



Zebra Your Edge Podcast

Hosts:

- **Therese Van Ryne, Senior Director, External Communications, Zebra**

Guest:

- **Jeff Schmitz, Chief People Officer, Zebra**

Transcript

00:00:00:00 - 00:00:30:20

Therese

Hello and welcome to our Your Edge podcast. I'm Therese Van Ryne. If we've learned anything as humans these last few years, it's that we must find - or in many cases create - new ways of working. We're all under pressure to do more each day without sacrificing the quality of our output or compromising on customer service standards. Even as technology tools become more prolific, people will remain central to every business operation.

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Therese

Our actions will dictate outcomes. That's why we all must start doing more to support one another and tap into the skills and creativity each person on our team can bring to the table. Whether we're trying to get more done alongside our colleagues, customers or partners, we all must figure out how to work better together. At Zebra, while we're focused on delivering technology tools that enable you and your team to work in new ways, we're also thinking about how we can work in new ways ourselves.

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Therese

We want to be responsive when your needs change and ensure our team is available when you need support. That's why we focus on creating processes and systems that support team agility. We are always trying to think and act customer-first, lead through innovation, succeed as one, and ultimately make a positive impact on your business and our communities. Of course, technology can help enable that, whether it's within our organization or yours.

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Therese

However, technology is only part of the equation. As my colleagues have said before, business success is defined by people's commitment to customer satisfaction. Since every organization and every worker in every industry has to find new ways to work right now, I thought it might be helpful to tap the brain of someone who is helping Zebra's employees adapt to new ways of working while we work to deliver technology that helps your team work in new ways.

00:01:55:29 - 00:02:14:19

Therese

Jeff Schmitz, who is our Chief People Officer at Zebra, has personally undergone several metamorphoses throughout his career. He understands the experiences people go through when they have to change how they work. Welcome to our podcast, Jeff. Would you agree with those statements I just made?

00:02:14:22 - 00:02:38:09

Jeff

Well, thanks for having me, Therese, and absolutely. And I think if there's anything that defines my career, I like to call it "non-linear." And there's definitely some things I've learned from that as I think about starting as a software engineer and moving into product management, eventually general management, running a p&l, being a chief marketing officer, and now a chief people officer.

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Jeff

There's really three things that, as I've thought about my career, that's really allowed me to make some of these kind of metamorphoses, as you stated. One is a simple one, which is just hard work. The people I see who are successful always have a hard work ethic, and they're really focused on working hard. It's hard to really make those kind of changes without that component.

00:03:02:20 - 00:03:25:19

Jeff

The second one is being positive. I think whenever you can kind of bring positivity to a situation, you are more resilient and I think it's really an important mindset to have. And lastly, I think that the thing that's most important and probably fueled the biggest change in my career was when I was writing software. How did I go from writing software to going into a product management and marketing role?

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Jeff

And I think that the attribute that helped me the most is just a natural curiosity that I had. And. And oftentimes when we talk about curiosity inside Zebra, we talk about our culture of being curious and being non-judgmental and trying to understand what people are saying before we respond. But this curiosity has more to do with being curious about what drives the business.

00:03:46:17 - 00:04:13:24

Jeff

So when I was an engineer writing software, I just got interested in: What was the product I was working on? Who were we competing with? Why did we win when we won? Why did we lose when we lost? And it's that curiosity about the business that I think everyone in any situation, any place and position in the company, can benefit from. It's that curiosity that actually helped me move from a purely engineering role into more of a business role.

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Therese

Fantastic. That's great advice. You have also spent many years studying both the role of technology in frontline work and best practices for change management. When people must change their habits, their behaviors, to accommodate shifting market demands. I'm sure there are many times when the way people must work and the way they want to work don't quite jive. Would you agree, Jeff?

00:04:35:00 - 00:04:57:11

Jeff

Yeah, I would say for sure. I mean, I always think about a manager's job and it's been described a number of ways to me that I have in my mind. One is balancing the needs of the organization versus the needs of the individual and others. But the hardest thing any manager and any leader needs to take on is: how do you how do you drive behavior change and habit change?

