

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to *Work in Progress*. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor in chief of WorkingNation. *Work in Progress* explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Joining me today is Josh Davies, the CEO of the Center for Work Ethic Development. Josh, thank you very much for joining me.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Absolutely. It's my pleasure, Ramona. Thank you for having me on your podcast.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I got to see you give this presentation that I really felt kind of set the stage for where we're at now and where we're headed in terms of our workforce economy. So, why don't we just start with your assessment on what is happening right now? What is happening with our workers?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Yeah, kind of where are we and what's going on? Well, this is a topic that I've been paying some attention to and doing research around for almost three years now. At the Center for Work Ethic Development, we get a chance to work with folks who are doing workforce development work. Whether or not that's in secondary education, post-secondary, government workforce, nonprofit community-based organizations, kind of anyone and everywhere.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

So, I get a chance to see what's happening out there, what's working and sadly what's not working. The patterns and the places that we've been stuck in, because we thought it used to work, and maybe it did, but it isn't today. That opened my eyes to really taking a look, not just at the challenges of the present, but also where the winds are headed. So, I've been doing a lot of work digging into that.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Let me tell you, 2020 was an opportunity to both validate that and to really look at where we're going. 2020's a year that many people are talking about. I hear this term a lot, where it's unprecedented, right? This year is unprecedented, there's so much stuff. Actually when you look at it, it's not that it's unprecedented, it's really just that it's accelerating trends that were already in place and moving the timeline significantly up. That's going to be a challenge for those of us who are trying to really prepare an equitable and effective workforce for the future.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So, how have we redefined employment? What does employment look like in 2020 looking ahead to 2021?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Yeah, well, that's a great question in terms of where we're headed. You look at a whole host of trends, some different things that have been happening, again, growing speed over the last several years. First and foremost, of course, there's this idea of the impact of technology, artificial intelligence and automation and the impact that's going to have on the workforce in the particular parts of the workforce we hadn't seen before.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

On top of that, you've got challenges, because we have an increased conductivity in global connection that have been highlighted by this whole work from home environment and how that's going to change the nature of workforce. There's a challenge with diversity, equity and inclusion, that we've really just blown open the chasm as we've seen. I think that's probably going to be one of the biggest challenges for us moving forward.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

You look at the job losses that have happened this year, and it's November right now when we're recording this. We've still probably got about 11 million people who were employed at the beginning of the year, who aren't, but they're not evenly distributed. It's a heavy impact on low wage workers, those folks with less education, and in particular, we've seen a huge impact as it goes to racial equality in the workforce. We see blacks and Hispanics significantly negatively impacted, but really, I think one of the biggest challenges is going to be women.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

When you look at who's been re-employed in the workforce and where those people are coming back, it's heavily male and it's heavily white male. I think one of the biggest challenges we're going to have to figure out as we move into 2021 in whatever quasi post-pandemic world we're in is how do we get women back into the workforce? How do we really become as intentional about bringing them in, and what do we need to do around what are the issues that cause women to get out of the workforce?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Whether or not that's childcare, whether or not that's education, whether or not that's just a need for only one person in the family to be out and about. Whatever it is, we have to tackle that and really look at that from a real equity issue as much as we look at how do we re-skill and re-train low skilled workers in jobs that just aren't coming back.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I think this is the problem that we're all trying to face, and I think it's going to take a lot of us working together. You were at the Pasadena City College Future of Work Conference and you spoke to the group there and one of the emphasis' was on let's collaborate, let's make education it's business, but it's people themselves I think. They have to figure out where are the programs that can help them upskill? I think there's some level of everybody in this together.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Yeah, there's no one solution, Ramona. I think you're right on the head on that, right? As much as I'm a huge proponent of the work that's being done in the community college community, just aren't enough resources there. What are we doing from an employee base? There's great organizations out there, the

Amazon's of the world who are really investing in upskilling their workers, but that alone isn't going to do it. What else are we doing to bring in non-traditional job training partners? How are we getting people the ability to do this?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

I mean, we can talk about free college all we want to, but if you don't pay for childcare, if we don't take care of transportation, if we don't deal with how do we continue to earn money while we're doing it, if we don't conquer those barriers, it really doesn't matter. So really I agree with you, it's got to be a holistic approach of bringing in all sorts of different partners together in order to find a solution.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You mentioned women losing work and not being able to go back into the workforce, but when people start looking at where they're going to go, what kind of skills do they need to find jobs now and in the future?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Again, it's the skills mismatch, that's the challenge. This, again, is not something that's new to 2020 or 2021, this skills mismatch has been part of our economy for a while. But unfortunately with low unemployment, we have been sort of hiding the challenge of what we have. The reality is that the jobs that people are losing today, aren't coming back. The University of Chicago estimates that 42% of the jobs lost in 2020 will be permanently eliminated.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

