? And they said it's the people who built what you're trying to change. That's always stuck with me.

RESHMA SAUJANI: So I want to get to *Workquake* because I thought, you start by basically talking about, you know, how you take some provocative positions and things are kind of counterintuitive. Right? Both of my parents worked at their companies probably like, it was probably their first or second job. They were there forever. And that was like the American dream. You work at one place and you work there forever. And so many companies, as you talk about this book, is that they built their strategies around how do you get people to stay. And you say that's wrong. Most people are going to have five to seven careers in their lifetime. What should companies be doing now?

STEVE CADIGAN: Yes and let me first say I'm not happy to be saying that companies should be having to appreciate and understand and acknowledge that talent is going to leave, but they have to. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, all the consulting firms that research talent, particularly in the United States where we have access to more really good data are showing the last ten years, the length of time people are staying in organizations is just coming down. It came down from five to four in the last six years. And for people 25 to 35, it's come down to 2.8 years, and that's the median. In Silicon Valley, we don't have a celebrate your ten years, we have a celebrate your ten months, like you're still here?

And so one of the things I'm trying to say is, listen, people are not leaving because they're disloyal, they're millennials with a short attention span, they have a career sugar high mentality shopping for promotions. I don't think that's what's going on. And that, by the way, is the first thing all the CEOs I talk to think, oh, this generation, disloyal. I say no. This generation sees more opportunity than you ever saw in your life. They can see what's possible. They have information on compensation, leadership, on culture, best practice. They know more and see more openings and possibilities than we could in the classified ad section or at some job fair that would happen once a quarter. So how can you begrudge them for acting on that information. You can't.

Plus we have an economy that's changing faster than ever. We have dozens of

unicorns out there with these billion-dollar valuations that don't even have a 20-year birthday on the horizon, and they're disrupting industries. So all these big companies that promise job security, let's take GE. GE has lost almost a trillion dollars in value in the last 20 years. Like what? And they didn't have a technology portfolio so they have slowly been deteriorating. That used to be the basis of every business book written in the 80s and 90s, was GE. And now that calls into question for talent today, so what is safe? What is a career?

And what I offer in *Workquake* is understand the psychology of the workforce if you're building an organization today. Safety to them means movement. The more I move, the more people I know, the bigger my network is, the more knowledge I have. That's power today. And so what I'm telling organizations is, you know, there's a bigger promise than taking care of someone when they work for you and that's the promise of I'll take care of you for your career. And that's called playing the long game. So my advice is I don't think any of us believe that the trend of people leaving faster is going to change. So let's accept that and build a business model and a talent strategy that accounts for people are going to leave.

Now I still want to keep my best people, don't get me wrong. But let's understand the shift, the psychological shift, let's understand the landscape they're seeing that we created, and maybe we should do things like have an alumni program so when people

do go, because in a world where the turnover is up, you have more people that used to work for you than at any time in history. Right? So why don't we curate that and nurture that.

And many of the organizations I work with, I have to help them because they have what I call the Tony Soprano School of HR Philosophy, which is you quit, you're dead to me. And that can't work. Right? It doesn't work. And so very few organizations, consulting is very good at this, have alumni letters, gatherings, hey, can you just give us a view of our new product and tell us what you think? Or we see that you're connected to someone that we want to have a deal with, can you make an introduction for us? Or would you come and talk to our employees about life after our company? I think that's lesson number one.

And lesson number two is in a world that is changing faster than ever, the lifetime value of a skill today is decreasing rapidly. So you're always going to need to be up-skilling and re-skilling and hiring new talent so I'm trying to tell employees the promise of making your people better for tomorrow is more valuable than the promise of a job long term. That's what people, I believe, want today. I think talent wants, just make me better for tomorrow. Don't promise me a job because if you do I'm not going to believe you. You can't control so many things in the universe right now. But you promise to make me better and make me more able to leave, I'm probably going to stay longer. And that is

the cognitive dissonance why it's hard for organizations to make that move.

And listen, Reshma, I was on the other side of the table where you would come to me and say, Steve, can you support, can you tuition reimburse me for my Masters, and I'd go, why would I do that because you're going to get it and you're going to leave. Well, now you're going to leave anyway. So maybe if I do that, you're going to stay longer. Right? And so that's sort of the, what I'm trying to suggest to organizations is first accept the new psychology of the workforce. Now this isn't everyone, this isn't every industry. Like if I'm putting someone on the moon, I don't want anyone leaving because lives are on the line. Right? But I need a new model.

