

# It's the Vibe.

Talent

## Episode 5

### Employer Brand: More Sausage than Sizzle

with Mark Serunjogi from Zalando

#### Ian Tyler:

Hello and welcome to It's The Vibe, a podcast series produced by Talent International, and centered around no BS conversations with business leaders and innovators, digging into all facets of company culture. I'm your host, Ian Tyler, and I'm Talent's Group Chief Strategy Officer. Why are we doing this? At Talent, our vision is to empowering people to build a better world of work for all. As such, we're keen to leverage our global reach and help educate businesses and individuals, big and small, how they can actually contribute to that and build a better world of work for their people, within their businesses.

We want to enable that by hearing from leaders all around the world, who are specialists in their space, to unpack some broad-ranging topics around company culture. We want our listeners to be able to listen to and apply insights that are gleaned through these discussions. We want to share learnings from experts and employee engagement, communication, D & I, and a whole lot more.

Today I'm very, very excited to be joined by Mark Serunjogi for this episode, which is a discussion around employer branding. Allow me to introduce you to Mark. Mark is Employer Brand Manager for Zalando. Zalando is an e-commerce fashion [inaudible 00:01:34] lifestyle brand and platform company based out of Berlin in Germany, which services over 20 markets. He's doing some pretty interesting things.

Prior to this, Mark worked in various roles, looking at employer brand, D & I, social media comms, content and events. He's a pretty good authority when it comes to all things employer branding. Mark, thank you very much for joining us. How are you going?

#### Mark Serunjogi:

Wow. Thank you for that intro. I'm very honored to be here. I'm doing very well today. How are you?

#### Ian Tyler:

Excellent. I understand you're joining us from Berlin.

#### Mark Serunjogi:

Yes. That's correct.

#### Ian Tyler:

Yes. Excellent. Zalando and your journey, tell us a little bit about how you ended up at Zalando. What's that quick background summary of what brings you here today?

#### Mark Serunjogi:



Yeah. Well, I'm originally from Copenhagen, Denmark, and I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to go to the US. I was in New York for a couple of years, which I call my backpack through South America. But just staying in New York, really finding myself and figuring out who I was outside of my comfort zone. But then, I was seeking a bit of that comfortability back and I started looking for jobs pretty much all over, looking for someone who would hire me.

I ended up at Zalando the first time, in Berlin, doing advertisement for the Danish and the Nordic market. But I was also doing some employee representation. I was also doing some D&I taskforce, and I really was looking for a way of combining my love of community building with my love of marketing. That's when I stumbled across employer branding. Once I did that, I felt stupid that I didn't know of it beforehand. But I definitely felt that it had a pull to me. It had a good ring to it.

Then I started applying for employer brand roles. Luckily enough, for me, I was given the chance to be the first employer brand specialist that GetYourGuide and build their function there. That's three years ago now and the rest is history.

**Ian Tyler:**

Wow. It's interesting you say that you found your calling, but you felt stupid you didn't know it was there all along. It's an interesting one because employer branding, I feel, is a more relevant, open conversation today than ever before. Would you agree?

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, I think everybody loves to say like, "Oh, the market is so tough right now." But people have been saying that since I got into employer branding three years ago. So the market is just tough in general. People are in an era where they are taking control of their lives and their careers, at least oftentimes the talent that we are targeting.

So we need to have a conversation of what we're bringing to the table as companies, for us to even have a conversation of them joining. In that regard, employer branding is more relevant than ever. Let's not even talk about COVID and a world in recovery.

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah. Absolutely. I find that the more business leaders and companies I talk to, when we think about a talent attraction and engagement, employer branding, and selling that employee value proposition was something that was seen as something that marketing did, or something that HR do. But it actually seems now to be a conversation that is very much an executive level discussion. People understand the importance of brand, conveying a real genuine message about who we are, why you'd want it, why us, and what it is that we are really striving to do, is that I think it's more of a purpose-led conversation now. Would you agree?