You look at earlier recessions, what happened, right, people would lose their job and then they would, once the economy turned, they'd get another job in that industry or in that field. The reality is, that's just not going to happen this time, because things are going to be permanently different. So, what are the skills and what do they need?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Part of the challenge with that, Ramona, that I find is we have not done a good job of identifying, measuring, developing, quantifying these non-traditional, you can call them soft skills, people skills, but the skills that are transferrable job to job that will help people get into new careers and new industries.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

We have to figure out how to do that, because you look at what's going to be across the board, the skills of the future, they tend to be non-industry specific, right? It's critical thinking, it's problem solving, it's creativity. It's the ability to work with diverse people, it's writing, it's communication. Those kinds of skills are integral to success, but we just have done a really poor job of identifying, developing, credentialing anything that doesn't fit into a nice little job box.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

How does education make sure that those critical skills, those cognitive skills are part of the curriculum?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Well, I don't think it's that they weren't ever part of the curriculum before, but they weren't being intentionally developed. You look at a lot of soft skills and they're sort of a residual, right? They're things that we develop along the outskirts of the content that we've been developing in the past. So it's not that the methods aren't there, but what we have to do is switch and become more intentional about developing them. That starts by defining what they are.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

So for often with these skills, it's like the old, one of those definitions, I know it when I see it, but we don't do a very good job of being concrete about what the skill looks like, how you demonstrate it, what you can get achieve, what the different levels of that skill are. We have to do that first, and the good news from an academic perspective, that's what we do well, but we have to turn where we've been before, where it's focused more on academic and technical and turn that lens now to more of these foundational workplace soft skills.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Businesses need to take that into account when they're looking at someone. Maybe they don't have the hard skills that they need, they can't program a computer, but if they have the soft skills, this person is worth looking at as an employee. How do we telegraph that to the employer? How do you show those skills to someone?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Yeah, well, it starts with the first mindset from an employer. Well, it's not even just an employer, right, it's the mindset shift for everyone to be looking at somebody from a skills perspective, as opposed to more traditional "old school approach," where it's purely about degree and experience. If you look at traditional job postings, no one's really looking for skills for the most part, it's almost always, "Hey, you need to have this degree, you need to have this many years of experience. You need to be able to operate this machine," or whatever it is, "code this language."

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

We have to get employers to understand that there's a set of skills beneath those, and there's a lot of organizations out there. I'm a big fan of Skillful and the work that they're doing, but we have to help employers understand the value there, because if not, they're just going to keep doing things the way they are. HR professionals have been trained for years to do the same approach. We've created computer algorithms to help us weed through massive amounts of resumes to find keywords and look for different things, we have to re-shift all that. It doesn't happen overnight, but it starts with understanding the value that brings, and that has to be the first step.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

One of the things you pointed out in your presentation is the value of apprenticeships. Because if you get those people in who have those good cognitive skills and you bring them in and you show them how to do the job you need done, there's endless value in that.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

It's such a great pathway. Apprenticeships around the world have been used for decades as a way to help train people in all sorts of different jobs. In America, it's been widely used, but only pretty much in

the construction trades and manufacturing. But getting an opportunity to do an earn and learn model, where, yeah, we could bring people in because they have solid soft skills, they have these foundational skills and then give them the opportunity to earn and learn, that will set us up for success.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

There's models that are out there that work. There are companies that are doing it, there are educational institutions that are doing it, but it's happening at such a small scale. It's really difficult right now to get the numbers that we need, but what we have to do is just overall look back at work-based learning and figure out how we can partner together to make that happen.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

That's really, I think, a place where community colleges can play a huge role, right? We've already got advisory boards that have employer partners on them, so every single community college for every one of their technical programs has a group of employers. How do we turn that from a traditional where we're obligated to have a meeting once a year, or you support this, to truly figuring out how we partner together?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

The LA Community College system has been doing a good job of that to reaching out and figuring out what employers need. We've got to do that, not just to develop curricula, but then also to figure out how we can build more of these earn and learn apprenticeships that combine the best of both worlds.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Do you see any resistance from business to doing that? I actually thought what you said that it was just on such a small scale was something I hadn't really thought about much, because I am familiar with those trade programs that are working really well, manufacturing programs that are working really well, even computer programs, such as the one you mentioned, Amazon. What's this resistance? Where's the roadblock?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Well, I think there are a lot, and that's the problem. First and foremost is that apprenticeship isn't seen as something that you do outside of these construction trades. I think that's this mindset, oh, apprenticeship, oh, that's great. Put on your hard hat, get your little welding kit out and let's do this. As opposed to, hey, here's an apprenticeship in graphic design or here's an apprenticeship in coding. I think that's part of it, is to see that apprenticeship can work in different places.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

