

Remote Work Culture Ideas to Build Strong Connections

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Ginny Bianco-Mathis, Mitch Simon, Sharon Koifman

Mitch Simon 00:10

Welcome to another episode of team anywhere where CEOs, leaders and experts at building teams, companies, organizations, and amazing cultures

Ginny Bianco-Mathis 00:22

share how to lead from anywhere in the world. I'm your co host on the East Coast, Jim Bianco Mathis,

Mitch Simon 00:28

and I'm your co host on the West Coast, Mitch Simon. And we invite you to join us team anywhere. Today, our guest is Sharon cofman, author of surviving remote work as the founder of distant job, a company that finds global remote talent. He has over a decade of experience finding, hiring and creating great cultures through unique ways of building connectivity and trust. We've all seen the statistics that show that remote work provides greater productivity. Our guest agrees that productivity is great, but what Sharon provides in the podcast is how to build greater employee long jeopardy. Hello, and welcome to another episode of team anywhere. I'm your co host Mitch Simon on the west coast. It's a pretty gray gray day, but I'm on the west coast. And then there's my co host. My the amazing Dr. Ginni Bianco maphis.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis 01:35

Nice here, and it's nice, they better not host on the east coast.

Mitch Simon 01:38

And we are so excited. So excited to have Sharon Kaufman, on our show from Montreal, Canada. Wow. And Sharon, you're going to tell us all about you. I know you're a writer. You're are you? You've started a company called distant job. You have a podcast. We'll get into that in detail. How are you today? Sharon?

Sharon Koifman 02:02

I am doing fantastic. And the good news is that for once in one show, The weather's also great.

Mitch Simon 02:08

Oh my god,

Sharon Koifman 02:09

it's beautiful. sunny outside. I'm looking forward to this interview to run outside.

Mitch Simon 02:14

Yeah, it does not. So I, I helped for the listeners. I was born in Montreal. And as soon as I was born, my parents said, we're out of here. You know, and so yeah, so I live in Southern California. And they and we love it here. So yeah, so let's make this fast. Okay, so Sharon, tell us your story.

Sharon Koifman 02:33

We are a recruitment agency that specialize in distributed people across the world. Right. So so this is a big differentiate, outsource company, they take on projects they take on them, or they have an allocated office where there are people, and they want to keep them busy. We start from fresh every time you have a job description, we take care of you. And we go to the world to head on this individual. Now what in the world? Go ahead,

Ginny Bianco-Mathis 03:01

sir. No, no, I'm sorry. And those people are people that will work remotely? Yes. Because the companies you're working for are remote organizations. Yes. So that when you ensure that those people then have the appropriate mindset, talent skills, I, I am working remotely because I like it. And that's how you get the best of me.

Sharon Koifman 03:30

I'm sure it's a big word. We're not in short, we're in the people's business, there's always a chance that the person is is not good. We find amazing people. We're like a local recruitment agency. Do you ever job description? What are you people, it's up to the client to interview them, it's up to the client to do what they do. It's just remote. You just just like we are seeing each other's face, turn on the zoom and interview the person exactly like you would interview a local individual.

Mitch Simon 03:58

Great. And so do you have a special relationship with the people that you're finding Are you you're just you're finding people who are coming to you as as would a company who is finding its own people that would work on site.

Sharon Koifman 04:13

That's exactly it. We do not have relationship based on the client. We create a relationship becoming the the HR manager for the for those companies, assuming they choose to add this value, but in the beginning, we solicit them like any other recruitment agency, we just have the capacity to do it in a more bigger scale in a more a more distributed scale across the world.

Mitch Simon 04:38

That's great. So I guess my next question, I feel like such an such a beginner at this. And obviously, you know, sure, and you've been doing this for a long time, I guess, you know, 10 years ago, the traditional business would I don't need you because everyone who I'm going to hire, they're going to be in my office and now around If I have figured this out, I'm gonna probably maybe hire all my people who

never come to my office, or I might hire some of my people who never come to my office, and how am I gonna go find those people? I would have to find a guy like Sharon, to help me do that.

