



slack

VARIETY PACK

Episode 23: Meet Pack

Host: You are listening to the Slack Variety pack, brought to you by Slack.

Reporter 1: All kinds of people on all kinds of teams use Slack to do amazing things.

Host: Welcome to the Slack Variety Pack. In this episode we'll be making a lot of exciting introductions for you. You'll meet coworkers who don't work for your company. Then you'll meet the next generation of entrepreneurs, and we're going to introduce you to the newly designed, you. First up, Danny Groner set a mission for himself to get to know everyone he works with, and then some. Here's how to meet everyone in your office.

Reporter 1: Attention all stations. He is making for the Empire State Building.

Danny Groner\ : I love coming to work here at the Empire State Building. The main reason is everybody's heard of it.

Host: That's Danny Groner, a member of the marketing team at Shutterstock. Shutterstock is an online marketplace that licenses stock photos, images, video, and music.

Danny Groner\ : What's funny about the Empire State Building is for all intents and purposes it's an office building. There are three person offices. There are ten person offices, but most of the companies in this building aren't nearly the size that Shutterstock is.

Host: A couple years ago, Shutterstock was growing so fast that they had to move their New York headquarters into a larger space in the Empire State Building. While it was cool to move into such an iconic building, the company's growth spurt was a tricky transition. The staff also had to contend with a big open office plan. The old office was more traditional. Quite a change.

Danny Groner\ : I felt the change in myself when we arrived here because suddenly everybody was out in the open and it wasn't just your team that you knew. It wasn't just the people that you were in meetings with. You were naturally running into people all over the place. At a certain point, four, five, six times of seeing somebody, you're going to introduce yourself. I found that as I opened myself up to that I realized I really enjoyed that, and getting to know people and finding out not only who they were, but what function they served here, how our business was growing.

Host: The new faces kept coming. Danny was having a hard time keeping up. He made a conscious decision. Instead of feeling sorry for himself because the small company feeling was disappearing, he set a challenge for himself. Meet as many new people in the office as possible.

Danny Groner\ : I decided that I was going to make an initiative for myself that everyday, and I committed to one month to start, I was going to meet a new Shutterstock employee. I kept a very strict spreadsheet to make sure that I didn't double up on people. The rule I had for myself was I couldn't leave the conversation until I

learned one fact about them.

Host: If Danny noted in his spreadsheet that Sally like to cook, the next time he bumped into Sally he could ask her ...

Danny Groner\ : Hey, have you cooked anything recently? Let's talk about that. We actually create this connection that wouldn't have been available otherwise, if I hadn't decided to reprogram my brain to make sure that i was doing that.

Host: Danny set up his challenge with twenty-two days left in the month of May. He was determined to meet twenty-two new people. His early attempts were a bit rough around the edges.

Danny Groner\ : One of the first days that I introduced myself to somebody was on the elevator on the way up. It was around eight o'clock in the morning and it was just the two of us in the elevator and we were both going to our floor. I said, great. Seize the opportunity. I cornered him and it became this hilarious story because he was much more introverted than I was and he felt like, who is this guy, why is he bothering me, and couldn't wait for the elevator stop to come so that he could literally race off of it and get away.

Host: Then Danny got into a grove.

Danny Groner\ : I would sit in our café area in the middle of the afternoon when I knew people were going to have a lull and get up to get some coffee or get a snack. I would just scout out and try to figure out, have I meet that person, have I met that person, from a safe distance away. I would be able to check on my spreadsheet if I had an inkling about what their name was or what they did ... I don't think we actually formally met. I'm Danny.

David: David.

Danny Groner\ : David. We've been on emails together.

David: That's right. I have.

Danny Groner\ : You're on sales, right?

David: Yeah.

Danny Groner\ : What do you do here, Caroline?

Caroline: I'm account manager for Canada.

Danny Groner\ : Cool. Canada?

Caroline: Yeah. I've been with Shutters ...

Danny Groner\ : how's everything going?

David: Good. Really good. A busy week, but good week.

Danny Groner\ : That's great

Caroline: Yeah.

Danny Groner\ : That would be great. It's good to talk to your guys. Thank you very much.