**Mark Serunjogi:**

It's definitely one that is value led. I mean, because I think there are companies definitely that not necessarily always are that interested in purpose, but might understand that it's about values and how to connect with people on some value, even if the value is that we work really hard and we make a lot of money. How do we showcase that in an authentic way and get the talent that is on board with that and share that value with us?

I think that is starting to click more and more, even as some are still struggling to figure out, how do I actually do that? They are aware that they need to have the conversation.

**Ian Tyler:**



They are. When we talk to businesses about employee value proposition and employer brand, many businesses think it's something that can be created in a room with some people and not being data driven, not being from the people, for the people, not to be too grandiose about it. But we [inaudible 00:06:29] that data-driven conversation about being quite deliberate and quite specific about the conversations that we want to have and the things that we want to say and show.

But when you do that data collection internally within businesses, often you find things about the company that, "Oh, that surprised us." And we weren't aware that that was a good thing or that was a problem. Can you talk about your experience of how these companies may be able to go on a journey of exploration around telling and conveying their message?

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Yes. I mean, one is that I think it's very important to be data-driven and have that data, and the approach you take from there be very grounded in reality. But I also think that it's a very beautiful thing to have a vision and be visionary. I prefer having leadership that is visionary and have an idea of who we want to be, and who we would like our company to be, and what we would like our company or our employee experience to be for people that join us. And then, from there have a conversation of, "Okay, how far is the reality from there? What is actually the data that we can-

**Ian Tyler:**

What's the gap?

**Mark Serunjogi:**

... collect? What is the gap? And then, have a conversation, "Is this gap good? Is it bad? Is it what you expected?" But having the conversation based on the premise of the vision, and do you want to tweak the vision, does it still stand? Sometimes you do realize that, okay, our reality is very, very far from what you want the company to be, but then it's easier to have a conversation of, okay, then what do we need to be doing to get us there?

How do we also ensure that that conversation and that work that goes into bridging the gap between the vision and the reality, how does that also become part of the employer brand? How do we also tell the story of, "Hey, we are here today. We'd love to be over there in a year's time. Would you, as talent, love to join our company and help us get to our vision? And if you do, this is what you can expect. This is what you get out of it, and these are the lessons that you might learn from there." So how do you also have that conversation actually become part of the brand and part of the allure of who you are as a company?

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah. It's that getting the balance between aspiration, inspiration, and reality.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Exactly.

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah. That's something that some brands, some businesses, some companies I see, and my own personal opinion, I look at just a different business and go, "They've nailed this. They've got this right." You can have some really interesting companies that, from a brand perspective, go, "Wow." I look at their video content, and so there's some businesses, without giving them a plug unnecessarily, that build accounting software. It's not that very sexy.



But hey, their employer brand, the way that they bring that story and that inspiration to people about, "Wow, what an amazing place where I can go and be me. And I can bring what I bring to the table, that is going to add value to this company. But in turn, that company is going to add value to me." That, for me, is where the magic is.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Exactly.

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Yeah. Really understanding that relationship. It's a relationship. In most of our relationship, we appreciate them when there's some give and some take from whoever we are in relationship with.

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah. 100%. With that in mind, and again, I don't want to be plugging other brands. But just given your vantage point, I am curious, are there other brands out there that have got it right, that you respect and you admire? I am curious by that, given you your vantage point.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Yeah. There definitely are. I will start by saying that I think that I'm, at this point, I am actually working for one of the brands that I've been admiring. I mean, I used to work for Zalando before, and then I left to do employer branding at other companies. I always look back at what we did at Zalando with great pride and kept following what they did over years. But also saw the growth, also saw their progression. Saw that a lot of the conversations that we had internally over the years became external conversations with actual strategy and targets, and C level involvement.

Then I was like, "Oh, this is actually a company that is taking these things seriously. I was always proud, from an alumni point of view, and always refer to them as the good example. Then right before I chose to come back, there was this reflection of like, "Well, you don't need to be an alumni forever. You can actually choose to re-engage and apply as a candidate." If you want to work with the best, why always refer to the best if you have the chance to actually work with the best again. So [crosstalk 00:11:33]-

**Ian Tyler:**

Exactly. Yeah.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

That's actually the story of how I left. The brand, and also because of what I knew from working there before, and having a good experience there before, made me comfortable with actually rejoining. There was no bad blood. I wanted to go out and get some experience, and now I'm able to bring my experience back where I started. That's one place that I really admire.