And when the pandemic hit, holy smokes, now we're seeing the largest segment of the workforce today, hospitality, retail, restaurants, hotels, they're not going back. They are not going back. And this is not a stimulus check thing, this is not an unemployment, it's bigger because all the states that have cut that off are still not seeing a return. So that's why I'm saying there's a real shift that's been even accelerated because of the pandemic.

RESHMA SAUJANI: Talk to me about what Chipotle is doing different because they kind of get this, and you talk a little bit about that in your book.

STEVE CADIGAN: Yes, I'm so impressed by some of the things that Chipotle is doing. So here's what Chipotle does. So Chipotle first says we know we're not a career destination. We are a transition career option for someone. Maybe you're looking for that job as an actor or maybe you're going to school to better yourself to get a "real job." So what Chipotle says is we recognize that. We want you to pursue your dreams. That's the first thing they do. They're not playing to keep people forever. They've acknowledged and they're honest with themselves. That's what I call it enlightened leadership. They're honest about who they are as an employer.

The same is true for like a bank teller, for a barista, for so many other places, but those places still try to keep people forever. So they've said we're okay with that. We want you to be the best version of yourself so we're going to give you free tuition reimbursement. You only need, it's not like these companies that say you have to work here a year or two before we're going to do that, they say just work here for a couple of weeks and then we'll do full tuition reimbursement for you.

And they've partnered with universities to offer degrees. No student loan debt. None of that. And they've found, and this will be good as it plays up, because they've really turned the corner on this probably three years ago, when their turnover is just off the charts. I mean some of these fast-food restaurants, I don't about you but in Silicon Valley if you have over 10% turnover, it's like, ooh, that's not good. These restaurants

have 200, 300, 400% turnover, and so just minimizing that by making people better.

And that's part of what I say that Chipotle does so well is like we're going to make you better for tomorrow. And we hope that means we're going to have the better talent that's in that transition mode. Right? The better people are going to come to us because they know while they're here in that transition, instead of going to all the other fast-food places they could go, we're going to get the best people.

RESHMA SAUJANI: Another strategy you talk about that employers should be using is internal mobility. Talk to me about that and an example of where you feel like someone is doing this right.

STEVE CADIGAN: Yes, so we're starting to see, as the recognition is penetrating the talent strategies, that bigger organizations, let's take Comcast as one that I've done a little work with, Comcast is like can you help us think through how we solve this attrition. And I say, well, the first thing is does everyone in your company know every other job they could do in this company that could prepare them for their next, like that they could do without having to leave? So particularly if you have critical mass, if you're a large sized organization, you have a portfolio of opportunities that people could pursue without having to leave to go to another company. And so I think the level of awareness, and I wish I had a list of a lot of organizations, oh, Reshma, there's a bunch of people

killing it. There's not a lot that are killing it right now.

One organization that, beyond Comcast, that's doing some interesting things is Spotify. So again, it's technology. It's a little bit of a smaller organization than a Comcast but what Spotify says is we're going to force-move you every two years. Not everyone, but most people. And they have a business model where many rules can be learned, it's not like deep level of expertise that's required, because we believe that you're going to be more inspired and more motivated if you move.

And here's part of the rub where I said earlier that talented ACs, career strength, job securities movement, not being stationary, if any of you who are listening in ask yourself, when have you been the most excited in your career journey? When you've been doing the same thing two, three, four, five years? Or when you just took on something new? And the answer almost always is took on something new, a little bit scary, a little bit exciting. And that's part of your growth mindset that's kicking in where you say, ooh, a little bit scary. It's hard. It's new. But that's also unlocking energy, and the internal movement, and this is the play where organizations struggle because, well, they're not experienced. They don't have the right skills.

And when I left LinkedIn, as sort of a case study, if someone would say, Steve, can you consider this opportunity because it's a pre-IPO company. They need someone running

HR that understands how to prepare the company. I said, we did a world-class IPO and I had no experience on paper that would have suggested I could do that. So are you sure that's what you need? Right? Sometimes the fact that someone doesn't know something makes them hungrier to want to learn. And so this is, and again that gets back to your prior question which is what are some things that companies can do, is like become a company where people can learn more than somewhere else.

RESHMA SAUJANI: Yes, and to that point too, it's for a lot of people that's scary. Right? It's scary to be, I mean it's almost like saying, like as an employee you will thrive if you're a generalist, which is counterintuitive to kind of what we've been telling people, to become specialized for your job and not to build your career. So I'm an employee, right, I want to thrive in this new normal that you're describing to me. And, you know, part of it that you talk about in your book, is that means that you have to re-frame yourself to be an entrepreneur. What are the traits that you should be building to do that?