Sharon Koifman 05:17

Look, recruitment industry has existed for a long time. So even when you're in a local, in a local environment, you sometimes need to hire a recruitment agency. This is a multi billion dollar industry, that when we change the game, we're saying, well, you don't need to hire locally, we will find you exceptional talent across the world. This is the big change. This is the big change that we created 12 years ago, when we said, Hey, why don't you just hire local people, the world is big, you have a much bigger pool of town to choose from, which means you have to, which means it indirectly makes you It gives you the ability to find better people and find them faster. Other than incredible value. And incredible value. I

Mitch Simon 06:01

think that's the word today incredible. The two words today's incredible value. Okay, so, Sharon, you've been doing this for quite a while. Obviously, the world's turned a little bit a year ago. It sounds like you're already ahead of the curve. But is there anything that surprised you over the last year?

Sharon Koifman 06:19

Ah, so. So you know, this is actually a challenge. When I wrote my book, also about remote management, suddenly, I needed to hit challenges that are not just remote related that COVID related so one leg for To give you an example, one of the biggest advice that I give is that you need it for mental health sake as a remote employee, you need to book your social activities at the same level that you book, your your business meetings, right and becomes a top priority to take care of because when you're when you're working remotely, you're suddenly you get stuck at home. And you forget that you have that you you have a social life even when you went to the office. you booked your your buddies going for lunch for happy hour to for a squash game. I have a friend that would go into scoldings running, and during lunchtime, that was an experience and you move home and you suddenly forget about that experience. And my answers to you is what prevents you from emailing the same people and go for lunch, go for happy hour, go for that run gone. It's the same thing. Although you have a lot more time as a remote employee, but suddenly COVID came as like, Yeah, but I can't go for lunch because the restaurants are closed. Right? So, so a little bit, so I needed to give advice. Okay, open your balcony, tried to do something, get creative. We COVID but COVID has created a new layer of challenge how to stay sane in this in this remote environment, which I've answered before everything, but it isn't your layer of complication.

Mitch Simon 08:05

That's great. I'm sure um, during the winter going out on your balcony in Montreal was probably not a good idea. Well,

Sharon Koifman 08:11

I bought I bought a fire. I bought an outdoor fireplace I bought okay. I made an outside heaven in my, in my, in my in my balcony. So the answer is yes. Yes. You can.

Mitch Simon 08:27

Yes, yes, you can. All right.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis 08:29

Have you found up because of the pandemic different kinds of companies now coming to you because they now have decided they have to go more virtual and hybrid?

Sharon Koifman 08:42

I have the big boys I have the big companies come to me and no, this was not even like they didn't even take me they couldn't even write what in every in every location and we don't need out rumbled you don't need you sir. Oh

Ginny Bianco-Mathis 09:09

wow. And it's talking to really big companies these days is like Okay, show me you know, it's sort of like Gee, I hate to say it but the technic worked in your favor.

Sharon Koifman 09:25

Hey guys, I don't want to celebrate I don't want to sell No not

Ginny Bianco-Mathis 09:28

at all right? emerged

Sharon Koifman 09:33

yes that people understand people finally understand the incredible value of

Mitch Simon 09:40

great you know, I'm Can you give us before I want to ask you about your new book, which is surviving remote work, but before we get to that, you've kind of raised it the big boys. I'd love for you to kind of share with us. You know, you'd have to share any names but how are one of these big boys or Big Girls right? How are one of these big boys working with you As they're dipping their toe in the water, because they're, you know, their their history is everyone comes to my office or several laps around the world. How do you work with them, so they can help figure out how to do this.

Sharon Koifman 10:13

So the interesting thing is that I'm a general small to medium size solution. Enterprise only recently, we started having those discussions, but the few enterprise clients that we have, it's usually a specific department within the company approaches me. So it's not the CEO I you know, Bill Gates never talks to Bill Gates that people I ever

Mitch Simon 10:38

kill his pitch right now. Right on the news? Yes.

Sharon Koifman 10:42

Yes, that's it. But but but the but the but I manager of a department comms is, Oh, my God, I need people. Right. Right. So certain companies grow a lot, especially on the technology, some, some strength, some grow. And the some of the companies that really grew and COVID as I Oh my God, we need people. Okay, I got it remote is not so evil. Let's give it a try. And it's usually those individuals, those head engineer are the mini CTO, not the big CTO, but the, the technology manager of the department said, Okay, what do we need to do, I will get an approval from my HR management, go ahead, start. And our processes, learn about the company, the job description, the culture, the value, and we go and we talk about it. So this is a it's never yet. I've never yet to talk to the head head guy of a massive enterprise. But we slowly kind of wrap up one department at a time.