And then, for other companies, I think, one, is a hard thing to answer because I don't want to make advertisement for companies that I don't know that well in depth. But I think it really comes down to, for me, how I see companies treat their people, because that's something for me that is very important. Obviously, also with doing employer branding, I'm interested in working for companies where I think that I can stand by the message and stand by the brand, within my personal integrity.



Companies that are also touching upon my personal interests... I mean, obviously, Peakon, which is an employee engagement tool. I think they're super interesting. But I'm also interested in the product. I'm really interested in how they're actually helping companies build better cultures and better engagement. Then they're also based in Copenhagen. So there's a bit of a bias there because I'm from Copenhagen. There's like, "Oh, there's actually a great company that's from my hometown? That's interesting."

Then the other companies like Netflix. That's more of a curiosity thing. I've met so many CEOs and companies that call themselves the new Netflix, or want to be the new Netflix. Now I'm just like, "What is it actually about Netflix that is so great that everybody wants to emulate that? Now I'm more curious to actually have the Netflix experience, rather than the experience of all these other companies that want to emulate Netflix."

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Nonetheless, they're also doing really good things content-wise and involving their employees when it comes to really getting behind marginalized communities, whether they're on the production side or it's in the productions they have on their streaming platform, or employees in the offices. Again, that people story is really what connects me in terms of, what are companies doing for their people? Then I'm also a musician on the side. So it's hard not to think of a Spotify. Also another Nordic brand, so, again, a little bit of bias there.

**Ian Tyler:**

There's a trend. There's a trend.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

There's a trend. But I also think that the bias is also because for better, for worse, we do have a way of looking at society and looking at a wealth of fair. The heart of the social democracy, we say is in the Nordics. That also influences how we do business and how we interact with each other at work, and that kind of accountability for each other's wellbeing. I think that that is something that I recognize in between the lines and definitely am drawn to.

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah. No, it's fascinating. It really is. There is always a huge amount of subjectivity with these types of things, because, as you say, yours comes from this very much an unconscious bias around where you're from and the things that you're interested in. But actually, that's the same for everybody. But when it comes to an employer brand for the company, the brand itself, the message they want to convey, you've got to, wherever possible, try and remove some of that subjectivity so as you can appeal to the masses.

That's really hard for a lot of companies that want to attract good people to their good company that resonates with their good message. It's a really hard thing to get the balance right.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

But I actually say lean into the subjectivity because, I mean, companies are as different and unique as people are. When we talk with management and they say, "We want good talent," or "We want top talent. We want to be the employer of choice. We want to be the top employer," it's like, what if we just stripped away all of those words and focus on, "Well, what is you at your truest form in terms of, of course, the reality, but also where you want to be? And how do we, instead of focusing



on top talent, focus on the right talent or the suitable talent for where you are at this stage right now? And that balance of..."

As I usually say, we want to be inclusive, but we are also inclusive within a very exclusionary space, because when you are looking for people, you want certain skills, you need certain experience, and that is valid. But how do you ensure that within your exclusivity, that you are as inclusive as you can be, and connect with you as an authentic company that is trying to get authentic talent as well?

### **Ian Tyler:**

Yeah, and convey an authentic message. Yeah, absolutely right. We have this saying. It's a very Australian saying. For any listener out there that doesn't understand it, I'll try to explain it in a very, very simple way. There's this saying, which is, "More sizzle, less sausage." What that means is more sizzle, it's like, tell the story, be exciting. Sausage is the reality. It's like you can hear and you can smell the sausage being cooked. But actually, the sausage is what you eat. It's a various Australian saying.

There are businesses that are go out there and they embark on this journey of employer brand and being authentic. It's about, "We want to make sure that we've got lots of sizzle." But the reality has to be really real, and very, very authentic. That's what I mean by that sausage and sizzle analogy. When I talk to businesses about employer brand and why that's so important, and the aspirational elements we've spoken about, and inspirational elements, often they go, "Where do we start with this? How do we actually get going?"

