

It's the Vibe.

Talent

Episode 2

Innovation: Why Bother?

with Jen Mumford from Zip

Ian Tyler

Hello and welcome to It's The Vibe, it's a podcast series produced by Talent International and centred around no bullshit conversations with business leaders and innovators and really what we're looking to do is dig into all facets of company culture. I'm your host I'm Ian Tyler and I'm Talent International's Group Chief Strategy Officer.

So why are we doing this? Well, at Talent our vision is empowering people to build a better world of work for all so we came to leverage our reach and help educate businesses both big and small and how they can do this by hearing from leaders around the world; who are specialists in their fields and we want to unpack some of these broad ranging topics specifically around culture.

So what we'd really like to get out of this is our listeners by some of these insights gleaned through these discussions. We want to share learnings from experts and employee engagement, communication, DE&I and a whole lot more... So today I'm really excited to be joined by Jennifer Mumford from Zip for this episode, which is focused on a discussion around innovation, kind of why bother.

So just a bit of background about Jen, so Jen is the Chief of Staff to the Chief Human Resource Officer's at Zip Co and Zip is a \$4 billion high growth ASX listed fintech and has had significant success. Jen's role is now leading the people and culture teams across the US and also Zips new emerging markets across Canada, Mexico, the UK and UAE. And prior to this, Jen was in the organisation that was also growing and scaling and let the core foundational elements of people and culture for Data Republic, as well as safety culture.

So I think it's an interesting discussion to have a conversation with Jennifer about, specifically around "Innovation: why bother", so Jen, lovely to be talking to you about this today and welcome.

Jen Mumford

Thanks for having me Ian, there could be no other topic that I would prefer to talk about on our Tuesday morning.

Ian Tyler

Absolutely, now a little birdie tells me that whilst we're all in during this hopefully last phase of lock down your lock down journey has been somewhat interesting in light of the fact that there is an imminent move for you within the Zip business. Do you wanna talk to little bit about that?

Jen Mumford

Yeah, so start of this year or somewhere around March/April timeframe I took on a role leading our people and culture teams in the US and new markets remote, lockdown in Australia and so that's been certainly a new experience. Working somewhat USA hours locked down here in Sydney and





yeah specially moving to the US in New York where the U.S. team is based, the teams grown from around 60 to 250 in about 9 months so very very keen to get there and two week's time - flights booked, I'm gonna be on the ground finally having got there but definitely being some life admin and weird hours worked along the way.

Ian Tyler

Yeah I can well imagine, and if you think about that transition in a time that we're all in, I mean one, that's exciting but to it's not for the fainthearted either. So as you say there, life admin skills being scrubbed up there significantly.

Jen Mumford

Yeah true I like to keep the body like to keep the body guessing for sure.

Ian Tyler

Good stuff, so I wouldn't mind starting there actually just thinking about that - because you know, when you think about company culture and you think about a culture of innovation. There is potentially a school of thought and a mindset out there certainly for many people in different parts of businesses that kind of don't lean into the concept of innovation because they kind of sense and feel that it's maybe somebody else's job. Maybe it comes from the boardroom, to the shop floor, however that mindset might be. Just by virtue of what you're doing and the journey that you're about to embark upon I think highlights really what is a culture of innovation at Zip. Do you want to talk to us a little bit about how it is that you moving from Sydney, Australia going all the way over to the Big Apple to kind of help, I guess, disseminate the mantra of Zip's culture internationally.

Jen Mumford

Yeah, so it's really good point it was very intentional, and our Chief People and Culture Officer Anna Buber-Farovich is very much an innovator at heart and Anne has that DNA built into everything that she does.

How I like to think about; one I hate the word innovation just generally; I think you're either innovative or not and the moment you start kind of thinking about how we can be more innovative that kind of suggests that you're not.