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Jeff

And we know this is hard, right? I mean, people try to lose weight or stop smoking. Habits are really, really hard for people to change. And so I think when we think about frontline workers, kind of our users of our technology, you know, one of the things that's really advantageous is Zebra provides technology that can help people make the kind of changes that you might want to make in a business.

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Jeff

And, you know, the tools can be an important part of reinforcing habit change and driving change management and help people work in new ways, in ways that are more effective and achieve higher-level customer success. And at the same time, that technology can enhance actually the employee satisfaction. And so the person, while they're changing their habits, getting different results, also creating an experience that's better not just for the end customer they're serving, but also for them.

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Therese

We know that any time there's a forced change in how we must work, there's going to be some resistance. We're creatures of habit, like you said. But I would imagine that if any organization has a strong, supportive culture, people may be more receptive to the reasons why the change must occur and it becomes easier to meet the end objective.

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Therese

Do you agree?

00:06:12:05 - 00:06:34:00

Jeff

Absolutely. Hey Therese, I think the first thing is when you ask somebody to change, and I think you said it in the question, the first thing people want to understand is: "Hey, help me understand why. Why are we changing? What is the outcome you're looking for?" Not just tell me the change. And I think that's always foundational to get a change in habit really taken up.

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Jeff

I think the second one is culture. I think culture is such a strong force in any company. And, you know, one of my favorite quotes is from Peter Drucker. You know, "culture eats strategy for breakfast." You can have all the plans that you want, but if the culture

doesn't support the change that you're looking for, it's going to be really challenging for you to make those kinds of changes.

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Jeff

So, you know, given the environment we are currently living in, we seem to have a lot of continuous and unexpected changes and disruptions in all of our businesses that we've seen over the last few years. Embedding that concept of agility, a willingness to try new things and have that be built into your culture, not just words on the wall, but something that people feel they could really take some risks, try some new things and expect it to be agile, can really be an important and essential component in driving any change in habit or any change in behavior.

00:07:32:23 - 00:07:42:12

Therese

So in other words, organizations that prioritize culture equally with productivity and output experience better business outcomes. For sure.

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Jeff

We've seen study after study. I saw a recent one from McKinsey that I read that showed a direct correlation, as many studies do, between culture and business performance. And in their study, what they showed is people who had a strong positive culture - those in the top quartile - had two extra shareholder performance as those in the bottom quartile.

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Jeff

And again, there's many studies that show this. There's a direct correlation between culture and performance. And I think it's that connection that led - kind of some of the history of Zebra that I think people can learn from is when - Zebra, as a former printing/barcode-printing company in 2014, bought a big business carve-out of Motorola that was two and a half times its size. Andre, our then CEO recognized...

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Jeff

and I think it was the most important decision of his career in my opinion ... was he recognized that the culture needed to change. A company that was one billion in revenue didn't have nearly the culture of a two and a half billion dollar part of Motorola. It was part of a much bigger organization. So it was really important that we defined a new culture.

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Jeff

And I think that decision by Anders was key for the last eight or nine years of Zebra's success. That was absolutely a critical component. Last year, when Bill Burns, our current CEO, took over, he also reinforced the importance of culture and said, "This is one of my top three priorities...to really bring our culture to life."

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Jeff

And what that led us to, Therese, is saying: How do we relook at our strong culture and add components to it and make it even stronger than it is today? And that drove us to actually create a purpose, a very pointed purpose, and a new set of really inspiring values that are foundational to our culture so that we rally around those values and that purpose and bring those to life is key to that culture.

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Jeff

And I'll mention and say it out loud what our purpose is: "Together we create new ways of working." And that's kind of a theme of this podcast a little bit. So how do we create new ways to work that make everyday life better for our organizations, their employees, and those they serve? And I'll break that down just a little bit for you, for the Zebras.

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Jeff

Well, you know that we often sit in the hands of frontline workers scanning, printing, mobile computing being our core, but we're also investing in new things like retail software, robotics, machine vision. And those new technologies will both augment the way work is happening today, but they'll also transform the way work is done, whether that's in retail, whether that's in a manufacturing environment or in a warehouse.

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Jeff

So that "create new ways of working" is really a rallying point. It's also important that our customers and our employees are core. So thinking about the organizations who buy our equipment, that's critical. The employees of that company and enhancing their experience and ultimately the end user and those they serve. And we do that in everyday life, in retail, manufacturing, healthcare, etc..