David: Thanks for stopping by.

Danny Groner\ : I didn't want to only know, I'm a data scientist and I have a math background. I didn't need their full CV. What I really wanted them to do was recognize that I was extending a hand. Once I had extended the hand and they had answered my question most people would turn back and say, tell me about yourself. How long have you worked at Shutterstock? Then I could naturally move the conversation in a way that I could learn something about them that had nothing to do with Shutterstock but had everything to do with themselves. Hey. I don't think we've met. I'm Danny.

Speaker 20: Andre.

Danny Groner\ : Andre?

Speaker 20: Yeah.

Danny Groner\ : Nice to meet you.

Speaker 20: Nice to meet you.

Danny Groner\ : How long have you been with us?

Speaker 20: It's been four months, now.

Danny Groner\ : Hey, Max.

Max: What's up?

Danny Groner\ : How you doing?

Max: I'm beautiful.

Danny Groner\ : Good to see you

Host: By the time Danny's self imposed month long challenge was up, the daily meet had

become so much a part of his routine that he decided to keep going. He kept up his project for another two hundred days. If after he formally stopped and put away his spreadsheet he still loves to meet new people at work. He's reprogrammed himself to be friendlier, more gracious to people, and his commitment rubbed off on his fellow workers.

Danny Groner\ : One of the guys that I met, such a nice guy, and there was one day recently that he told me that he was going to go sit with his friends at a table in our café and he needed a chair. He went over to a different table and there was a chair available but there was only one person sitting at the table. His instinct was just to ask can I take that chair and then to bring it away. Then he told me that I came over him, in his head, and he decided that he was going to sit down and have lunch with that guy, that new employee who was sitting alone. Instead of taking the chair away from him, making him further alone he decided to join him.

He told me and I was so happy that he shared that with me. That's essentially what I hoped would happen was this halo effect, the pay it forward, where somebody that was a new employee just three months before this new employee was certainly becoming the veteran reaching out to the new employee.

Host: Danny's biggest take away from his experiment? He works with some really great people.

Danny Groner\ : When we IPO-ed in 2012 was this sense of, are we going to lose the essence of what Shutterstock is? As I was meeting people I was realizing, no, we haven't lost that, because the Shutterstock DNA of what it means to be a Shutterstock person has remained the same. It just means that there are more of those people available to you. I'm on my fifth year and I'm just as enthusiastic and passionate about this company because it's really fun to come to this office and see people, and to share all the stories and insights and things that have happened with my friends who I happen to work with. I think we've met too. Danny.

Mark: Yeah, we've met.

Danny Groner\ : Remind me of your name.

Mark: Mark.

Danny Groner\ : That's right. Good to see you guys. Thank you guys so much.

Host: Slack. Working better, together. [inaudible 00:07:50]. If you're a designer or if you've ever worked with a designer, you know that the design process is full of choices. There are constraints, redo's and sometimes you have to throw things out to make the project even better. If you think about it the same could be applied to life. What happens if you applied the design process to your life? Our next guest did just that. We went along with her to try it out.

Reporter 1: Here I am, standing in the middle of my living room at three a.m. Sleepless in my underpants. I'm taking a long hard look at my life. Literally. Scattered around me on the rug are dozens and dozens of multicolored cue cards holding a single word. I have just deconstructed my life. Who talked me into doing this?

Ayse Birsal: I'm Ayse Birsal. I teach people how to apply design process and tools into their life, to think about their life creatively and optimistically.

Reporter 1: That's right. The woman who pushed me to deconstruct my entire life isn't my shrink or my mom. She's a New York designer by way of Turkey, a woman I hardly know, who wins awards for designing smart storage, forward thinking furniture, and high end toilet seats.

Ayse Birsal: When people ask me now, what do you do, before I used to think of myself as a designer of products. I am still a product designer but now I think of myself as a designer of life.

Reporter 1: A designer of life. It's not a god complex. It's a job and it's her job. Ayse Birsal's book is called Design the Life You Love. Her book encourages individuals and teams to design new perspectives, new lives, new paradigms.