But to me innovation is around not acknowledging barriers, and so certainly in this instance location is not a barrier and the traditions are not a barrier. I've worked for Kansas City USD but very different to New York, I don't have heaps of experience in that space, but I was the right person to help transfer our culture. I have the ambition and the drive and am excited about it with the Zip stuff and know our culture and being part of that scaling journey and so it was very much an easy and quick decision that was made by both the business, Anna, and myself. I think within a couple of weeks to be honest; it wasn't something that took a long period of time it was just right and that's how we kind of rock and roll here at Zip.

Ian Tyler

Yeah, absolutely and I guess it's given your background as well working with some fairly impressive start-ups that become scale ups, that become in some way certainly in the business community, somewhat household names. So when you think about how these type of companies scale and essentially the whole start up in inverted commas boom over the last few years is really kind of catapulted opportunity for people all over the world and kind of catapulted these businesses from an idea and a concept, to scaling internationally and when you do that the definition of culture gets stretched and therefore you get these micro cultures that start to get created and to be able to





impart what has been like the mothership and really disseminate that message internationally, must be an exciting prospect.

But I'm curious, what is it within start-ups and scale ups, I guess more generally that you would say that innovation just seems to be at its core is it because they're just unshackled from traditional business constructs?

Jen Mumford

Potentially. There is kind of a couple of different ingredients that I always like to think about it, the first one is people. So there's a certain type of people or person and leader that you employ. They have a different kind of mindset, comfort with ambiguity, the way that they solve problems is a little bit different.

The system in which people operate - so this is how do you make decisions, is it a lean hierarchy, is there comfort with failure and things like that; that stuff on the hardest one to try and drive is as you get bigger and scale it.

And then probably the less obvious one is - often when you start with the customer problem and then work backwards from there - I find that when's your true innovation, in inverted commas because I have to use the word, comes from. When you actually not thinking about what have I done in the past or this is how I've done it before and I'm just gonna bring in lift and shift this. If you start with the customer problem, work backwards from there, often that's where the magic happens and a lot of it isn't this Blue sky innovation, it's those 1 percenters everyday that actually make their lives that much better and products that much more valuable.

Ian Tyler

It's really interesting, I mean let's over the course of this discussion do our absolute best to avoid the word innovation. And let's play that game, because that will be quite a challenge for us, certainly for me.

Jen Mumford

Yeah, good luck!

Ian Tyler

But let's see if we can be a little bit more creative. I really am fascinated by this concept because when you think about customer problems and you think about, you know there was a saying, I can't remember who coined it unfortunately, that was "innovation is really just finding new ways to do old things or solve old problems"; which if you think about the business that you you're in now, with Zip, that certainly use one of those but it was also a particular gap in the market if you will or a customer need created the business that in turn creates an organisation to grow internationally.

And you touched on something there before about leadership and leaders allowing people to kind of foster that mindset. I think so, the word that we're not going to use in inverted commas of innovation, is about mindset. It's about being allowed to fail or being allowed to give something a go or being allowed to take a risk on something. Is that something that you've seen not just at Zip but in other businesses that you've worked in that have been these fast-scaling tech enabled businesses?

Jen Mumford

Yeah, so a big part is driven by founders and your kind of start up and scale up business and I love that founder entrepreneurial mindset 'cause often they inherently have to have that ability to not



acknowledge barriers along the way to have actually got to the point of creating a new business. And so that factor then flows throughout the business, just in the way that they reward and recognise and incentivize an action themselves, and certainly Safety Cultures founder Luke had that, Larry Diamond and Peter Grey at Zip also have that - but then that attracts a certain type of person as well and your early kind of founding team and they really set the tone culturally and going forward. And if I think about particularly with safety culture, a lot of the hires were very intentional around hiring people that did have experience in similar highly ambiguous start-up, scale-up and tech based because that really does help build and then shape your culture as well.

Ian Tyler

So you touched on around incentivizing, so you know does that culture of start-up and innovation, is that something that you see is not only encouraged but actually incentivized as part of the business construct? There is that space and that opportunity for people to go out and create and there's an incentive for them to do that?