I think unfortunately apprenticeship has been tied very closely to the labor movement, for better or worse, and a lot of businesses are reticent to think even about doing an apprenticeship, because in their mind that means, "Oh, we're going to have to deal with unions, we're going to have to deal with that." Again, I'm not here to say pro or con to labor unions, that's a real barrier. A lot of companies just don't want to do it, because that's the perception of what is going to happen if they get to do an apprenticeship.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Another barrier is, quite frankly, most businesses aren't set up for this. They've got their business model and they've got entry-level people, they've got supervisors, they've got whatever their system is. Again, the HR systems aren't designed to create this new category, and that's really a problem, especially for a lot of legacy businesses who just can't turn on a dime.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Is there a model for adults, older workers to become lifelong learners that you've seen that you think is something that should be replicated?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

I think there are several good organizations out there that are pushing it, what's now called opportunity nation. It's a big push for seniors to continue to do some work. But again, you talk about this mental barrier, these challenges, these assumptions that we have. We for many years have lived in this one and done world where you go to school, you get your degree, you enter the workforce and you're done with education, or maybe you'll go back and get an advanced degree. But you're not going to go back and get a new certificate or develop this new piece along the way, so we have to find some to help make that make more sense to people and make it more accessible.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

When you look at education, one of the big problems we have in our mind, right, you have to go back to school full-time and do two years and do this, and it's this huge commitment. How do we start creating things in more smaller chunks? How do we create more opportunities for micro learning, where we can still do some sort of a credential or a badge where people can feel like they're getting something, and it is stackable so that it builds towards something so that people don't have to do things all at once? Because if we have to do that, the vast majority of people will not be able to really embrace this idea of lifelong learning, because it's just going to be something that seems completely out of their reach.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

One of the things that COVID has laid bare is this inequity that exists in the workforce and in education that people with lower income may have barriers to learning some of the skills that they need, some of the hard skills they need to get into the workforce. What are you seeing out there when people are addressing this? Because you've worked with a lot of workforce development programs.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Yeah, and there are programs around the states that are helping that, whether or not that's getting computers in the hands of folks who don't have them. Wi-Fi and connectivity is going to be the big issue moving forward. I don't care where you are, if it's urban, if it's rural, people who do not have reliable high-speed internet access are going to be left behind, and we have to be intentional about developing networks in order to make that happen.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

It's all well and good that we're getting a laptop to a family that doesn't have a computer access at their home, but if they don't have Wi-Fi, it's probably not going to help. Or if they've got two parents who now have to be at home with three kids who are going to school remotely, how does one computer meet the needs of a family of five, right?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

If we don't address those issues, and again, like you said, Ramona, the problem is it's the rich getting richer and the poor getting poor, right? This gap. Because who doesn't have access to this tends to be people who are poor, who are less educated who tend to traditionally be higher in racial minorities, and that's not helpful for anyone. Because if we continue to create this divide, all we're going to do is create more and more long-term systemic issues that are going to be harder and harder to deal with down the road.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

If a job seeker is soliciting out there, what advice do you give them for finding work, finding a path to a good career in 2021?

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

I think one of the important things to keep in mind is obviously digital literacy's going to be a critical skill. It doesn't matter what field you're in, you're going to need to have it. This is really one of the things that I found interesting about this whole work from home movement that we had this year and that organizations weren't ready for it originally, one of the things I looked at was that in 2018, it was estimated that 60% of the American workforce lacked basic digital literacy skills.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

These are people who are holding down jobs, right? We're not talking about ten-year-olds, these are adults in America who don't have these basic skills, and we have to develop them, we have to get those first. That's going to be the currency of the future, you have to be able to do those. That'll be step one, you have to get that.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Step two would be figure out in your kind of framework, what's doable. Do you have the opportunity to do a six month training program? Do you need to do something immediately where it has to be an earn and learn model? Do you have an opportunity to do something part-time on the side while you're working somewhere else? Figure that part out. You have to have that picture in mind so that you can figure out where you want to go.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Once you develop that, one of the advantages of 2020 is it's proved you don't have to be geographically located anymore. Once you figure that part out, in terms of where you want to get skills training, in terms of where you want to try and find employment, it doesn't have to be at your back door anymore. There's a lot of opportunities where people can work remotely if you have those other skills, and they will be able to hire you no matter where you are. So, kind of get out of the mindset that it has to be something in your backyard.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

So, those would really be the first three steps I would look at to figure out where ... get yourself your base, figure out where it is that you want to go and then figure out from there what the resources are available. Whether or not that's additional training and education or whether or not that's immediately into some sort of employment.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Josh, thank you so much. That's really sound advice, and I really appreciate you joining us on *Work in Progress*.

Josh Davies, Center for Work Ethic Development CEO:

Hey, absolutely. It's my pleasure, Ramona. I'm a huge fan of the work that you do and the team, trying to figure out how we can help really develop the workforce that works for America. I think that's really the key for all of us, and like you said, it's a holistic approach, we've got to do this together.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I've been speaking with Josh Davies, CEO of the Center for Work Ethic Development. This is *Work in Progress*. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor in chief of WorkingNation. Thank you for listening.