Ayse Birsal: Life is a great design problem. Just like in a design problem, you're not in control of everything. The idea is trusting the process and that the process will take you to a better solution and will help you simplify and understand what really matters.

Reporter 1: Fast forward a few months later from that New York interview. I'm back in my living room, staring at all the words on the floor. Here's what happened. I finally decided to try her work book and really went deep. I'm not going to lie. At first I had written it off and all its inspirational quotes and blank pages for doodles and dreams as a bit flaky for me, but I couldn't stop. Then I thought, if this can work on my life I want it to work at work. I want new patterns of flow and creatively and output. I want to up my game.

Ayse Birsal: The first step is deconstruction. Taking something apart and by taking something apart you see what it's made up of. You're breaking your preconceptions and the links that you automatically make between things.

Reporter 1: That's what I do. Take apart my life like I'm dissecting an old clock. There's over a hundred life words. Productivity, daughters, laughter, anxiety, commuting, eagle, lust, savings, career, cat, carbs. Then I divide all these things into four quadrants. Emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. I ponder it and it's clear I can do better.

Ayse Birsal: That's the second step, which is point of view. It's all a matter of point of view and how you see things. If you can see the same things from a different angle then chances are that you can come up with a better solution.

Reporter 1: That's how designers like Birsal work. This is how Steve Jobs came up with the magnetic power chord for laptops. Of all things he looked at Japanese rice cookers with similar clips and had an ah-ha moment. Someone trips on your chord. No dropped rice cooker, no dropped laptop. Shift your context and get a solution. Now, I'm ready for the big step.

Ayse Birsal: Reconstruction is like the bare bones foundation.

Reporter 1: I draw overlapping circles with my good words. Things come into focus. Career, family, health. I know. It sounds like a no brainer but it took breaking and building back up to get there. I feel like I'm making progress but not quite there. I need a bit of clarity. I go straight to the source and I lay it all in eyeshot. A bit of career change. I need more exercise. There's podcasting, then the story telling element. That was a really bad time. It's all about the team and the money and deadlines.

Ayse Birsal: Look, I'm not the psychologist. I'm not going to be able to solve your challenges and your problems. What I can do is give you some creative tools to think about your life creatively and also with optimism. When you say that you feel like you've accomplished something, I'm really excited about that. It makes me think, that's the feeling I have at the end of design projects. Can I look for that simplicity?

Reporter 1: Part of Birsal's design process towards that very simplicity is having me identify my heroes. At first I don't see the point of this. Her book's big hit heroes are Martin Luther King and the Dalai Lama, and mine are John Stewart and David Bowie and my crazy uncle Stew.

Ayse Birsal: What qualities did you put to them?

Reporter 1: The qualities that did attribute to them were story telling and making art that breaks my art, unafraid to go the route of mass consumption and just following their vision.

Ayse Birsal: Yeah. You've just described yourself. Those are your values. Once you identify those values, to then live a life that's coherent with them, that takes a lot of will power. What you're describing, people who walk to their own drum and are courageous and are creative, that's you.

Reporter 1: Are we having a moment?

Ayse Birsal: I think this is our second or third moment.

Reporter 1: The fourth and final step of Birsal's book is called expression. Putting this all into action. I found some really profound things within myself in the reconstruction but on the expression, on the last part of it, how do I make this book actually work?

Ayse Birsal: One of the expressions is to do a to-do list. Right?

Reporter 1: Okay. Working remotely. Industry [inaudible 00:14:33] compliment people. Go to the gym before work. Lunch with the dean. New software. Kiss my honey goodbye every morning.

Ayse Birsal: I would start there.

Reporter 1: I have shelves spilling with self help books and creatively manuals that, to be honest, go pretty much unused in my big picture. There's something structural, something hands on about designing my life and work like a designer would. The best part is it can always be deconstructed, reconstructed, and redesigned.

Host: If using design principles and creative process to help build your future peaks your interest, pick up Ayse Birsal's book, Design the Life You Love. Slack Variety Pack. Tweet us at slackhq. Channel change. People who are in your neighborhood channel. More and more people are working with people that they don't even work with. That's because more and more people are working in co-working spaces. They're so popular that there are big startups built around housing startups. Why are so many company's choosing to share their work space? Let's find out.