Jen Mumford

Yeah, so I'm kind of a bit less explicit about it more in the context of I would then take that investment in, hire people who have done it before, who are going to then lead the way and set the tone, invest that time in breaking down bad ways of work or dumb things that we do - and then particularly your multiplier people in the business, so your product and code, and there might be some Rockstar recruiters, product and marketing team members, give them equity so they've actually got skin in the game and want to think a little bit differently about solving problems.

To your point around that space to do things, if I was to incentivise something, I'd incentivize people actually investing time in the ecosystem - because so many of the best ideas actually come from the tech community or what others are doing and sharing ideas or crowdsourcing ideas. And so often when you're stuck in the BAU and the monotony of the everyday you're not creating that space to bounce ideas and kind of get in touch with what some of the cool things other people are doing as well.

Ian Tyler

Yeah, no that's absolutely spot on. do you, I'm curious, in your experience as well that space, that collaboration component, do you or have you seen before where businesses are more open to collaborating with other teams from other companies about solving problems or do you find it certainly in the in the start-up community and tech start-up community it's more insular - or you know as businesses get bigger they tend to go outside and work with additional partners and maybe even buy in that kind of innovation style of thinking - so I'm curious as to what you've seen.

Jen Mumford

Yeah, so one of my favourite things, I started my career at Deloitte in their management consulting practise and the whole premises of Deloitte is that your IP is sacred and you can't share what you're doing with competitors 'cause that's what people buy - and what I loved about and love about the tech start-up community not just in Australia but globally is this whole concept of open sourcing and sharing knowledge very freely to benefit from each other - and the Australian tech start-up communities have been amazing from that perspective. I have invested a lot in that and get a heap out of it as well but I find that if only big companies and particularly in the people space, which is often confidential, if we all open source what we do we'd be a much better community, people would be doing much better work and we would probably be solving much bigger and better problems.

So I've loved that openness of the tech community, a lot of the time you're not direct competitors for talent but they are in very different problem spaces and then have that ability to kind of learn



from each other and the companies that are ahead of you in terms of the that scaling journey as well.

Ian Tyler

Yeah well and that's interesting 'cause yes it starts with people, yes it starts with technology and the idea and so on, which I totally agree with and we've touched on kind of mindset and space and creation of founders and when you think about that in terms of the applications that in the workplace certainly from a pure people perspective - that trust based approach to have ideas exchanged and collaborate - do you find that given your consulting days with Deloitte and then in this kind of start-up space that the idea exchange in a start-up environment is a lot more free flowing and more fluid versus the more traditional construct, does that make sense?

Jen Mumford

Yeah definitely, so I definitely I guess I have a great fun example where the Deloitte consulting exec actually came to safety culture to understand more around the DNA in the ways work and how they're attracting top talent and things like that, so I definitely think the corporate world is kind of catching on and realising that there's some magic going on and there's some more kind of deliberate and intentional forums there creating to share information, but it's not in the flow of work. So for example if my team was to design anything, we are revamping our global onboarding at the moment; step one is who within our networks both tech and not tech, can we reach out to, to share ideas with and get feedback from and pressure test some of the things that we are looking to do as well. We do that internally and externally, that's step one. It's not an after fact, it's not something three years later down the track that's just how we feel like a product team through our customers let's listen to them who was some of the best let's get some ideas pressure test it, ship something and then get feedback on it and you drive from there. But that's just how we operate and that doesn't just because we're not a tech team doesn't mean we don't operate that way the whole everyone at Zip has that kind of customer philosophy. We still have ways to go but that's this how we operate whereas big companies don't have luxury to do that or aren't structured that way.

Ian Tyler

That's right and there's a fear of change in all of that as well, it's like well we're not start up or a scale up so we probably shouldn't or can't do it that way because that's just not how we do things - that kind of fear change. Even though the inquisitiveness is there, and the curiosity is there to go and have a look at the application of leaning into those types of new ways of working or new ways of collaborating just aren't broadly accepted as being adopted or being able to be adopted into those types of businesses. Which I think is comes back to that mindset piece and also the will and desire to actually want to do something different and change.