Because some of our listeners, they're going to go, "We want to do this. We want to get better at this." But they just don't know where to start. What would some of your advice be for companies out there going, "We want to start this. We want to bang our drum. But how do we get going?"

### **Mark Serunjogi:**

Yeah. I'm definitely going to give an answer that oftentimes people get so annoyed with, because I'm not into cutting corners or giving easy answers at all. I always say, start with the employee experience. You cannot build anything if you don't have a strong foundation. And for me, it starts with the employee experience. Some want to choose to call it culture, but it's really, what is happening inside of your company?

How are your employees talking about you? How are they thinking about you in this very moment? Because, as a marketer, I have done product marketing before. I need to have a product that I am marketing, that I'm trying to get people to buy into. When I'm doing employer branding, for me, that is the employee experience. It is the culture. I'm trying to tell people, "This is what we are. This is what we do." You should be buying into this story so that you would like to become a candidate. And when you get an offer, would like to become an employee.

So without that foundation, without a good product, I don't really have much to work with. We need to also feed in that loop from the market, that if you're not getting the right candidates, or if there's something that is off in the market, and they're not biting, then the question is what is "wrong" with your product, or what is not working within your product?

And so, I'd say it starts with the employee experience, and then figure it out from there, like, "Okay, how do we not only build good employee experience, but then from there, how do we turn that into stories? How do we turn that into narrative? How do we turn that into a brand identity, into a strategy, to get more people in?" Either if we want people that are as similar as the employees we have, or even if we want different employees from the ones we have. We need to have a look at ourselves first and then from there build upwards.



**Ian Tyler:**

I agree wholeheartedly. I use probably slightly different language to you because you're an expert and I'm just playing at it. But that's why I lean back on that data point around, don't make up what you think is happening in the business. Go ask them.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Absolutely.

**Ian Tyler:**

Start with data collection. Go and survey your people, not to be too objectively about run a survey, get the information, apply the survey, and away you go. There's more to it than that. It's that narrative. It's the storytelling.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Absolutely. Even goes back to questions that other people ask me also, kind of similar. They would say, "Oh, but we want to start our diversity and inclusion journey. Where do we start? How do we become more diverse? I keep going back to, look at your employee experience. Do you have an inclusive employee experience? Because if you don't, then why would anybody want to work there if they don't fit into this small margin of what is listened to, and what is respected, and what is empowered.

Start with that start with having an inclusive environment. And then, from there, you can have a conversation of, "Okay, how do we actually get more people who are diverse into our company?" But oftentimes, if you have an inclusive environment, it drives itself. That is the engine, actually, that needs to be going.

**Ian Tyler:**

That's right. I totally agree because when we have these conversations as well, when we look at hiring data and source of applicant and so on, do good brands, and a good brand story, and a narrative have higher percentage of internal rates of referral from their internal colleagues and staff referring other like-minded, good-willed individuals that can perform well and stay long to the company?

Interestingly, the data tells us that really strong employer brands and organizations that treat people really, really well have a very high rate of internal employee referral programs.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Absolutely.

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah, and it speaks volumes for that. I'm curious, I don't want to labor the COVID world at all. It's done to death. There's a lot we could all say about it. But it's been an amazing leveler because the vast majority of people have all been impacted in one way, shape, or form, which is unprecedented, as we know. But typically, out of these times of adversity, change, and so on become opportunities and new trends, new ways of doing things or thinking about things.

I'm really putting you on the spot by asking you this. Is there anything that you're seeing that could be seen as a trend or new ways of thinking about employer branding that you're seeing or hearing? I'm curious to see if there's any trends that you might be picking up on or have heard about, that may be the future of employer branding. The reason I asked that is, in another podcast, I was having

a discussion with somebody who leads a very large scale corporate communications team for Salesforce, Christie O'Toole.