Imagine if your co-workers didn't have the same boss or job or clientele as you. That's the case for a lot of people these days. Those who've decided to join the growing ranks of workers spending their days in co-working spaces across the country. Those are office spaces where entrepreneurs building startups, freelancers, and people who work remotely, come together to work. Kind of together, but also separately.

Erika Ettin: I don't even foresee myself going back to the home/coffee shop model. I have twenty-four seven access. Water, coffee. I always find space at the large table, outlets, internet, printing. I think that's a steal.

Host: That's Erika Ettin of Little Nudge. Her business helps people up their online dating game. She's base head of a co-working space in Washington, D.C.

Erika Ettin: Especially since we're talking about dating and other personal topics, not everybody of course feels comfortable in a coffee shop, when someone else might be listening. I wanted a more professional place to meet with clients.

RebekahCampbell: I'm Rebekah Campbell. I'm the co-founder of the company called Hey You. We are an app for cafes.

Host: Rebekah moved her startup from a one bedroom apartment into a co-working space in New York City. Rebekah and Erika have a lot in common. They're both entrepreneurs and go-getters but when it comes to co-working spaces their experiences are totally different.

RebekahCampbell: I had this vision that people who were old, starting companies would be working

really hard like us. They'll be working long hours. What I found was actually people over [inaudible 00:17:49] come in at, I don't know, ten or eleven. Then they're leaving at four, maybe even earlier. That infiltrated our team.

Erika Ettin: Most of us work for ourselves. It's a casual environment where people aren't wearing business clothes necessarily. I really like that. I feel like it's people who get my lifestyle and who understand that you may be working weird hours and you may be wearing gym clothes but that doesn't mean you're working any less hard.

Host: Whether the casual environment at co-working spaces fits with the way you want your business to run or not, one thing for certain. The nature of co-working spaces is to connect people to each other, which opens up opportunities for collaboration.

Erika Ettin: For example, a company hired me to make these dating videos. I certainly don't have the equipment to go shoot professional style videos but another company does, so they help me with that. I help them with other things, giving them media contacts and things like that. It's been very collaborative. We all give each other referrals.

Host: Startup co-founder Rebekah Campbell didn't have the same luck finding useful collaborators at her co-working space.

RebekahCampbell: Anyone that had an idea that was doing something with small businesses would come and talk to me and go, we should collaborate and partner and we should integrate our platforms. You'd be like, you know what? We have to just focus on what we're doing first [inaudible 00:19:20] products live and working and prove that we've got this [inaudible 00:19:24] we can start thinking about other things.

Jerry Davis: I feel that we're now in the transition from the post war corporate system where it was the company's job to look after your welfare to something different and I think co-working spaces are part of that.

Host: That was Jerry Davis, professor of management and sociology at the University of Michigan and author of *The Vanishing American Corporation*. He says the work trend is moving toward people working as contractors or running their own business by choice. Co-working spaces are now filling a void left behind.

Jerry Davis: Since you have a lot more freelancers there's more of a need for people to have the space to work and you can try doing it at your Starbucks but that might not be the best possible place to do work.

Host: Research from Ross School of Business says people are more satisfied co-working than working alone. Erika says she's not only met a lot of collaborators in her space but really good friends.

Erika Ettin: Yeah. It's been great. I've met so many people. We go to happy hour. I've gone on dates with people I've met at work. It's great.

Host: Rebekah also thinks people in her space were friendly but then it got to be too much.

RebekahCampbell: There's constantly people coming around trying to give you whiskeys in the middle of the day or massages or it was just lots of roommates all the time, or we had to clear out because there was a band coming in or stuff like that.

Host: Rebekah moved her startup out. Now her company, Hey You, owns a more ideal office space in Sydney, Australia.

RebekahCampbell: Now we have our own office. I can really set the time or the work ethic in the business but when you're in a space for hundreds of other people the spacing out of people set the tone. When you start hiring people that's the point where you really need to be able to do it in your own culture.