I want to ask you something, I mean the last 18 months of everybody's life the vast majority of everybody's life had been obviously significantly impacted with COVID and you know how we're having this conversation today within the comfort of our own home and when you think about innovation and I'm not talking here about you know didgy drinks on the zoom call at 4:00 o'clock, hampers being sent out you know because that is heads and hearts you know engaging people and trying to have a bit of fun with things. When I think about the kind of environment that everybody is in and you think about the flexible workforces and you think about innovation being able to thrive in the context of everybody being somewhat physically disconnected what's your view on what the world is like right now with that and then you know your crystal ball and hypothesis for how collaboration, innovation and creativity will be able to kind of continue to grow and scale in light of what we've just all been through

Jen Mumford



Right yeah, there's kind of 2 parts to that question that I'll address separately. First one is people keep on talking about this future of work future or have all these fancy things within an app future where we're living it and so and there's a couple of key things that we're seeing at Zip that actually breaks down quite nice into three Cs:

There's big part on careers and So what is internal mobility look like how are you creating those opportunities internally this whole concept of the great resignation and nutritional this piece people are going to look for the next role why not make it in your own company and you don't have to be a big company just to enable that

Next ones around Care, so how you are actually looking after people such an adela came out last week and couldn't have put it better myself and cares the new currency and so this concept of how we actually like Wellness to me we've seen without people's healthy part of the total compensation package and so that's super important and to be top of mind and it's not just giving someone an like a Buddha bowl or things like that or yoga sessions it's well how do we have mental health conversations how do we really show up and support people you have to have the answers how do you equip your leaders to have those conversations in the flow of work

And then this connected pieces is the last one which you kind of touched on it as well which is around or there's a new wave of leadership your leadership of old where you kind of have comfort in your teams delivering because you can see what they're doing and the hours that they work and and these are the rituals of the role there in the same room like that's never going to be the future anymore if you're working at a company where people are doing their best work so you have to be a little bit more intentional about it Zips built new leadership principles in the stage of growth that were in but also in the market and environment in which were operating in and that to itself then answers the second part of the question well "how do we actually innovate in this new, this future work that we're living now?" and it comes with three things again but there's no great people and leaders that people table come working flexibly flexible work might actually give you better access to talent based on location or people that don't live in cities and so that's one that could work in your favour.

The big big one is around your systems and the environment in which you operate in so can we still make decisions effectively if we're not in the same room or if a flexible and you said that trust is there that safety around failing and there being no consequence or are people micromanagers and that trust dissipates when you're not face to face

And then he last went around the customers and this is the one that I'm actually quiet most interested in "has access to customers changed working flexibly or being remote?" because in the past we used to do a lot of like customer fireside will get customers in the office or customer meetings even in their sales teams and things like that a lot of that now is virtual does that mean better access does that mean less access and that's the real one the time keen to see play out I think we spend a lot of time talking about people and leadership and ways of work during this new remote or flexible work but we don't think a lot about the customer impact and so and that's probably the one I'm most curious about but you just really have to be more intentional and deliberate in everything you do in this highly kind of flexible and hybrid world.

Ian Tyler

In another podcast I create that I recorded a while ago and having a discussion around communication and how you know people want to consume communication and that kind of always on notion - just listening to what you were talking about there just made me think about that you know the three C's that you spoke to in that connection piece and then thinking about that in the



context of what you said about the customer access to customer access and how we communicate to customers now - with everything that we've all been through pretty much every customer I've spoken to has seen the inside of my lounge room my study, have met my dog, seen my wife or my daughter or whatever it might be and occasionally met the postman who's come knocking on the door as well.

So what I find interesting about this whole scenario and the access to customer pieces because it's been such a wonderful leveller everybody's in the same kind of boat or as I was corrected when I said this to somebody before they said "everybody is living this slightly differently so maybe we're all in the same ocean but not necessarily in the same boat" because this is you know some people have really thrived throughout this and other people have struggled. So you know it has been a wonderful leveller because there isn't any anybody that hasn't been impacted through test but I find that access to customer piece for me is actually being easier.

