



slack

VARIETY PACK

Episode 10: Pack To The Future

Announcer: You are listening to the Slack Variety Pack, a collection of stories about work, life and everything in between. Brought to you by Slack. If you don't know what Slack is, head over to Slack.com and change your working life forever. On this episode, meet the man on a mission to get rid of your boss.

Brian Robertson: Look at the world around us. We live in neighborhoods where there is no boss neighbor telling the other neighbors what to do.

Announcer: On that lookout for a play date app.

Brian Robertson: Fill in your kid's match preference and location and just let them swipe. Gentle, gentle!

Announcer: A former criminal lawyer turns to fighting for the fishes.

Brian Robertson: When Robert Kennedy started the Water Keeper Alliance he had called me up and asked me if I'd be interested in being a water keep and giving up my law career and doing this.

Announcer: First, farmer's fields go high-tech.

Slack variety pack, yeah, cool. Making work less worky.

Reporter 1: We hear a lot about drones in the media and much of what we hear isn't very positive, but drones have many other uses that don't get as much attention and there's a very old industry that's started to use them in really cool ways.

Since the 1950's Americans have been moving away from farms into more urban areas. Now, just 2% of people work in agriculture, but our grocery stores are still stocked. Technology makes that all possible. Meet Gene Hall, a spokesperson for the Texas Farm Bureau.

Gene Hall: I don't really know of any industry out there that's any more technologically advanced than agriculture. Certainly some of the things that we're doing now with regard to satellite and global positioning technology where a combine can measure down to the last row and more efficiently cut a field where chemicals are applied the same way. The genetic technologies in the lab actually allow us to select for traits to grow food with less water and to address pest issues and all sorts of things. Agriculture, when it comes right down to it, is very high-tech, very technologically advanced.

Reporter 1: This harvest season there's one thing that has farmers across the country buzzing.

Gene Hall: Everyone is talking about it. All of the farm organizations are having drone pioneers speak to the various meetings that we have around the state. This technology interests a whole lot of farmers and ranchers.

Reporter 1: Now agriculture professionals are just dreaming up all the uses for drones.

Gene Hall: You could put a drone in the air and you could check your cows, you could count them, you could determine those that were having trouble having a calf. They could determine where livestock producers, if there was predator pressure on a given herd, if there was a break in the fence somewhere without having to physical drive several miles to go figure it out. I think it has a lot of potential.

Reporter 1: Right now I'm in a rice field an hour southwest of Houston, sitting in the air conditioned cockpit of the biggest piece of machinery I've every seen. At the wheel, rice farmer Scott Savage.

Scott Savage: Right now we are off the beaten path. I call this field the land of the lost.

Reporter 1: What are we driving?

Scott Savage: We are in a [inaudible 00:03:34] combine right now. I'm harvesting some organic texmati rice.

Reporter 1: A combine, it's like a tractor on steroids, seriously hooked up. Certain things still need to be done by hand or more accurately, on foot.

Scott Savage: During the growing season, which is about 90 to 120 days, we do come to the field once, possibly twice a day and check on the water on the crops, of course rice is a flood irrigated crop, so we don't want to waste. We want to be mindful of water, so we're always concerned where the water is in the field. It's manual labor, it's walking the fields.

Reporter 1: This is where drones have become a game changer for Scott.

Scott Savage: The aerial view is so much easier versus walking the fields and actually looking at it. Something that could take an- this is a 90 acre block, if one person would check it, you had to walk it without any type of four-wheeler or anything, it'd probably take you a good 30-45 minutes to walk around it. If you have a drone, you could check it in a matter of ten minutes. Fly over the field, download the data to your iPad. Do that a couple times a day and you would never have to actually step foot in the field.

When I first started hearing about little, small RC drones, I can't remember how many years ago, it was like, "drones, what is a drone." It's crazy.

Reporter 1: But Scott Savage grew up flying model airplanes, so when his uncle bought a \$1300 drone he had to try it out over his fields.

Scott Savage: For fun, and turned out we did use it for some ag this year.

Reporter 1: He says a drone is pretty easy to use.

Scott Savage: Mainly I just go straight up over the field. Take some pictures from different angles. Once you're on the iPad you can blow it up and see exactly where it is. I'm not doing anything, it's just staying up there.

Reporter 1: Next season, Scott will be using the drone to survey his crops. Scott's happy to be a drone evangelist at the upcoming agriculture meeting he's attending.

Scott Savage: For the money, for a farmer, you really can't go wrong having one.

Reporter 1: Old MacDonald is on the cutting edge.

Announcer: Slack. Feel Good. Busy.
Channel change. Future of work.

Announcer 2: When we go to work we tend to fall into one of two camps. We're either the employee or the boss. What if there was a parallel universe out there where there was only one big camp? Enter the parallel universe.

