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VARIETY PACK

Episode 18: Resolution Pack

Speaker 1: You are listening to the Slack ...

Speaker 2: Variety Pack.

Speaker 3: Brought to you by Slacks.

Speaker 4: All kinds of people, on all kinds of teams use Slack to do amazing things.

Host: Happy 2016, and welcome to a new year of the Slack Variety Pack. Coming up on this episode we have a story about staying limber and fit, and it's all in your head. We have a story on how outdoor camaraderie helps with in office software development.

First up though, we wanted to start off the new year with a prediction. Not something that we pulled out of our back pockets, but a 2016 trend from one of the foremost trend spotters out there, Rohit Bhargava. We interview him later in this episode, and we'll be hearing some of his 2016 forecasts throughout the show. Here's his trend on virtual empathy.

Rohit Bhargava: One of the trends that brand new for the 2016 edition is really based on the fact that everyone right now is talking about the promise of virtual reality. One of the things that I've picked up on is there is so many examples now of ways that virtual reality technology will allow each one of us to fuel our empathy for people, or situations, unlike ourselves.

There's research coming out of Stanford where there's virtual reality experience where you can make yourself the cow in a slaughterhouse, and the interesting question that the research asked is, would that make people more empathetic towards animals if they could experience what it was like to be the animal? The answer was yes. What's really interesting about the fact that this is happening across so much of virtual technology is it gives us this empathy machine where we can start to understand situations, or people who are unlike ourselves. That's a really powerful effect for business.

Channel change: Channel change, be it resolve channel.

Host: Exercise, along with eating well, are likely the most popular resolutions of every new year. But the activity we spend the most time doing, work, is also a great area for a resolution or two. We asked you to tell us what your work resolutions are for 2016.

Resolutions 1: In terms of work I'd probably say work/life balance. More flexibility for employees, like working from home, that sort of thing.

Resolutions 2: I'd like to monetize my website.

- Resolutions 3: I'm hoping that it'll become a trend, especially with the more millennials that are entering the work force and everything, that we'll have more flexible work schedules.
- Resolutions 4: Find something that is more fulfilling for myself and my family. I feel like I get caught up in the minutia of my work.
- Resolutions 5: Maybe work closer to home. To commute less.
- Resolutions 6: Work goal? Increase business 20%.
- Resolutions 7: I think my work goal would to be more efficient
- Resolutions 8: I want to know the nitty-gritty of customer service and sales, and how to deliver the most excellent service I can.
- Resolutions 9: Not to try to just live to work, but work to live.
- Resolutions 11: One of my friends, she puts a timer on. Half of her screen is a timer, so when ever she stops being productive she stops the timer. When she starts being productive again she starts it.
- Resolutions 12: I would like very much to be calmer in the face of problems with work. I would like to handle work related upsets with more fluidity.
- Resolutions 13: More productive and less Reddit at work.
- Resolutions 14: Be a nicer person.
- Resolutions 15: I find that a lot of my job is very task oriented, and one of my resolutions is to be a bit more personally connected with the people in my work place. Because I have found that once that connection is made my job is done to a much higher standard.
- Resolutions 16: I'd like to be less of a (censored) to my staff.
- Resolutions 17: I'd like to retire in 2016.
- Resolutions 19: My resolution is to find a job that I actually enjoy.
- Reporter 1: So it's clear that a lot of have been making work resolutions for the year ahead, and so have I. Because Slack Variety Pack is all about the world of work, I've been thinking a lot about a different set of resolutions. Especially for the work place; team resolutions. One of my favorite insights from last year came from an interview we did with author Tom Rath. His research into work place health and wellness revealed that the most important factors in happiness and satisfaction come from having a sense of purpose and from doing meaningful work.

Tom Rath: What scientists are finding out is that the more you give and do things for others, that's probably the fastest way to increase your own well-being even though you're not trying.

Where as, people who constantly focus inward and say, "How can I pursue happiness for myself? Or make myself happier today?" Whether that's taking time off work, or buying material goods, or if you're focusing inward, that's a really good way to potentially take yourself down hill even.

Reporter 1: He suggested thinking regularly about how the work you do affects other people. Whether it's your co-workers, or your customers.