Because for me the conversations have been so much more cut to the chase, it's the preamble and the get to know you, straight away you're in an environment which is your home or their home and that kind of breaking down the barrier or facade or wrapper of a relationship that you're going to forge happens a lot quicker is what I found in my own experience; what do you say to that?

Jen Mumford

Yeah I like that, it's the humanising factor. It's the true vulnerability when you've got a child screaming in the background or you partner blow drying their hair or your living in a God knows how many apartment level building like myself and the doorbell rings and the Auspost person won't come back, so you have to go get it - and so you can be mid interview and have to pause and go down and get it - there is a real humanising factor and so how then do we take the best parts of it and then couple that with the best parts of connection when you are actually face to face and instead of us all hanging around the office working it might be that when you are there together it's so intentional that we're spending real quality time together I'm excited to see what that looks like and I have no doubt it will be kind of a moving base that we continue to kind of work on and a mend along the way.

Ian Tyler

I actually think that the word that we're trying desperately to avoid, I actually think that will see an unprecedented level of new ways of doing things because people have been given the ability, the authority, the empowerment, the time and the space to actually give it ago

I think there was a there was a beautiful written article that I read in the Harvard Business Review sometime ago which was innovation at its core is the willingness to experiment but be highly disciplined - you know so I really like the notion of that and I think that because this scenario that we've all been in at the 3C model that you talk about and be disciplined be really really generous with your time but be really specifically generous with your time, so as you can be disciplined, so as productivity can increase and output can increase and all these things again I find this whole notion quite an interesting world to explore.

Jen Mumford

Yeah the thing that I'm most excited to see is often the best ideas come from pain or situations where there you're kind of in a hard situation and it's the only way out and I think that there's a huge kind of shadow part of the impact of the pandemic that more hidden component that we



haven't seen, a lot of people that are probably in an in strife and struggling or stood down or indifferent work arrangements and from there like after the Great Depression and the financial crisis and things like that, often that's when some of the best ideas actually come from and Zip story is actually off the back of the GFC where both are two founders and what either impacted in their roles or weren't happy in what they were doing and thought there must be a better way and that's where the whole concept around Zip money, Zip pay and then now what a global ten region almost a thousand person company is this driving from which is pretty cool.

Ian Tyler

It's very cool is very cool and you know it's an amazing story to see every day every week every month unfolding as well so I think it's I think it's very exciting. I want to kind of ask a question here and this is this is for me personally but also for the listeners of this, which is a very deliberate question if you will, and it's more about do you feel that there is a specific and deliberate way that anybody who's listening to this this podcast could actually sit there as a team leader, manager, an individual contributor, could say through listening to this I've got some takeaways; those takeaways on how we can fundamentally start to grow and implement or foster a culture of innovation or something that encourages us to think different, do different, be different. Are there some deliberate and specific actions that you think people within these businesses are listening to this could actually apply?

Jen Mumford

So well apart from one, workout who your customers are. If you're in an internal role that doesn't mean you don't have customers, your internal customers are employed at my customers at Zip. So one, understand who your customers are. If you haven't spoken to your customers or not speaking to your customers every week start doing that and you'll be surprised what you hear. My favourite question is "magic wand what's one thing that you'd fix?" it's always a good starting point that's one. The second one would be I like to call it a wall of pain or dumb things that we do or things like that; do a session with your team, what are some other things that you that make you so mad or so angry or really upset you annoy you every day let's word vomit them out and let's come up with ideas on how to fix them let's prioritise them maybe pick like 1/1 as a team every week or every other week to start cracking on with but it's always a little one percenters or like what's that 1% of the they were doing this week thinking about little things that you can do that then overtime actually build up to much more incremental bodies of change. The third one and final one but it would be who you speaking with outside of your company to get good ideas or what are you listening to is that concept of investing in the ecosystem and so who are you reaching out to. When I first joined safety culture, I wasn't a career HR person and so I went on a mission I said every other week I was gonna meet someone cool in the tech space or people space to learn something new and it was my personal KPI and then extended that to my team and the amount of ideas and things that I learned along the way or just that space to disconnect from work and think about an knew things or challenge how I was thinking about things was incredibly valuable. So start with customer, big ball of pain / word vomit session where you can take some ideas from, and then also thinking about meeting new people, reading new things and then setting a personal KPI if you're a goal driven person like myself.