STEVE CADIGAN: I think, number one, you should always be looking at the market. Always. You should always be looking at where you can apply and learn new skills. Whether that's, not just work, like I'm talking volunteering, hobbies. As you know, having read the book, I list a number of great examples of where someone, through volunteering, opened up a bunch of different doorways, because there are infinite

possibilities.

And that's the great thing that LinkedIn and some of these other sites that are looking deep at the data of career arcs has revealed, that careers are not necessarily this, they're this. And not only is it more interesting, but it does go counter to what you said, which is the deeper expertise you go, the more security you have because you're owning that. And I believe, and it's highly unsatisfying and it's not welcome when I say it to a lot of people, I think you're making yourself more vulnerable if you're going narrow in an industry and in a job because things are changing.

And that's where I get to one of the most provocative parts of my book, which is I believe companies today are going to hire people going forward almost more on what they can learn than what they know. And if you ask all my recruiter friends out there in the world, you know, how long does the job description's accuracy really last, they'll say probably two months at the most. Because we all know things are going to change, you know. And this is why I was excited to talk to you because you're dealing with a huge demographic that's also facing, you know, a career frontier where all I know is that the future I'm going into is going to be very different than it is today. I know that. Right? So I'm preparing myself.

And so another thing that I tell the workforce is build your network. It's a cliché, but it's

really true that who you know today is almost as important – if not more – than what you know. And that doesn't mean go to these uncomfortable cocktail parties or business events where you don't know anyone. What that means is, you know, help people that you know and ask for help from people that you do know. And that's just going to serve you well over the course of your career because things are changing too fast.

RESHMA SAUJANI: Yes, it's also, the other point, I think about this often and both of us have similar backgrounds. Right? We were raised by parents who came to this country not knowing the language, not knowing the culture. They had to learn how to be really gritty and really resilient and really brave. I have two kids; I know you have kids. I often look at my children, I'm like I need to build resiliency in you. I need to build courage and toughen you up because you look at this generation and I don't know if they're prepared for the new frontier because they've been so protected and coddled. And what's why a lot of what we do at Girls Who Code is kind of build that bravery mindset, take people out of their comfort zone.

I just came back from a trip to Utah, and I entered my vacation feeling just exhausted and tired and just not very inspired or very entrepreneurial. But like two days of rest and I'm like rock climbing, paddleboarding, and I'm like, oh, I got my mojo back. And that's how you build also this learning. What are some, you talk about volunteering, but what are some also personal strategies that you can build, you know, to build that learning

mindset, to keep that bravery up, to keep that entrepreneurship up?

STEVE CADIGAN: Yes, I think the first thing is it's more of a psychological shift in what you pay attention to. One of the frustrations that I've always had is, you know, you need to have a learning mindset or you need to be a lifelong learner. I'm like what the heck does that mean? Like I'm tired of hearing that. That's like my mom telling me when I was in high school, you've got to get a job. I'm like why do I have to get a job? She was looking out for my welfare, but I was like...she was like if you don't get a job, you know, we're going to make you get a job in fast food. I'm like, whoa, I don't want that.

So I think some of the things, some of the practical things that I think people can do is be a student, be curious. This is why I feel really fortunate. You know I was a history major but that really doesn't tell the story. The story is a liberal arts degree challenged me to think critically, to be able to express myself. I think as you hinted at a minute ago, I have three boys, and I'm a blended family and I have two new girls. I got remarried four years ago, and the biggest challenge that I wanted to take on as a parent of these five kids is the ability to communicate. And that's not just be articulate, that's listen, that's read body language, that's understand, like someone is saying this but what do they really mean? And how many times that you, as the leader, someone brings you a problem and what they state really isn't the problem. It's trying to be able to root that out. And so that's one thing.

The other thing is, and back to this sort of networking thing, we're really in an era of too much information. So how do you survive in a world where we have not enough time to consume everything that we have. Right? And so I think that is knowing people who can distill that, knowing people who can help give you a head start. You're sort of like the – what's that thing we had back before the internet – the crib notes, sort of like crib notes to whatever it is that you're trying to get to. And then be thoughtful. You know, I say in the book, looking for other career options while you're employed isn't a disloyal thing. It's actually really important for you and your family to just always be out there looking, sensing, seeing what's going on and how you might be able to apply your abilities.