We were talking about the importance of communication, and different channels, and making sure that we communicate with clarity and communicate across the way that people want to consume information. The same could be said when you think about communicating the brand authenticity and the message and the narrative. I'm curious to see whether or not you're seeing that through employer branding circles around trends that could be starting to emerge right now

**Mark Serunjogi:**

My go-to answer is, no, I don't see anything change in terms of like the core of what employer branding is and how you do it. I think that the changes come more in the different elements that are coming into the conversation in terms of like how you need to position yourself as a company. I mean, the obvious go-to is that it's impossible not to address your stance on remote work or an office policy. That might have been more of a-

**Ian Tyler:**

A benefit or a nice-to-have?

**Mark Serunjogi:**

A benefit. Yeah. Yeah. I was like, if you spend a lot of money on your office, you might say that. But otherwise, if you just have a generic office, you just leave that out of the conversation, rather than like, "This is the address where we want you to show up in." Now it's become more of a focus point. Or, for example, online events. Before, physical events was more of a huge deal. I mean, especially in Berlin. Berlin is a city of meet-ups, I was about to say.

And, of course, positioning to online events, and what is actually the value of online events, because before the physical events, it was not only the presented content, but it was also the networking that was giving value to people. How do you add value online? So I think that it's more conversation of, how do we do what we've always done, but do it differently and doing it a way that is still valuable and make sense to people?

On the other hand, the channels, at least how I've worked, have always been digital. And also because I've been doing more international recruitment. So it's always been like, "Okay, what are we doing digitally, and how do we connect people from wherever they are to wherever we are? Oftentimes, of course, because of the conversation of relocation, and I see that now is again with this whole thing of remote work, is getting tricky because now we are still present on the internet, which is everywhere. And people are asking the question of like, "I saw you online. Does that mean that I can stay in my locality and be hired?"

Versus before I think it was more given that this is also a conversation about relocation. I think that that value proposition needs to be so much stronger if you still want to relocate people to your location, because the competition has moved, because this is also a point of competition. Yeah. Unfortunately... I mean, not unfortunately, but it's not under my scope to do office or relocation or remote mobility policy.

I am working in Zalando and also previous company that prefer to have more of a hybrid model, more of a office-centered culture. So that is what we have to work with, is how do we make this attractive in a world where people outside of tech know that they can demand remote and they're starting to get it now.





**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah. Yeah. That's right. It's interesting when you think about it in a non-employer branding perspective, but in a talent acquisition perspective. Organizations that were feeling the pinch around high demand skill sets, low supply, and low talent, smaller talent pools, where they're recruiting from a one hour or two hour maximum commute within their office, to the remote working aspect, the global...

Sorry, the talent pool that these businesses are attracting people from is now a global talent pool, because if they are adopting flexible workforce arrangements and the ability to have success from anywhere, the innovation that comes into that once you've attracted them, the innovation is, how do you engage them? How do you keep them engaged? The brand's done its job in terms of turning the head and creating the intrigue. The acquisition component does the job on onboarding them and giving them a great employee experience.

But then, when they're inside the company, maintaining that level of engagement and making sure that the brand stands up around being flexible, but being communicative and being authentic. Again, that's one of those other balancing acts in this kind of world that we're in now, is what is our future norm. It's difficult for businesses to grapple with and how you do that, and different strokes for different folks.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Absolutely.

**Ian Tyler:**

People want to consume info differently.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Absolutely. We keep going back to that same point of, that's why it's so important to ensure that you are listening to your employees and you have the data that you need there. I think that the biggest challenge for companies is that piece, of how do you build a proper feedback loop between yourself, leadership, and your employees, so that you not only take the feedback, but you also act on it, and you show that you are listening?

Once you show that you are listening, your employees will also dare to be more and more open with you, and more and more trustworthy. I mean, it goes back to this thing of companies promising a feedback culture, or a company where you can say anything and would listen to anything. But you can say that as much as you want, if your employees don't experience it, it's bullshit, I was about to say. But it's not real. So you would try to build a brand perception that isn't in touch with reality.

How do you do that? Well, you actually listen. In my head, I feel like it seems more simple, and it's more simple than complicated. But that's where I am. Because when you listen, then you can think of like, "Okay, how do we actually make these things work? And how do we build the story around that?"