Reporter 2: Imagine that you're a budding entrepreneur and as your company grows, you begin to feel trapped in a traditional top down corporate hierarchy.

Recorded Voice: Yeah, you're going to have to talk to Gary before you order those pencils.

Reporter 2: You know there must be a better way to run a company, but you can't find one. You decide to take ideas from software, from nature and from neighborhoods to create something totally new.

Brian Robertson: I'm Brian Robertson and I am the creator of Holacracy which is a totally different way of running a company.

Reporter 2: He's right, it's totally different.

Brian Robertson: We're living in such a vastly different world today than when our corporate paradigm grew up, you know, near a hundred years ago. Companies today, if they're going to survive, have to be more agile, more nimble, more responsive.

Reporter 2: What is this thing called Holacracy. Brian calls it a new operating system for corporations. The big idea: there are no bosses. Instead the company organizes and runs itself.

Brian Robertson: We sometimes have a hard time imagining a company without bosses and a managing hierarchy, but look at the world around us. We live in neighborhoods where there is no boss neighbor telling the other neighbors what to do. We each have autonomy and we know the boundaries of our autonomy. If I know that I control my house and my car and my property and my computer, and my neighbor doesn't. Yet, I know if I want to take his car I better ask his permission.

Reporter 2: Let's take another analogy. This time from the world of nature. Consider your pancreas. It does a pretty good job of being an independent, autonomous pancreas all on its own. There is no need to actively boss it around and tell it how to do its job and because the pancreas, like all your other organs, knows its own role, does it well and works well with others, the result is a healthy body.

Brian Robertson: That's very much what Holacracy brings into an organization. It's the same fundamental structure nature uses to scale complex adaptive systems.

Reporter 2: That's the influence of nature and neighborhoods on Holacracy. The final piece comes from the world of software.

Brian Robertson: One of the key inspirations behind all this in my background was the agile software development space. Agile software development is based on principles that don't look like conventional management. It's much more dealing with uncertainty and embraces change. It allows much more autonomy.

Reporter 2: No matter what analogy you use, it essentially boils down to this.

Brian Robertson: It's a distributed control system with proper boundaries.

Reporter 2: The idea of a self organizing enterprise is so compelling that several very high profile companies have decided to become Holacracies and completely revamp the way they work.

Brian Robertson: There's Medium, which is run by one of the founders of Twitter. There's also David Allen Company, run by the author David Allen of Getting Things Done.

David Allen: Hi, I'm David Allen. I was CEO and I was getting buried. It was insane. I teach stress free productivity. That's a little embarrassing. I had this question: does the company need a CEO, maybe it can just run itself. It turned out, I shared the stage with Brian Robertson. I heard Brian start to talk about Holacracy, and I went, "oh my God." It just hit me like a lightning bolt. I said, "this guy is talking about exactly what I was looking for." We had them give us a taster program and it blew us away.

Reporter 2: The highest profile company using Holacracy is the online retailer, Zappos.

John Bunch: My name is John Bunch. I work at Zappos.com. Our move towards Holacracy is a doubling down on an investment that we believe will help drive forward our culture.

Reporter 2: Zappos is a very fast-growing company. Changing the organizational operating system was a big decision, but the opportunity to stay agile as they continued to grow was too good to pass up.

John Bunch: When we were a smaller organization we were really able to change and shift to opportunities that existed, but as we got to the size that we are today, 1500, it became much more difficult to adapt and change.

Reporter 2: Just in case you might be running how you know what to do in a world with no bosses, Brian's got another unconventional answer.

Brian Robertson: In Holacracy, when you fill a role, you have the authority to do anything that makes sense to you. The default is actually a lot of autonomy. It's autocratic autonomy. If I fill a spokesperson role at my organization and I have the autonomy and the authority to do anything that makes sense to me to serve the purpose of that role. It's not a group decision and it's not the boss's decision, it's your decision if it's your role.

Reporter 2: If all this isn't enough to make your boss hide in the corner and weep, there is still one more hugely disruptive concept in Holacracy and this one will melt the minds of your human resources department.

Brian Robertson: If you look at a typical management hierarchy, what's organized are the people. Who can direct whom, who can tell whom what to do and where Holacracy differs from that significantly is we're not organizing people, we're organizing the work. Then people might fill many roles and we might fill roles in many parts of the organization.

Reporter 2: That's right, you can create your own ideal job consisting of a wide variety of different roles.

Brian Robertson: I can shop around, I can fill a few roles from this part of the company and a few roles from that. What's the best intersection between the company's needs and the individual's passions and goals?

Reporter 2: These customized roles are big wins for employee culture at Zappos.