RESHMA SAUJANI: So you wrote this book before Covid and then Covid happens. So, one, what did the pandemic reveal to you about what wasn't working and maybe what was working?

STEVE CADIGAN: Well, first I had a panic attack when Covid happened because I'm like I just spent a year writing this book and now it's going to be worth nothing because I don't know what the future is. And then I woke up after four or five sleepless nights and I told my wife, you know what, I actually think this holds up, and in fact, it's even more important.

But I think what Covid's revealed to me is really, I mean I talked about agility. You talked

earlier about adaptability and grit. I mean every consulting firm out there has said what are the most important skills CEOs look for today. Agility, adaptability. And what the pandemic has really revealed to me is like we're, as humans, are going through a crash course in adaptability in every dimension of our life right now. So that's a good thing, I think. It doesn't feel good. It's not what we wanted. Home and work, I called it a hostile takeover by the pandemic, so that merger happened. And we've always talked about how can we merge those two or how do we balance those? There's no balance anymore. It's all together and we're all in each other's homes.

But that's how sort of I thought about the pandemic. I said, wow, I really need to get this out there because I'm trying to deliver it in a way that's not intimidating. And one of the real motivations for me to get this out there, particularly during the pandemic, is, you know, going into the pandemic, talking about what the future of work was, robots are coming, AI, run for the hills, there's no way your job is going to exist in the future. You don't know what it is. You can't learn the skills fast enough. We're all going to be replaced. And I thought that was highly, highly, you know, de-motivational. I'm like, no, the other side of that story is, yes, technology is coming but being human has never been more important.

And so what are those skills, back to your earlier question? Those skills are human traits – empathy, communication, caring, leadership, listening, a lot of those dimensions

that technology is never going to replace. Those are where if you want to be vital for the future, that's where you need to be investing your skills. And I think about my kids, like, hey, let's put down the devices and, you know, and a secret for a lot of you parents, you want to do that, just accidentally say, oh, the internet is down for tonight. Oh, maybe we should get a board game out or something. Right?

Because I do think those unscripted conversations, and this is part of what I worry about with the pandemic a little bit, is working from home, are we, how do we replace those informal moments where someone's guard is down and they tell you something from the heart. Because most of our interactions are planned now and it's on a screen and we don't have that energy that we have being in the presence of another person in the same way. Now there's a lot of potential upsides that we can talk about separately, but that's one of the things that I think the pandemic made me feel very nervous about was if we believe that innovation comes from trust and connectedness, do we feel this reality is delivering that enough to replace maybe what we had or how we did it? Right? So it's a big learning.

RESHMA SAUJANI: I mean one of the things I wanted to get your take on too, though, is in the beginning we started this conversation by saying when a culture is baked, it's hard to change it. And you have that quote, right, of never waste a good crisis. Right? But for a lot of companies now that are legacy organizations, they get a second bite at

the apple. You know they get to rebuild their culture and attract talent that maybe they couldn't have but it doesn't feel, like when I look at the landscape, that people are recognizing that opportunity to do that. They're kind of resistant to change and they're just saying, look, let's go back to doing what we were doing before even though it really wasn't working for them. What's going on?

STEVE CADIGAN: Yes, so I call that sort of the human nature knee-jerk reaction. As humans, we are fight or flight. When we're afraid, we're going to revert to what we know. That feels safer. And when you think about it, every dimension of our life felt unsafe. And this is one of the truths of business today, which is why I'm trying to help business leaders understand why people are moving, because talent sees less into the future predictably. You, as a business, have less assurance of what's going to happen in the future than at any point in history. So let's try to recognize that and try to build sort of safety in a different kind of conversation.

So what I think a lot of businesses are doing is they're coming, I'll give you an example. I was talking to a major, major European-based multinational. And I won't give away their name but they make a lot of hot chocolate. So they're saying, Steve, tell us what the future is. Should it be at home? Should it be hybrid? Should it be all, you know, back to the office? And I said, well, I can't answer that question for you because I don't know how you create value. And I said, I do know what the future is. The future is

experimentation right now. You need to experiment. You need to try new things in different departments. You need to get more feedback. You need to create greater cycles of A-B testing and see what works and what doesn't work.