Mitch Simon 11:44

Wow, it's Yeah, it's it's great again, it's just fun. You know, Jenny, just when you thought we knew everything, you know, here comes along at a place where you can find people who are remote, you know, and

Ginny Bianco-Mathis 11:59

definitely, definitely, yeah, it's making me think of a whole lot of

Mitch Simon 12:04

situations here. Yeah, make sure there's a guy out there and called Sharon could solve my problem. Just get people from wherever they are. I mean, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis 12:16

And Sharon, and we think that maybe, especially the big boys, the big boys, and girls, I should know better, but should may, may start to say, well, we need to have this in house. So that just might also open the doors for you, you know, training, you know, cadres all over

Sharon Koifman 12:41

boys and Big Girls and Big Girls are girls is that appropriate term? From what I understand the gala?

Mitch Simon 12:46

Gala. Thank you. Thank you,

Sharon Koifman 12:48

I guess. Yes, you know, I have two little girls, my focus is for them to, to kick some butt in the future. I want them I want to give them the biggest advantage possible so so the so the big boys in the big house, uh, usually build their own departments internally. It's, it's, it's never specifically my target market, target market from here and the medium sized companies. Those are, those are the people who don't want to have an officer operation in every single corner. Got it? And this is really this is really my big wins.

Mitch Simon 13:28

Yeah, love it. Okay. I want to know, Okay, tell us about your book. So you you launched a book. I saw it on Amazon. And what's what's fine. Have you seen a genie, but it's basically a cartoon version of

Sharon. I think he's wearing flip flops. So if anyone hasn't seen Sharon Sharon, I used to have red hair and a red beard. Sharon, still thank God is young and has a red hair and red beard. So it's a picture of Sharon, a cartoon version of Sharon. And the book is called surviving Rome remote work. Why is this book so important?

Sharon Koifman 14:04

Why is this book software look, we this this is not just a discussion of COVID This is a discussion event remote has brought so much more productivity to companies remote as created happier and more independent people. And this is not me. This is an MIT Sloan research as shown, right events that there is that there is happier and more independent people and there's tons of tons of if you're going to cocoa, you will see that people are producing 77% more on on their on all their jobs. And this and people realizing that this is a necessity. And once once you get to the point that you understand that this is the necessity, right? We, we need to figure out how to do this right? survivor remote work is that book for both the managers and the workers, usually I believe that the company is only as good as their management. But I talk a lot about companies that are not getting it right. And if you're a worker, you can potentially become the next manager. This is not just an opportunity to be an effective remote worker, it's an opportunity to be the next superstar in the company and to be potential than the next a manager. This is what I'm providing. In surviving remote work. Of course, it's all about building trust, creating an amazing culture, creating more productive people. making it fun, and and making your company exciting that people more people want to work for that is and do this while managing, maintaining a house with kids and

Mitch Simon 16:02

lots of good stuff. Great. And I wanted to I love that statistic. You mentioned cocoa, it's so it's cocoa cloud, they said that remote workers are 77% more productive. And 23% are willing to work more hours and even said that workers would actually be willing to I think I can't remember was 23% was around 20%, who would actually prefer a lower wage in order that they can actually work from home, which is really cool. So let me ask you, in your book, you just mentioned how you how you really keep your company culture alive remotely. And I really want to know what you say in your book on how to keep that culture alive when whenever one is not there.