Host: Co-working spaces may not be suitable for everyone but there's no mistaking their popularity. More and more of these spaces are popping up in city's around the country and around the world and more people are using them. As for Erika Ettin she understands the limitations to co-working spaces but she's sticking to hers. Her advice?

Erika Ettin: I would tell them to try it out. Every co-working space has a different vibe because ultimately just like when you're in a "regular job" the people make the job and I would say that that's true of a co-working space too.

Host: Slack. Your team's collective brain. [inaudible 00:22:23]. For our next story, we're adding a new layer of variety to the variety pack. We'd like to introduce you to a story from another podcast. We were listening to Upgraded, a monthly podcast about education and then we heard this story about a grade school in Texas that runs the entire school like a country. There's an economy. Kids come up with business ideas. They hire workers, and they learn how to run their own businesses. We thought you might like to hear it too.

Child 1: My name is Kenzy and I'm in third grade. I'm CEO of two companies.

Host: Most entrepreneurs don't sound like that, but not many schools are like Cunningham Elementary. Located in South Austin, the low income public elementary school is one of a dozen micro-society schools in the country. It's a twenty year old concept, based on the idea that kids need motivation to stay in school. Kimberly Skinner is the school's counselor.

Kim Skinner: Each grade level has their own venture and then we had student led ventures in the fall semester. They stayed after school and they actually go through the business plan and talk about a budget and what would work, and we have a bank. It's not real money of course.

Host: The money is fake but everything else is real. Take eight year old Kinzy. Before she could sell her product she had to conduct a market survey, write a business plan, pitch in front of investors, and take a loan from a bank. Did we mention she's eight? The key to success? Marketing, of course.

Child 1: Say, you made one huge poster with glitter and lights and stuff, then people will probably notice that poster and say, hey, that looks really good. We should probably go to their business, but if you make a little small poster that says, come to so and so's business then they'll just probably won't notice it.

Host: Everyone notice Ranicke. She's a banker. Ranicke helps her peers withdraw and deposit money from their accounts. Sometimes, this fifth grader has to get tough.

Child 2: Some people withdraw, they're like this. I promise I had this more money. The bank is just taking my money. That's what they usually say, sometimes.

Host: What do you say?

Child 2: I say this. I'm telling you, you have now fifty or twenty dollars in your account.

Host: Is this school building a little army of pint sized Bill Gates and Sheryl Sandburgs? That's not the goal but it may plant a seed. Take thirty-six year old Vince Perez. He was a student of [inaudible 00:25:16] Elementary, one of the first micro-society schools in El Paso. Now he's an elected member of the city government.

Vince Perez: I certainly think that it had an impact, being exposed to that at such a young age, that it did teach us the importance of civic engagement, certainly.

Host: The friends he made in those micro-society days now work in local government, public health, and the armed forces. Just like in the real world, Cunningham has its big corporations. Businesses led by entire classes. This semester, Lucia is helping her kindergarten peers conquer the fitness market.

Lucia: I'm a personal trainer. I can do downward dog.

Host: Can you show me? When her class teachers yoga Lucia is always learning math. Every student takes a turn at the register.

Amy Lloyd: They were sorting. They were counting. They were organizing and they were labeling, all under pressure, with customers right there.

Host: Principle, Amy Lloyd says she has a strong feeling that participating in a small economy is helping the students on state tests.

Amy Lloyd: We're trying to track that and we think that that's helping a lot of our kids to do better. What we noticed last year is that our bankers did much better on the math state standard. Historically when you look at micro schools they do much better. It

just takes a while for the kids to connect it.

Host: Teachers want the kids to do well on standardized tests but they also want the kids to be excited to come to school.

Amy Lloyd: In this little corner of the world we're really trying to empower kids and take back that message for kids that learning has meaning. It's not just passing a test, that when you come to school to learn there's a real purpose for that and let's connect the dots for you.

Host: That's a wrap for episode twenty-three of the Slack Variety Pack. For more information about this podcast go to slack.com/varietypack. Subscribe to this podcast on iTunes or Stitcher. If you like the show please rate us on iTunes. Thank you for listening.

Reporter 1: Slack Variety Pack. All kinds of teams use Slack to do amazing things.