And they're like, no, no, no, tell us the answer. I said, I am telling you the answer. And that felt really uncomfortable for them. And I was like I know what you're fighting right now. You're fighting the resistance of I need to be in control. I need to be the leader that knows everything. And I said, first off, leaders that admit they don't know everything tend to get more loyalty than leaders that think they and say they know everything. So appreciate some humility is going to buy you some loyalty and some trust, but we're in uncharted territories. And even as we're going into this session today, we're not on firm ground. You know, what is the Delta going to present?

You know, we've got a teacher's union here in California that's very powerful and I have yet to see something from the school district. They've said, oh, we're going to, but I haven't seen like we're really going to do it. And that, you know, the education for many workers who have kids, that's a big deal. Really big deal.

And that gets to what, I love how you framed this, Reshma, which is we have the greatest opportunity of our lifetime today to rebuild something better, whether it's diversity, whether it's inclusion. The challenge for many organizations is diversity and

inclusion used to be hot on the talent agenda and now wellness has sort of like come right above it, like burnout and fear and turnover is up everywhere. And so, you know, you're trying to fight all these fires at once and it's really disconcerting.

So I have a lot of grace for organizations that are struggling and I'm trying to say, you know, some of the reasons technology companies are thriving – and there's a lot wrong with Silicon Valley, so I'm not here to say it's all roses – but one of the reasons technology companies are thriving is because they built cultures of change, to your point earlier.

Most unicorns are not in the business they set out to be in. So they've learned in a very short period of time, pivot, adjust, learn, react, try something new, learn, adjust, pivot, react. So organizations that are not used to that are really having a hard time. And I think the more you can build some of that muscle memory, maybe in a department, don't try to change the whole thing at once, it's hopefully going to help give you confidence that you have the ability to do that better.

RESHMA SAUJANI: I like what you said, though, about testing and shifting. And, you know, as much as, it is true. Right? I can't imagine starting a job today and then being able to build an emotional connection with your colleagues over Zoom. But then again, you know, I didn't think that one could date online and, you know, that seems to be

working out well for a lot of folks.

So part of it is just, it's the shift, which, you know, ending with, you are TikTok famous, which is pretty cool. And you're into that platform, we were just talking about your book, and this is going to be one of the platforms that you use to really promote that. Tell us, how did that happen? Why do you love this platform? And are you doing dances? Are you singing? What's up?

STEVE CADIGAN: It's a fun story. A year ago, this past June a year ago, several students from George Washington University reached out to me and said we'd love to build out your profile on TikTok. We've seen some of your YouTubes, which were really shoddily done. My kids joked, Dad, you've got six followers on YouTube, you're a loser.

So I said, do you really think teenage lip-syncers and dancers are going to resonate with my message? And they said, oh, yes, we really like it. So they helped me, put the training wheels on. They helped me put some pieces together. We took some old speeches that I've got, repurposed them in TikTok-y way and they didn't do very well. And then I started getting on there. You just basically put your phone up and you say what's on your mind. And pretty soon, like today I think we hit almost 121,000 followers and closing in on a million Likes. And I was like, what?

And then every day what happens now, Reshma, is I get five to ten people on LinkedIn saying I saw your TikTok video, love what you're doing, I want to connect with you here. So I never in a million years thought I'd strut around my house with my teenagers going, that's right, Daddy's a TikTok master. Never thought that would happen. And my kids are saying, Dad, my friend saw your TikTok Live. They really liked it. I was like, what? And so it's made me relevant with the teen generation over here again. But it's been fun. But seriously, you know, it's a huge ocean that's brand new and it's been really fun to explore.

RESHMA SAUJANI: No, you definitely have cool Dad energy, so I can see it. I can see it. Well, good luck with the book. I loved it. I loved it and I learned so much and I'm sending it to my team at Girls Who Code because I think there's a lot that made me just shift my thinking and a lot that then just resonated.

STEVE CADIGAN: Thank you so much, Reshma. Thank you so much.

PRESIDENT BARBARA VAN ALLEN: Well, Reshma, Steve, fantastic conversation. Thank you. Just full of insights and very timely for all of us. So thank you so much. We really appreciate it. This was the last of our events for the summer, and we're happy to announce, though, that we've already started confirming events for the fall. And we've just put up on the screen the first two hybrid events for September because we are, at

this point, planning an in-person and virtual element for both of these. September 13th, Hans Vestberg, the Chairman and CEO of Verizon. He will speak on the future of telecommunications. And then our Chair, John Williams, who is also the President and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, will be speaking on the 27th. And he will be speaking to the U.S. economic outlook. So again, thank you everyone for joining us today. Please stay healthy and safe. And again, Steve, Reshma, thank you so much.