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Jeff

And we are involved in so many transactions where an end user is interacting with a company associate, a retail associate or a health care worker. And in those little transactions, making those better in everyday life really makes a difference. And I think you

also mentioned earlier the five new values. We used to have kind of one word attributes of values, and we've added a lot to that.

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Jeff

And this idea of how do we lead to innovation? It's our lifeblood, innovation, as a tech company. And how do we deliver excellence with agility? And here you see that idea of agility being built: in the ability to try new things, to be agile. To try new things is an important to be not just, again, something on the wall, but something we bring into the culture.

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Jeff

We act on putting the customer at the center, think and act customer first. Succeed as one. How do we work as a team, right? How do we work as a team? Both includes and our partners to serve our customers. How do we work not just inside our own group, but between groups? Really important. And then ultimately, how do we make a positive impact in the communities that we serve?

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Jeff

So I think those new values really are kind of inspirational in their core to how we treat each other and our culture.

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Therese

Jeff, thank you for walking us through the new purpose and updated values. They're absolutely incredible. I'm curious, why was it important for your team to look at this and make these changes? Does it really change how we work or how we help our customers work in new ways?

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Jeff

Yeah, for a culture to have any impact at all. And one of my favorite definitions of culture is "it's how we get things done around here." And so the only way culture works is if it actually does impact the way you work and the way you work both with your internal employees work together, or how your employees work with your partners or your customers, it has to do all of those things.

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Jeff

And so when we first rolled out our culture to everyone in the, you know, post acquisition days 2015-16, we were able to fly everyone in and have a two-day session and get everyone aligned to what the culture elements were and our values and really practice putting them into action. And I think that was really, really helpful.

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Jeff

But, you know, if you think about that process started eight or nine years ago. And in subsequent to that, a lot of things have changed, right? We've onboarded a lot of employees during the pandemic when we were all at home. We weren't able to engage some of those newer employees in the culture. Some of the culture, you know, is hard to maintain when everybody is virtual and living in a 2D world.

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Jeff

And in back in the day, the office was the place to really experience the culture and practice the culture. And that got a little bit harder. And now that we're starting to live more in a hybrid world and we've had a change in CEO, they also values culture. It seemed like the perfect time to really tune up our purpose and our values and put them back into action.

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Jeff

And the way we're going to do that is by...we've introduced it to the team. We want to make sure people understand it, and we're going to reinforce it in our upcoming leadership summit. We are going to have a virtual platform that helps people and teams engage with that. We're embedding it in our new higher training.

00:14:08:13 - 00:14:27:16

Jeff

We're going have ongoing culture champions and insights to bring it to life, because that's the important part. It's not words, as I've said before, it's about putting into action. The culture ultimately is - whether you're helping design or create it or it's happening - it is how you get things done and how you treat people.

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Therese

So absolutely. I'm curious, Jeff, when you started talking to employees, partners and customers to see how they feel about Zebra and what they expect from the company, was there any feedback you found surprising or was it what you expected?

00:14:42:01 - 00:15:16:04

Jeff

Yeah, I think we got a lot of great feedback about our culture. It's something that we've invested so much in that I think people see that culture coming through and we got that really good feedback from customers, partners, employees. However, I would say that the most important thing if you're going to kind of engage in a culture program and you're going to define that through your values

and your purpose, etc....once you decide you're going to define your culture, the most important thing is actually to make sure you are engaging those folks so that when you build it in, you build those values.

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Jeff

It's something that people feel connected to and they had some influence, too, because then when you go to roll it out, you'll have a lot more support. So the actual active listening, may be even more important or as important as some of the feedback that you get.

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Therese

Very true. How do you envision our purpose and values influencing the way we work as a company or with our customers and partners going forward?

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Jeff

Yeah, I mean, we really need to leverage the strong culture we already have and you know, add to that and in, in bring it more to life with some of the new concepts that we have. And we know we have a strong culture from the feedback we get from our ongoing engagement studies. So people give us a lot of great feedback about our culture and we have to continue to invest in and in evolve that culture.

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Jeff

We need to be agile in our culture because there are different attributes we need to bring to the table. Back in 2014 and '15, when we defined our culture, some of the things we talk about today about how do we bring innovation to life through having diverse perspectives wasn't something we thought about at the time. Sustainability was not as important as it is today.