Tom Rath: I think the most practical thing that I've seen from a work standpoint is to start to draw some connections between point A, which is your effort, and point B which is the influence it has on another human being. You kind of need to see that every day.

Reporter 1: So here's what I'm thinking; if my happiness and satisfaction comes from making a difference to others, maybe I should consider making resolutions not just about what I want to accomplish, but about what I want to contribute, and about what kind of person I want to be when I'm at work.

So this year, I'm going to resolve to see myself not as an individual, but as a member of team. I'm going to think about my team members, I'm going to take responsibility for them, and go the extra mile to make life easier for them. I'm resolving to consider how my individual behaviors effects the rest of the team. I'm going to prioritize empathy, and I'm really, truly, going to try to understand the feeling, opinions, and beliefs of my coworkers. I'm going to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, and I'm going to assume that every one's intentions are good. And, I'm going to resolve to resolve any disagreements for the sake of our team.

Now these might sound easy, and even obvious, but I'm pretty sure they're going to be hard work. Hard work that will bring more happiness to and success to my coworkers, my work, and myself.

Isn't that the real point of creating resolutions? So this year, I'm resolving to make a difference in a new way. I hereby declare 2016 to be year of the team.

Speaker 1: Slack: your team's collective brain.

Channel change: Channel change: Crystle ball channel.

Host: At the start of this episode, we heard a 2016 trend from trend forecaster Rohit Bhargava.

In the 2016 edition of his book, "Non-obvious", Rohit has ten brand new predictions for the year. But what does it take to predict a trend? It's not about guessing. Trend spotting requires a certain skill set, and the power of observation.

Rohit Bhargava: My name is Rohit Bhargava, I am the author of several books about being a better marketer, being a better leader, and being a better person.

Host: Rohit Bhargava is no ordinary marketing guy. He has a very special skill, he predicts the future. But he doesn't gaze into a crystal ball, and he doesn't read your palm. He uses data and observation to interpret patterns in our everyday behavior. He reports trends to companies like Visa, American Express, and Under Armour, and publishes an annual trend report that has reached "must read" status from marketers everywhere.

Rohit Bhargava: My definition of a trend is a curated observation of the accelerating present. I believe that a trend has something to do with the present (right now) and if we can learn to predict the accelerating present - that is the things that are happening right now that will happen more frequently and with more impact in the future - then we can start to predict the future.

Host: Despite his powers of prognostication, even Bhargava couldn't predict how he would end up as a renowned trend spotter.

Rohit Bhargava: I just wanted to have a really interesting blog post. It was the end of the year, and I was like, "Hey, I should write something about trends." That was how I started doing this. Then over time I realized that I enjoyed thinking about that, but I needed a longer time frame.

Right when I published that first blog post, the very next month, which was January, I started collecting ideas figuring I would do the same thing at the end of the next year. What ending up happening was that by the end of the year I had this really thick folder filled with magazine articles I'd ripped out, and blog posts I'd printed out, and conversations with great speakers at events that I'd went and I'd key noted at. Where I went and I wrote down something interesting that they said...

As I dug through this whole folder of 300 pages of stuff, which doesn't seem like a lot, but when you spread it out it's a lot. I realized that there was some macro trends in this stuff, and that might be the process that I should be using. And that's the process that I ended up using.

Host: And take it from Rohit. In a world full of predictions, your trends have to be credible and accurate.

Rohit Bhargava: A lot of times what you find is the person who is... the example I use all the time is the person in charge of marketing for the hammer company declares 2016 to

be the year of hammers. You're kind of sitting there thinking, "Yeah, you better hope it is." Because that's how you're going to sell more stuff, but that doesn't make it a valuable trend.

Host: This has got to be disappointing news for hammer manufacturers. In reality, this is how a major trend comes together.

Rohit Bhargava: Everyday Stardom was based on this idea that we as consumers want to be treated like superstars, and we expect that now because we are able to.

What was interesting was the examples that I found of that were found over a wide span of time. So I had one example of couples in India who were getting their weddings recorded to look like Bollywood films. Then I was reading about Disney's magic band technology, and how they were finding personalized ways to deliver experiences to consumers. That was a big story, and I found that.