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah, absolutely. Not only that. It's like, how do we move the needle on it if we've just got a feedback loop that says... We send the message of we're an inclusive culture and we're all about diversity, equity, and inclusion, but yet you've got an all-male board. So there's no gender diversity, and or you're not supporting other things for your ESG policies that are all about sustainability, impact planet hearts and minds. And so, you're not living up to expectations there, which become expectations certainly as different generations come into the workplace because there's table stakes there.





It's like, "You said you did this. You don't do this, and I want that." You've got to get that right. Yeah. You've really got to get that right.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Yeah. I mean, I even was reading a report recently, which shocked me, that said, I think that half of the workforce right now is "millennials", right?

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

But we still talk about millennials as if it's these spoiled little brats that don't know what they're doing. Meanwhile, they're knocking 41 with three kids in a house.

**Ian Tyler:**

Exactly.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

And it's like-

**Ian Tyler:**

[crosstalk 00:32:02]. Yeah.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

But it's like there's so much resistance to adapt the workforce to suit, I would say, yeah, my generation and younger, that I value-driven. We are extremely value-driven people. But companies or leadership in companies sometimes address us and approach us as if we're still kids that don't really know how this business thing is working, though we're actually the ones that are making business work the majority of the time, because we're making up the majority of the workforce now.

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah, that's right. Interestingly, not to crossover into too many broad-reaching topics here, but there's so many different generations. I think it's the first time in certainly recorded history in the workplace where you've got four core generations at work at the same time.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Exactly. Exactly.

**Ian Tyler:**

The wants and needs of that demographic are vast.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Absolutely. Absolutely. That's when it comes down to, again, that even with less visible diversity factors in your staff, you are working with diverse employees on a daily basis. So even the notion that, "Oh, we don't know how to do diversity," well, no, that's not true. The thing is that you just don't think about how you do diversity. You don't manage it. And so, how do we actually get to the point where...



Yeah, I think at the end of the day, what we're trying to say is we need to be more conscious about all of these elements around people, around company cultures, so that you can be mindful of what kind of brand is it that you're building and how are you using that brand to get the talent that you ideally want?

**Ian Tyler:**

I couldn't have said it any better because that's a beautiful segue back into what ultimately is our vision, which is empowering people to build a better world of work. That's why these types of conversations need to be a conversation that's happening. We need to be deliberate about that because it's what people want. It's what employees want. It's what companies are saying they want to provide. So it's about, to use the Nike slogan, is just do it.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Just do it.

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah. Just lean in and get it done. Go and ask the question, and you know what, if you're given a shit experience, it's on us to improve it. You just need to know where the needle is at right now.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Yeah. I think for some reason, sometimes people forget to bring the humanity to work. I think there's none of us that would like to be in situations that we are uncomfortable in or where we don't feel welcome or wanted. And so, how can we keep that in mind in our daily work and when we're interacting with other people? It's like, yeah, we are really just human, even if you are a boss, even if you are superior to someone else.

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah, absolutely. We're all in it together, all striving for, kick our best goal and to ensure that we leave a legacy and to make an impact on the people that we engage with, the communities that we champion, and also the businesses that we represent. So I couldn't agree with you more. I'm going to ask one question, which you may not want to answer. And if you don't, that's totally fine because it's one of these questions, for somebody like you, you may not want to just go, "Yeah, here's three things that you can do. So tick, tick, tick, and you'll be fine."

But I am curious, certainly for the listeners of this, that as I've said before, they don't know how to get going. We've spoken about some really interesting things that can be applied to their business, and certainly things that can be really thought about as they start to approach their employer branding evolution, or revolution, or creation, if we've got businesses and founders of companies that are thinking about this as they're starting their smaller companies.

I guess it's some advice. We've spoken about, "Go and give the humans a bloody good listening to." So go and ask them is point number one. But what would a couple of pieces of advice be as some takeaways, from you to our listeners, as to what it is that they could do to help them get their employer brand message moving?