Sharon Koifman 16:48

So first of all, company culture is a funny thing. I people like to throw that idea around a lot day. But yeah, I have a great culture, I have a great culture. But when it comes to really defining what it is, people are having a real challenge. I mean, if you go on Wikipedia, investopedia or anywhere that definitions are so long, and so complicated, I can't I don't remember them by heart. But it's, it's a mouthful. And when people think about culture, they'll just think about this Google culture where people sit on the beanbags, having appy hour playing ping pong, and apparently are super, super productive. And you don't know how I thought that, too, in order to create a good culture, you need to start with a better definition with a clearer definition. And I did that I spent I spent a year analyzing, researching how do I define culture in order to accomplish it, because once you understand a practical definition, you don't need to do things just for the sake of doing you don't need to have the biggest party in the world to have a wonderful culture. So my definition of company culture is about creating connection. connection between you and the company, connection between people or colleagues across the company, which

create a better teamwork and connection between the client and the candidate, the employee and the client. Once you have that word, you're already goal oriented. To see what you're trying to achieve, you're no longer focusing on creating the biggest party in the world, you're focusing on creating connection. So for a long time, I remember I tried to create zoom parties, right, and it just everybody comes, bring your drink, bring coffee, bring beer. And it was a lot of fun for four or five times and we still do it once or twice a year. But after the fifth time, we just got old so quickly. And so and and my my VP at the time, and this is this is not working anymore. And instead what I realized that intimate one on ones were so much more powerful. So we implemented an app called donuts on our slack. We use slack as our charting solution and randomly connects people. You get you get doughnuts. I do donuts. We're obsessed with donuts

Mitch Simon 19:27

right now. implemented donut because we I think we talked about donut on one of our earlier.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis 19:33

Yeah, yeah.

Sharon Koifman 19:34

So donut, there's been a huge success. I still personally run a hang up in my managers. One on one having drinks. It's this intimate level is so important. So the drinks on zoom is not so bad. The Zoom party is at least for me and effective. Maybe somebody else does manage to create connection with it. I'm not against that. But the idea is that your your thought process when you Greek culture is not about how do I make the biggest party the most fun company is how do I create the connection? I love that.

Mitch Simon 20:07

I think we were separated at birth. That's just that's just kind of it all of us know, it's another teacher, you know, talking I guess it's magic. So can you give us some idea of of my love? I love We both love the idea about creating connection? How does a leader keep a team united in a in a in a remote setting, you know, route situation? You know, what is he or she now do under these new circumstances?

Sharon Koifman 20:44

So, one, I mean, there's unlimited advice. One of the strongest advice that I that I discovered was all about building trust. Now, trust is another one of those cliché words that I use, and I try to deconstruct cliché terms. So it's not just Cooper culture through other things, but for trust actually, is not a question whether I can trust my employees to do a certain things, of course, I should trust because I interview them. And I hired them. And they went through a process that that generated potentially that trust, the trust that I'm talking about, is whether my police can trust me. It is, this is the big one. Could my employees come to me? And tell me that they don't understand something? Without without a penalty? Come on, please come to me, and call me an idiot? Because I did something really wrong with me take it. This is this is this is constructive? I mean, I need it. You're right. Could my employees trust me to say anything that is on their mind, without any consequences? This is, this is my Moto, this is I live, I live on building that trust. And if there's any manager in my company that is running that trust that it eliminates that consistency. Because anytime that one of my managers or me, but I don't I really became, if if

there's anything strong above me is I don't lose temper. I lose it after I go run. Right? I don't lose my temper. Because I know that every time that I do, it will cost me three months of trust building time.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis 22:42

You did you did explain that so well, in terms of one that you're meaning of culture, and then to you even define trust, and then it's a course through you role modeling that, that your folks are going to get a sense of that and, and move in that same direction? Do you also come right out and say, Hey, here's how I define culture. What do you all think? Can we all buy into that? Here's how I define trust. And the only reason I'm bringing that up is I find some people actually needed spelled.

Sharon Koifman 23:21

So here's, here's the interesting thing, here's what happened to culture for me. Because culture is a huge focus. And in my management process, and in the beginning, again, through a lot of experimenting, and I use my company as almost a research lab in management. And, and so in the beginning, I spelled it out. You know, I literally say we're a nerdy company, we like we were fans of, of Star Wars and Star Trek and gaming's we are and we dress this way and that I went and we're all about trust, and we are astral free environment and when I would spell them out. And what I've discovered is that I'm not in control. If I, if I give my employees that they're the ability, if I build a trust in within my company that they can say anything, they can take their own initiative, they can be independent, something I lost control over the culture, it's no longer mine. It's a you know, it ends up being I tried to sell to other people to clients and everything. Here's what happened. Here's the conclusion of this entire process, but there's people in the company that took charge of it, then all I can do is just let them know that Hey, you got my supports. And every time we bring every time we bring a new employee, you guys are part of the interview process. To make sure that this person is a fit within your culture. That's right. We don't answer my values. I have specific values and still asshole free environment, mistake friendly environment building trust environment. Otherwise, you don't want to you prefer Star Wars over Star Trek, which I think is a complete sin. By the way, Ryan, I don't understand. How does anybody think the Star Wars is better than Star Trek, but I've just percent of it around that one, right. But But apparently, my company became a star wars kind of company. Right? And I, and I'm not in control. And it is what it is. And I wear it now for a fourth of whatever that date it is that that this Star Wars Day that just happened like two weeks ago, I where a daddy does Darth Vader Oh, I