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Jeff

So it needs to evolve with the times and with the employees and ultimately, you know, culture. Again, it includes everything we do and how we do it and its present in how we treat each other, how we get things done. And I think there's three things that really are indicative of a healthy culture. One is it's a leading indicator of success.

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Jeff

If you have a strong culture, if your people understand the culture, if they live it, it's likely it's more likely going to be successful. As we talked about before. Number two, culture is a lasting differentiator. It's something that's difficult to come by. So if you can build a strong culture, people want to stay. They want to be part of that culture and they want to thrive in that culture if it aligns to their own personal values.

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Jeff

So it's a it can be a lasting differentiator and a great connection to your employees, which are ultimately your company. You know, your products are important, your buildings are important, but it's actually your people that are your biggest asset. And lastly, a healthy culture enables companies to adapt and change. So given all we've seen in the world over the last few years, that ability to be adaptable, to change, to try new things is so critical and it needs to be embedded in your culture.

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Jeff

Or as we discussed before, you know, you may find that people are rejecting the changes that you think are necessary in your business.

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Therese

Very true. Before we let you go, Jeff, what advice do you have for other business leaders who want to ensure they're creating a culture that attracts and retains top talent? Should they do what we did and revisit their purpose and values? Or is there something else they could do to build a culture that's attractive to all stakeholders?

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Jeff

Yeah, I mean, everyone's different and maybe there's different paths for people and they may be at different places in their culture. But I think the first thing that I would recommend someone do is kind of assess where your culture is and understand what your culture is from your employees and your customers and listen really hard and ask them questions.

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Jeff

How do they perceive your culture? So it's important to have that outside perspective. Then maybe they could make a conscious decision about what you think the culture needs to be to drive the success that you're looking for and to drive the company you want to be in. The changes you want to make into how you interact with your customers, your employees, and ultimately define it.

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Jeff

One way to define a component of the culture is the purpose. Why do you exist? What values do you find important? Because you want to find employees that align with those values that will certainly help you attract and retain the employees who resonate with those values. And that's more important than ever. I would also say that as you're developing purpose and values and creating a culture, there's a few things, a few words that I think are important to remember.

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Jeff

One is, as you start to go out and describe your culture, it's important that it's clear - there's plain language that everyone can understand - why you exist, what values you think are important. It's important that it's credible. So you want it to be credible. People can kind of say, "Yeah, that's a reasonable place for us to be given where we are today."

00:19:18:22 - 00:19:40:09

Jeff

But at the same time, you want it to be inspirational, so you want to stretch a little bit. Lastly, you want to be distinct, you want it to be unique. You don't want to look just like your competitors or other companies. You want to make sure it feels distinct. And lastly, you want it to be durable. We're really looking and updating our very strong culture that started nearly ten years ago, so you want it to be durable so it lasts.

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Jeff

That seems like a, you know, a long time for it, the last 8 to 10 years. But you want it to last at least 5 to 10 years. And of course, you want to keep maintaining it, reinforcing it and updating it. And then I would say: "Figure out the best way to make it come to life."

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Jeff

It's not good enough just to understand where you're at, understand where you want to be. You have to bring it to life and you have to use every element and everything you have and invest in it if you really want to make it real. And so I would say that make sure that when you're onboarding people, when you're interviewing people, that culture is reinforced.

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Jeff

That when you're doing performance management, when you're training, every opportunity you have to embed this in the life cycle of your employees, the better off you're going to be in bringing it to life.

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Therese

That's a great point. It really has to become part of your culture, no pun intended.

00:20:40:11 - 00:20:53:14

Therese

Amazing. Well, Jeff, you've given us great advice today. So many great examples of what we're doing at Zebra that others can replicate as well. I'm sure our listeners have enjoyed it and we've enjoyed having you on. So thank you so much.

00:20:53:17 - 00:20:54:21

Jeff

Thanks, Therese.

00:20:54:24 - 00:21:05:23

Therese

And thank you to our listeners for tuning in to our Your Edge podcast. We hope you'll stay tuned for the next one. Until next time I'm Therese Van Ryne. Thank you.



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