There was another example of a kid in San Francisco who was Bat Kid for a day. He was part of the Make a Wish Foundation and it was a big deal, and he was a little superstar because he saved the city. 50,000 people came out and they watched him.

As I started to draw a thread between these seemingly unrelated things, Bat Kid, Disney's magic band technology, Bollywood brides creating these videos, I realized that all of them are examples of normal everyday people becoming superstars.

The expectations around that is something that I started to realize was important for business, because if your customers are used to being treated like superstars it's no longer acceptable to send them an email that starts with, "Dear Customer". Because superstars are not called, "Dear customer", they're addressed by name.

So immediately you start to see the business reasons why this actually makes a difference. It's not about creating Bat Kid for your customers and making 50,000 people watch, it's about treating people in a personalized way. That's the insight.

Host: Turning a blind eye to what's coming around the bend can lead your business into a game of catch up.

Rohit Bhargava: I read somewhere recently that gum sales at checkout counters of grocery stores had tanked. Gone way down. The reason why is that when we're checking something out at the grocery store and when we're paying for it, we're no longer looking at that, we're looking at our phone.

So we just look at our phone until it's our turn to pay, we pay, and then we leave. We don't even pay attention to the gum or to the candy, unless you have a kid with you in which case they want all of it.

Host: So get out your note books and start paying attention. With some patience, observation and curiosity, you might find yourself predicting trends that could make 2016 the year that you become an everyday star.

Slack Variety Pack. Tweet your trend @SlackHQ.

Channel change: Channel change: Fitness channel.

Host: At the beginning of each year, many of us hit the gym with the best of intentions. "We're going to get into shape, we're going to do our bodies good." But we tend to neglect the muscle that we need to exercise the most.

Reporter 2: I do my best to stay active. I eat pretty well, I swim, I lift stuff, and do the occasional cleanse. Not bad, right? Well, apparently it's not enough. I'm completely neglecting to use the thing I use the most.

Alvaro: If we don't exercise that set of muscles, which is the brain, it decays. So the next frontier in physical fitness is in our assessment, brain fitness.

Reporter 2: That's Alvaro Fernandez, CEO of Sharp Brain and co-author of "Sharp Brain's Guide to Brain Fitness."

Alvaro: Most people think it is our genes that hard wire us, but it is not our genes. It is our experience. It is our lives.

Reporter 2: This means to exercise our brains, we need to constantly challenge them. Not to only maintain them, but to grow them.

Alvaro: No matter your age, every single day of your life your brain is creating a number of new neurons. Cells that fire together, wire together. Where they go in your brain, how they hook up, how they connect with other preexisting neurons, that is influenced by your mental exercise.

Reporter 2: Here's the key, and what I've gotten wrong by doing the same level of crossword everyday, or picking up a favorite book. To increase your brain power you need to constantly do things that are new to you, and as varied as meditation, trying different foods, physical activity, and even in the way we use technology. See that smartphone in your hand? You can get even smarter with that.

Mark Baxter: Anything that you do in life that stimulates your brain is beneficial to your brain.

Reporter 2: Mark Baxter of Vividy Labs is one of the founders of Fit Brains, a web program and app full of games designed to stimulate the major areas of your brain.

Mark Baxter: If you do a cross word single every day of your life, that's got value to you, but it's a single location in your brain. Really, the idea is how can you stimulate other areas in your brain, and how can you stimulate the areas of your brain that are under stimulated?

Reporter 2: Seems millions are seriously considering it. Since 2007 this guilt-free gaming app has reached number one in education in 90 countries, and there are over 18 million users.

A lot of people are getting their cerebral workout.

Mark Baxter: The laser reflects off of mirrors, it's this fun little logic puzzle. You can see how I'm deflecting that laser beams to point at it.

Reporter 2: A good brain workout will jump start the five major areas of our brains. Memory, concentration, visual, speed and logic.

One of America's foremost neuroscientists made sure Fit Brains has the right equipment for a proper workout.

This is Doctor Paul Nussbaum.

Paul Nussbaum: My role with the team was to teach them about how the brain works, and the kind of exercises that would make sense for humans trying to get a good workout with their brain, and try to build essentially what we call in the field "Brain resilience".