Ginny Bianco-Mathis 25:57

was gonna ask you about that. What you've explained is the journey of making that happen. At first, you did speak about it a lot, then you planted the seed and your culture grew around it. And they are the force now. Just so new people come in, they get interviewed by your folks, and they feel it.

Sharon Koifman 26:23

Yeah, look, there's something very powerful. And it worked for me, I don't know if it works for everybody else, you know, my brother runs a company, four times the size of mine, any things that I'm in lala land, right. So I don't know if it works for everybody. But for me, treating my employees, as an entire three dimensional being has been incredibly, incredibly successful for me. It really worked. And he gave me and the big difference between my type of company and those other successful companies that are more micromanage, and more, the more it's very boss centric environment, we know that they succeed,

we see them all the time, but they work twice as hard. That's the only thing that I can see. I'm not saying that I have the formula to to build a bigger company than the micro managers, because some of those micro managers really, really succeed. But I run a happier company, and a company that demands less of me to small fun. Yes. And it's not it's I find is great. But fun is not happiness. Right? It goes much, much deeper than that. Right? It is peaceful, feeling fulfilled and happier. And that's, and that's a huge deal. So

Mitch Simon 27:52

now, is there a shroom? Before we, before we end this amazing conversation? Are there any questions we should have asked you to really support our listeners on how to really succeed with a remote company.

Sharon Koifman 28:05

And one of the big differences is the discussion of mental health. This is when you sending people home, right, they might be more productive, they might be more independent, they're potentially happier if infrastructure allowed it because the research shows that majority people are happier, but it also opens up to some serious mental health issues. And now the manager needs to become a little bit of a therapist. And I'm not asking for managers to get degrees in therapy or to become real professional therapists. What I'm asking for managers is to get more intimate with with you spend more time in meetings talking about how is your weekend, fight Hangouts. And like I said, we're the culture Hangout, have drinks, have chitchat talk about normal things. Because when you talk when you get to learn about their kids, and the pets and the wife, you get to see if they're getting burnt out. You get to see if they're really suffering at home, if they're lonely, you you get to see things you have to proactively get intimate with your employees to see if they're not just productive in the short term. Are they going to be productive in the long term? So it's not just about productivity? It's also about longevity. Excellent, right. Yeah.

Mitch Simon 29:36

Well, that's great. Now where can all of our listeners find us around?

Sharon Koifman 29:40

So you'll find me and in many places first, write me on opposition, buying my book, surviving remote work. You can find me at my recruitment agency, different job. It's Sharon at distant job calm. And question. I'm an open book. I'm always happy to help people with their needs. You can Find me or more my team at think remote comm This is our media company, where we all talk about everything remote management and, and remote work and the remote industry and everything all about it. And soon you're going to talk to me in that in our, what we're building right now HR management company and barrel and everything. So we've got so good in HR, that we're creating it an independent service and in demand software, but we're not there yet. It's going to take several months for that. Okay, great. All the questions you can find exciting,

Mitch Simon 30:35

so great. So buy his book, surviving remote work, find him at distant job calm, and for even more on remote work. Go to think remote.com Sharon, this has been fantastic. I think you need to go outside

because you're already Montreal is probably the only great day of the year only great day. Yes. Right here. And so to all of our listeners, do check out all of Sharon's resources. And if you've liked this episode, or all of our episodes, please share them with your friends and colleagues. And we're gonna sign out Jenny on the east coast and on the west coast, and we'll see you on the next episode of team anywhere