John Bunch: Employees now have the ability to work in different areas. There are some really bright shining stars that are doing nothing like they use to do and doing what they're really passionate about. That has been a big, big win for us.

Reporter 2: For a lot of self starters, these big ideas will be very appealing and empowering, but David Allen warns that for others Holacracy could be their worst nightmare.

David Allen: What Holacracy is up against is a whole lot of people that are a lot more comfortable just being told what to do and leaving work at five o'clock, getting a paycheck.

Reporter 2: Zappos came up with a very clever way to weed those types of people out.

John Bunch: Recently, with regard to Holacracy and our move towards self management, each employee was offered three month's pay to leave Zappos, to make sure everybody that was here was really interested and passionate about this new vision, new direction for our company.

Reporter 2: There are now over 300 companies operating as Holacracies, not bad for that budding entrepreneur who decided the status quo could use some new thinking. Apparently, not bad for Zappos, either.

John Bunch: We really believe that Holacracy yields more engagement, more entrepreneurialism and at the end of the day, more innovation and profit.

Reporter 2: Think your company might be ready for self organization? If so, Brian Robertson has a new book and it's out now. Go to Holacracybook.com to find out more.

Announcer: Slack. Your team's collective brain.

Channel Change: New Parents Channel.

Reporter 3: Like many of you, I am happily married and a proud father and that's all magical and whatever until you realize it means I'm missing out on what seems like a pretty universal experience in 2015, swiping right and swiping left. This simple act turns everything into a game. Pictures pop up on your phone and you swipe right if you like the look of them, left if you don't. It's become a trend in apps. Whether you're looking for a date, or job hunting, or adopting a dog, but I'm not trying to do any of those things. I'm asking any app developers in the audience: please, create a mobile dating app for play dates, a mobile play dating app. Yes, I know these kind of already exist, but apps like momco and sites like hellomommas are there to help moms meet. I want something I can use with my child. It would do so much good.

First, it would give us time together to bond. It would show me the wonderful world of swipe culture. It would help my child learn social skills on two levels: through the app and on the actual play dates. Toddlers are already fascinated with smart phones. They can tap and swipe before they know how to talk, so why not have them do something constructive? I can see it now, you download the app, fill in your match preferences and location and just let your kids swipe. Gentle.. Gentle! Like this, hmm, this is Jaden. This kid looks pretty cool. He's wearing a Ramones shirt, he's probably into punk, swipe right. This is Madison. She's got a fisher price corn popper, very cool, very retro, swipe right. This is Addison, he looks like he wets his bed. I mean, who doesn't, but you don't want to look like you do it, swipe left. This is Brayden, but this is a picture of twins, so which one is he? Probably the evil one, swipe left. This is Harper, she looks like she eats past, swipe right.

It doesn't just have to be a planned activity. It can also be a spur of the moment thing. Maybe you stepped out of the room just long enough for your kid to drink

half your frappuccino and she's suddenly got a bunch of energy she needs to burn off right now. Just swipe right on everyone and when you get a match, your kid can start up a chat. The great thing is, as far as I can tell, most techspace conversations aren't much more complicated than toddler conversations. So, hey, lol, dog, cat, car, blankey, sup. Please, app developers; make me this app. Children are the future and the future is exhausting. Gentle... Gentle...

Announcer: Share this story with friends. Go to soundcloud.com/slacksingleservings.

Channel change: [inaudible 00:17:11]

Reporter 4: Water keeper. A global environmental movement who's goal is pretty straightforward: fight for swimmable, drinkable, fishable waters around the world. Achieving this goal is from from easy, that's why it enlists the help of people who can really make a difference. One of those people is Mark Mattson. We talked to him on the windy shores of Lake Ontario.

Mark Mattson: We did grow up on a little island called Wolf Island and it was very important to my mother that we had a place to go. That's where I learned to swim, that's where I learned to fish, to sail, to dive. Over the years, when I went to law school, and the more and more I went home, the commercial fishery disappeared. Tampons and condom containers and needles would float up on the shores. Nobody drank the water any longer and people weren't really eating the fish.

Reporter 4: Mark already had a successful career when he realized where his heart really aligned.

Mark Mattson: I was a criminal lawyer and doing civil rights work. I worked in the prisons and an old lawyer, who worked for my father 30 years early, was back and he was doing criminal law. He said to me, "you know, we need to think about the great lakes and the environment." By 1999 when Robert Kennedy started the Waterkeeper Alliance, he had called me up and asked me if I'd be interested in being a Waterkeeper and giving up my law career and doing this.

Reporter 4: For Mark, the answer was easy.

Mark Mattson: I was seeing the loss of this, really what I felt, was the most important part of my life, which was my connection to the water. I was seeing that slowly being taken away by apathy, lack of funds. I always said that power, influence and money dictate who gets the short end of the environmental stick and the short end was clearly the small communities, the fisherman, people who were swimming in the water. They weren't organized and they didn't have a way of representing themselves in order to ensure that this would be protected.