When you do something novel and complex, the brain cells kind of rejoice. There's this one part of the brain cell called a dendrite, and those are just like branches of a tree. What happens is those dendrites begin to develop new connections, new branches if you will. Across your lifespan, the more that you do this kind of activity the more dendritic sprouting you get, the more your brain looks like a jungle.

So if you have this picture of a jungle in your mind, think about for example, a disease like Alzheimer's as a weed whacker. If we lead a proper life style across our lifespan, it delays the clinical manifestation. So it pushes off the onset of the devastation that a disease like Alzheimer's can present.

Reporter 2: According to Fernandez, Alzheimer's isn't the only enemy for our heads.

Alvaro: Stress, too much stress, contributes not only to the lack of birth of new neurons, but even to the death of existing neurons.

Reporter 2: And he says good brain apps also really work to ward off the bad stuff. He's a player himself. But he won't call them games, he calls them fitness. Fitness needs consistency.

Alvaro: You need to practice around fifteen hours, one-five, in around 1 to 2 months. So what does not work is, "Hey, I'm just going to play around 20 minutes now and then 20 minutes in a month, and then 30 minutes later." That is not real exercise, right? The same thing with physical fitness, so exercise means exercise.

Reporter 2: That's a lot of screen time, especially in a world where our smart phones are glued to our hands. Still, the brain experts say it's way better than another kind of screen time.

Alvaro: With the science published right this second, what is maybe the main enemy of brain fitness? What would be your guess?

Reporter 2: Facebook?

Alvaro: No, the biggest enemy in developed countries would be watching television. Facebook requires you to be reacting more often, you are exposed to more novelty, you are contacting other people...

Watching TV is truly what is passive by definition.

Reporter 2: So this year, try giving up binge watching for binge brain fitness. It's time we all got ahead.

Speaker 1: Slack. Working better.

Host: Rohit Bhargava is back. This time to tell us that in 2016 everything old is not just new again, it's also cool.

Rohit Bhargava: One of the trends that I think a lot of people are going to be talking about is the down side of the internet, of things making every piece of technology around us so smart that it's always being updated, and it's always connected to the web.

What I mean by the downside of that, is that sometimes you're going to want the technology that you used to have, and not the technology that requires you to install the update before you actually use it. Which we've all experienced in frustration as a consumer.

One of the trends I'm tracking for 2016 is what I call strategic downgrading. Which is the idea that we as consumers will sometimes choose the previous version, the inferior product, because we actually liked the way that that worked and the fact that it wasn't as connected.

There's a really well known example now of litigation happening with John Deere around tractors, because there's a whole host of farmers that are saying, "Look, we bought these new tractors. They're all connected to the internet and even though we purchased them we can't use them, because they need software updates. We need to wait two days for your delivery guy to show up. That's an acceptable amount of time, because we've got to do our jobs."

So what's interesting about that in terms of the opportunity that it creates is this idea that retro might become cool again.

Channel change: Channel change: Developer channel

Host: Earlier in this episode, we heard from Alvaro Fernandez talking about the importance of brain health to tackle stress.

Alvaro: Stress, too much stress, contributes not only to the lack of birth of new neurons, but even to the death of existing neurons.

Host: In this next story, stressful, even life-threatening situations, foster a different kind of health. That of the work team.

Reporter 3: When you think of teams of software engineers and the kinds of activities they like to do in their off time, we tend to come up with pretty stereotypical things like Foosball and video games. But it turns out, team building in the tech world can get down right risky. But it might be the best form of bonding out there.

John Oram: I am roped up to my lead developer who is behind me. The lightning storm is over us switching between hail, snow, and rain. The rock is humming due to the static charge, and as a lightning bolt goes off around here, this all stops. All these sounds stop.

My name is John Oram. I'm an avid mountaineer, rock climber, and I'm a lead developer at a web and software development studio.

Reporter 3: Rock climbing and mountaineering, programming and software development. Who knew? Rock climbing is actually a pretty popular activity in the tech world, and it's a ritual that's had a positive impact on the industry and at John's own workplace, at tech company Socoloco.

John Oram: Informal team building activities seem to be better than formal ones, because people are more relaxed and let their guard down, and get to be more comfortable with each other. Which is half of keeping a productive environment.