**Mark Serunjogi:**

I mean, yeah, besides listening or creating some kind of employee engagement tool loop, if you don't have a team that is doing employer branding, find a person and empower them to coordinate this field because it is work and there's a lot of work, and it's complicated work. I have been alone, or I've been in teams of one or two over the last couple of years, and it is tough. It's a lot to put on people because employer branding is not only that external mouthpiece.



It is also all of the rest of the reputation cycle, pretty much the 360 of, from the first impression to people actually leave your company. What do they say and think about you after they've left the company, and how do you try to manage that in employer branding? It's tough. Then, of course, there's also when you have leadership that wants to show some kind of return on investment, or setting up metrics, and KPIs, and data, you definitely need at least one person that can spearhead this, even if it's as a project manager that is managing different projects with different people.

Give it an ownership. That's what I would say. Someone that you can... Not just to put there and say, "Go do this for me," but someone that you can put in place and have a conversation with about like, "How do we do this? How do we do this in the most suitable way? And with all of these different options, what should we prioritize right now? Or how do we set up this roadmap of testing what works for us?" It is really daring to start somewhere.

### **Ian Tyler:**

Yeah, exactly. But you've got to be brave and you've got to be bold, and you've got to start somewhere. Yeah. I totally agree. It's interesting. When we start to measure things, we start to manage them. And when we start to manage them, typically, we start to move the needle on things in business. So by not starting, we're never going to know, and by starting, you're going to know something. And then, it's about iterating on that and moving the dial and moving forward. So-

### **Mark Serunjogi:**

Sorry. I just thought about the last thing, because I just went on about the second thing. But the last thing that I would love to say to people, especially if you are leadership or if you are the manager, is that oftentimes we get given the task of finding the best talent, the top talent. But rarely do we actually get to define what is "top talent", what is "the best talent". So I would really challenge people to try to describe what they're looking for in talent, try and describe what kind of employer they would love to be, without using the words top or best.

You have to define yourself, what does it mean to be the best talent for us? Well, we're looking for this, or we're looking for that, or ideally, you have this kind of experience. How do you really break it down? This is also a challenge that I would give when I worked with copywriters. At one point, we kept writing about impact because the talent, they're looking to make an impact. We talked about the impact that those employees were doing.

In the end, I was like, "You know what? I'm so tired of this word impact. From now on, when we write pieces, we are supposed to say the same thing but not use the word impact." It just keeps challenging us to use the language and the words differently. And then, after that, then another word became a word we use all the time. And then I put a ban on that. So it's like I'm always pushing myself to not use the same word over and over again, or at least not use it without reflecting on, what does this actually mean to me, and what do I want the reader or the listener to get out of this piece of communication? And is that what my intention is?

I think it's also a way that we can, if you are aware enough, you can also start challenging your own bias in your language, according to who you want to target. But I've really, really tried to encourage people to move away from cliché language. If you're saying something that you've heard others say at least 10 times, try to trick yourself into saying something different.

### **Ian Tyler:**

Yeah. That is a beautiful way to wrap this call. I want to say thank you so much. You've been exceptionally gracious with your time, your contribution, your golden nuggets of insights. We are





exceptionally grateful for you to spend this time and really contribute to really what it is that we're setting out to achieve here, which is educate, share, and really offer some insights to businesses of all shapes and sizes, as I said. Mark, thank you so much. I've thoroughly enjoyed our conversation. I'm just-

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Thank you. Thanks so much for having me.

**Ian Tyler:**

Yeah. Yeah. You are very, very welcome. I'm pleased for all the listeners out there, that you've taken the time to listen to this conversation. We've been joined by Mark Serunjogi from Zalando, doing some amazing things. Thank you so much. What we'd like to do here now is just pass over to our listeners. Just so you know, if you've got questions, or feedback, or there's things that you want to explore further about these types of insights that you've gleaned from the conversation today, feel free to get in touch via Talent's website at [talentinternational.com](http://talentinternational.com), or reach out and connect with us directly on LinkedIn. Mark, thank you once again. Really, really appreciate the time. Thanks.

**Mark Serunjogi:**

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