Ian Tyler

Yeah absolutely love that, I think there's something in there for everybody certainly for me so I'll be squirrelling those away for myself personally, thank you Jen.

Jen Mumford

What about you Ian? Is the company that you work at or in the space that you're in, what are some of the things that you would recommend if someone wants to take away some things to do differently, what would you say?



Ian Tyler

Yeah, I see what you did there that's very good of you, know that put me on the spot. So I think the big one for me it comes down to in many ways it runs for everything that you've just said it comes down to communication it's communicate with your people communicate with your customers it's communicate I mean in our world we've got the customer is the candidate given that we're global recruitment business so if you're communicating with clarity and setting the right level of expectation but allowing people space and time to think for that creativity to grow there's nothing greater than being awarded that time and space to grow and communicate with clarity, you'd be amazed at what kind of things can occur

Also I'm a massive believer in this this notion of cognitive diversity so bringing people from different walks alive to solve a problem that you're grappling with. There's no reason why somebody in the payroll team can't actually help somebody in the sales team there's no reason why somebody in sales can't help somebody in marketing and vice versa and on it goes and I think the more we encourage that cognitive diversity, you know different people coming to help solve new problems or old problems, I think that is where you start to really build culture and layers of culture to make it really tight and really fibrous that will just go on and supersede any one person because it would just be how you do things, which is what cultures all about.

It is that kind of ambiguous notion of it's a feeling, it's the vibe and that's the whole idea of his podcast series is it's a vibe, it is a thing it's something that companies do there isn't a playbook per se comes from peoples experiences those experiences to your point about meet new people that you wouldn't typically have engaged if you deliberately went and did that you're learning new things and you bring an element of that even if it's a tiny 1% into a new environment and how you apply that with different people and you share that knowledge you're laying and layering different fibres of the culture that enable businesses to thrive. so that would be my kind of my take on things for sure for sure.

Jen Mumford

I always find that people don't know where to start and the easiest way I've found to frame it is experiment with that, call it a pilot and so then you have an excuse if it doesn't work. That's cool I was just experimenting this is the lesson learned we know that this doesn't work.

Ian Tyler

Exactly and well it's it's interesting that you say that the kind of experimentation because in the same Harvard Business Review article I read probably about two years ago is that tolerance for failure is OK but no tolerance for incompetence, so fail real quick.

Jen Mumford

I think I live by those principles maybe.

Ian Tyler

Which is really interesting, I think what I'd like to do is say thank you very very much Jen Mumford for joining us in this conversation today I think it's been really interesting, every time I have a conversation with you I get something out of it I feel like you always give you're all. I always feel like I've got a little bit of something and everybody will get certainly a piece of gold from this discussion so I'm immensely grateful that you've been so generous with your time I really am. So what I'd like to do is say thank you very much I will give you the rest of your day to go about doing all things it





and thank you graciously once again on behalf of Talent. So what I'd like to say for everybody listening now is that thank you very much for joining us in this podcasts we hope that you've got some really interesting takeaways and insights and you know theories and things that you can just apply I certainly do encourage you to think about some of the things that Jennifer's been really generous in sharing with us today and I think there's something in there for everybody I really encourage you all to go back and take some of these things into your business so if you got any further questions or would like to know more please get in touch with us via talents website talentinternational.com or reach out and connect directly on LinkedIn thank you very much.

Jen Mumford

Ian, I've got one last thing to say, making sure for your listeners, it to try to have no more 0 days so it's making sure that every day you're doing something to be a little bit better but no more 0 days.

Ian Tyler

Love that love that, beautiful thanks.