If I'm uncomfortable with my co-workers then the way that I work is going to be more uptight, more withdrawn, and there will be less back and forth. We work as a whole, we work as one unit. So the loose, relaxed, collaborative nature of

how an efficient software development team works is very much how it works in the gym, how it works with climbers.

Climbing is good for social relaxed team building. When we get new people in the office and we say, "We're going to the gym, do you want to join us?" Nine times out of ten they'll say, "Yeah", and will feel like they're participating.

Reporter 3: John also sees the beauty and challenges associated with both activities.

John Oram: I have read people's code and thought, "Wow, this is beautiful. It reads like a poem." And if you can do it in a nice concise way, limited amount of code, pleasant to read, it takes a certain finesse to do that. It is creative.

For climbing, it's limited amount of jarring motions, limited amount of energy. Every time you hit a new cliff it's a different puzzle, and it's a different problem. Just like when you're programming. It takes a certain finesse to do that, and it is creative and very artistic in it's own way.

Time was of the essence, because as the day goes on it's more likely to have a lightning storm. We climbed up, watching these cluster lightning storms passing our left shoulder. They were far off at first, and they were getting closer and closer. We saw about five of them go by.

We were very close from the top of the mountain when we turned around and realized that the next one was going to hit us. We should of turned around.

Reporter 3: When you write lines of code on a project you're never just writing it for yourself. One miscalculation causes a ripple effect, a bug in the system that could have far reaching consequences. In a climbing gym, or on a mountain, you're attached to someone who's feeding you rope and acting as a counterweight to prevent you from falling. Or you're roped up to a few people while navigating glaciers or climbing a sheer rock face.

Open lines of communication and trust in your team are vital on both counts.

John Oram: We climbed up, coiling the rope as we went. If either of us fell we would have killed the other one. We had pieces of metal that were put into a crack and as I'm coiling rope I realized that this is the only thing left to do.

I asked my developer, "Can you please jump up there, pull that metal out of the crack, and then we're going to take all our gear and run down the mountain."

So we timed it. A lightning bolt went off and then he jumped down. He has about a minute or two before the next lightning bolt at most. For that instant he knew he had to get that done, and he trusted me completely that that was the safest way for our team to keep moving forward.

Reporter 3: Once you've experienced that kind of life or death situation together, it's natural to bring that sensibility back to the rest of your life, including the office.

John Oram: He's a stronger developer, and I'm a stronger climber. So in that situation he accepted my roles, or my suggestion, and he trusted me. Then I trusted him more at work. Because he understood that I knew more in that situation.

If you're in the office and one person describes how they intend to do something, and somebody else looks at it and gives you a bit of extra advice... The acceptance of advice from somebody who gives you advice at the gym all the time on how you do something, means that you're probably going to be more willing to accept it at work. You're going to be able to build stuff in a more efficient manner.

Host: Our final 2016 trend from Rohit Bhargava means good news to that guy who told us his resolution is to retire this year.

Rohit Bhargava: One of the things that I did in the new 2016 addition of Non-obvious is I revisited trends that I predicted several years ago, which now have a big resurgence.

A trend I originally predicted in 2013 which I called optimistic aging. There are many new ways for creating engaging opportunities for people over 50, or people over 60, people over 70. There's legacy careers, there's a whole movement that people are tracking towards what they generally call silver entrepreneurs. This idea of people over 50 starting their first company at the point when they get to that age as opposed to earlier. There's the idea of more technology in the smart home that's allowing aging in place, that's allowing for more mobility with seniors.

So in 2016 I think that this idea of optimistic aging is going to create a lot of opportunities for companies to rethink who their target audiences are, to engage older workers into the work force, and to embrace them into the workforce.

Host: You've been listening to episode 18, the resolution path.

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Speaker 15: The most common question I've gotten since I started racing cars when I was 13 is why would you choose such a male dominated sport? My answer is always, "Why not?"

Speaker 16: I heard a great analogy a couple of weeks ago. They said, "A players are your racehorses, B players are your work horses, and C players go to the glue factory."

Host: Thank you for listening.

Speaker 16: Slack variety pack, do amazing things.