Reporter 4: It wasn't much of a stretch for Mark to fight for the water's rights.

Mark Mattson: I came at environmental law seeing it as exactly the same work I was doing in criminal law and civil rights. I was representing the underdog that was under-represented. I was taking their issues to the courts. As a lawyer I, and with Robert Kennedy's incredible history at the Hudson Riverkeeper [inaudible 00:19:41] I was encouraged to take that on as full time as a Waterkeeper where a big part of my role was to basically be the lawyer for the waters.

Reporter 4: For a while, Mark's Waterkeeper work was a success, but legal fights can sometimes take years, and in the meantime those most affected were becoming disconnected.

Mark Mattson: Our private prosecutions were ground-breaking, our investigations were ground-breaking. I thought that was what we'd do forever, but by 2005/2006, circumstances changed and it couldn't just be the lawyer for the environment. That was becoming less and less effective and I failed really to see that connections. The laws were slowly being ignored, people didn't know, so I realized that we had a much bigger job to do as Lake Ontario Waterkeeper, which was to rebuild that connection. Rebuild the understanding that people had for why they lived where they were and how privileged and lucky they were to have fresh water.

Reporter 4: Mark and his team realized that to stay relevant they needed a hook that would draw people in on a practical level, but keep them interested in a more fundamental way, so they created an app called Swim Guide. The app connects users to beaches and swimming holes and identifies which ones are clean for swimming and which ones have water quality problems.

Mark Mattson: Swim Guide, it's a leadership builder, it teaches them about the laws, it teaches them about the uses of the water, it teaches about the public spaces, it teaches them about the science behind bacteria and ecoli. It also teaches them about the other chemicals that are being part of it, that might not close the beach down, but have concerns if it's drinking water, for example, the impacts on fish and fish habitat.

Reporter 4: The app has been a huge success. It now covers 7000 beaches from Baja to New York and has over 500,000 downloads. Not only that, the app acts as a catalyst to connect people and make them leaders in their own communities. The fight for clean waterways is far from over, but for Mark Mattson, it's headed in the right direction.

Mark Mattson: They don't need Al Gore or Robert Kennedy or David Suzuki to save them. They can do it themselves. They understand their relationship to the water and they have the tools to protect it. What happens when that happens; it's magic. It's amazing how things get fixed so quickly.

Announcer: Have a great story? Know someone who inspires you? Tweet us at SlackHQ and we'll tell your story here on the Variety Pack.

Channel Change: Office Channel

Reporter 5: Black cap chickadee, the american goldfinch, cedar waxwings; when you're out in the wild you can identify these birds by the shapes of their wings and the notches in their tails with the help of a handy ornithology guide. In more familiar territory, a handy guide may also prove useful. We're here to help.

The Slack Variety Pack field guide to the modern co-workers of North America.

Reporter 6: A handy guide to recognizing the most common types of office wildlife in your workplace and in yourself.

Reporter 7: The Speakerphone-er.

Reporter 6: Marked by their preference for making private conversations public, this species happily fills the office with the crackly voice of their co-workers, partners or fantasy football buddies.

Reporter 7: Captain Click Bait.

Reporter 6: This co-worker really wants to tell you about something they saw on the internet, but they don't want to come right out and say it. Instead they use a series of grunts, sighs and laughs to lure you into asking them what they're looking at online. Big surprise, it's a bunch of Chuck Norris jokes.

Reporter 7: The un-headphoneable.

Reporter 6: Distinguished from their other co-workers by their lack of headphones, this person's behavior pattern is as follows: a video begins to play loudly from their computer speakers and they frantically race to lower their volume while scrambling to grab their earbuds.

Reporter 7: The Hover-er.

Reporter 6: This invasive species perpetually lives in your peripheral vision, hoping to speak with you. They don't want to interrupt so they wait and wait and wait until you make eye contact.

Reporter 7: The Email Followup-er.

Reporter 6: This colleague just wants to make sure you received that email or slack message they just sent three seconds ago. Well, let them just tell you what it says.

Reporter 7: The guy from another department who once a year stops by to sell boxes of his daughter's girl scout cookies.

Reporter 6: This is a guy from another department who once a year stops by to sell boxes of his daughter's girl scout cookies. This is the best kind of guy.

Reporter 7: The Printer Attendant.

Reporter 6: Distinguished from the average co-worker by their need to hurry over to the company's printer and stand around and wait while it prints their document. Their either motivated by a paranoia that someone will steal their print job, or they just love toasty warm paper.

Reporter 7: This has been: the Slack Variety field guide to the modern co-workers of North America.