

THE **NEW** BAZAAR

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EPISODE 18: A HOPEFUL VISION OF WORK

JULIA POLLAK ON THE FUTURE OF THE WORKPLACE

CARDIFF GARCIA: Hi, I'm Cardiff Garcia. And this is The New Bazaar. Coming up on today's show.

JULIA POLLAK: I'm very excited about the remote work revolution. I think it will stick.

CG: Julia Pollak on a hopeful vision for the future of work.

Before we begin, a couple of quick and exciting announcements. First, we are planning to do a special end-of-year episode in a couple of weeks, and it's gonna be an ask Cardiff and meet Aimee episode, where you can send in questions for me about the economy or anything else. And we'll play your question on the show, and I'll answer it. So email us those questions to hello@bazaaraudio.com, and preferably send your question in the form of a voice memo so that we can play it. Again, that's hello@bazaaraudio.com.

And I'll be joined for that episode by our mysterious executive producer, Aimee Keane, who will be in front of the mic to moderate. And also, she and I will give you a kind of behind the scenes look at what we're doing with the show and with our company. And second, transcripts. Aimee and I have launched a website for our company, Bazaar Audio, and we have started posting transcripts for The New Bazaar podcast episodes, in case those are of interest to you. You can find them at bazaaraudio.com, where you can also learn more about us and about the other kinds of work that we do. Check it out.

Today's show is about the future of work, but before understanding what could happen in the future, it's first necessary to understand just how weird the present situation for work has been during the time of COVID. For one thing, the effects of the pandemic are, obviously, still with us. There are millions of fewer people employed right now than before the pandemic. And a key reason seems to be not that the jobs aren't there, aren't available, but that so many of those jobs are still too dangerous, and workers are staying away. And other workers are choosing not to take those jobs, perhaps because they have kids or relatives they have to care for right now.

And still other workers might just be waiting for a better opportunity to come along than the ones they have right now, because at the same time, there are millions more job openings, available jobs than before the pandemic, which means that companies are really struggling to find workers. And you can see that in how wages are going up, especially for low-income workers. And there are nearly record high numbers of people who are quitting their jobs to take new jobs, or just because they're confident that they'll be able to find a better new job soon.

So the labor market has been tighter than, I think, a lot of people might have expected given the shock of the pandemic. And this shock has also led to a ton of experimentation in new and different ways to work. Working from home, working remotely, that is the most obvious example, but also there have been new kinds of automation that have taken the place of some old jobs. More people are starting their own businesses now. And some companies are also trying out a four-day work week.

Other companies have also started trying new ways of recruiting workers. But will all this experimentation last? And what policy decisions and what societal changes are needed for it to last? And even if it does last, how will that fundamentally change the labor market and how we think about the nature of work itself?

The future of work is something that our guest, Julia Pollak, is especially interested in. And in fact, it's why I wanted to speak with her. Julia is the chief economist at ZipRecruiter, which is an online site where companies can post their available jobs, and job seekers can, hopefully, find them. And the data that she has access to at her job, the ZipRecruiter data, also ends up giving Julia the chance to see what's going on in the labor market in close detail and in ways that most of us just can't.

How we work and how we think about work is something I'm just kind of endlessly fascinated by. And I really enjoyed this chat with Julia, which I hope is just the first of many chats on this topic, because it is a topic that affects our lives in so many significant ways. Here it is.

CG: Julia Pollak, welcome to The New Bazaar.

JP: Thanks so much for having me on the show.

CG; So, the future of work, have you always been like a futurist type? Uh, are you a sci-fi person? What got you into this topic?

JP: Ah, it's interesting. You know, I, I love stories. The reason... We, we were talking before the show about, uh, Guy Raz's How I Built This.

CG: Yeah, Julia, for our listeners who don't know who Guy Raz is, he's a very popular and really excellent podcast host who has launched and hosted podcasts for NPR and for other places. And the one you're referring to specifically, How I Built

This, is all about how entrepreneurs successfully built up their super successful companies.

JP: I think the reason I so love his podcast and, and the book he put together with, with all of those stories is that these are the stories of explorers of, uh, heroic battles against naysayers and against bureaucracy, and against, uh, litigious rivals. Uh, and, and they're about the civic virtue that we really need to cultivate as a nation if we want to get to the future of work, if we want to improve things and shake things up.

I think the, the story of people battling the odds, defying the odds and their circumstances, uh, have always really inspired me. Uh, it's 'cause I come from, from South Africa, a place with very high unemployment and with low productivity growth, where I've seen individuals really rise up a- against the odds and become successful entrepreneurs and lift up their entire neighborhoods.

CG: Wow. That's a very inspiring kind of backstory for, for this particular interest, but it also lines up beautifully with your actual job with what you do every single day.

JP: I think that's, that's why I'm here. 'Cause, uh, I've seen how important it is for people to get jobs and for people to become entrepreneurs and, and hire others.

CG: Yeah. To stay on this theme of entrepreneurship, one of the things that has shocked a lot of people who follow the economy and follow the labor market is that throughout COVID, there's been, like, this huge increase in startups and people who start new companies. And I think there's a few potential reasons for it that are sometimes given by economists. One is that a lot of people were maybe just forced into starting a business, either because they lost their jobs or maybe because COVID just made their lines of work too dangerous.

But add that to the fact that since the start of COVID, a lot of spending opportunities have just gone away or went away for a little while because so much stuff closed up, you know, like restaurants and movie theaters, a lot of stores were closed. And so people were able to save more money that might be used as, like, startup capital to start a business.

And, of course, there was economic policy, which was helpful, I think, in the sense that there were these big fiscal packages under both President Trump, and President Biden, and two different congresses, that got a lot of money directly to households. And obviously, of course, interest rates have remained quite low, so people can afford to borrow money really cheaply if they need to.

And so my question for you is this, do you think that this big, and to a lot of people, I think, frankly, shocking rise in entrepreneurship since the start of COVID is something that's gonna last? Or do you think it'll just be a one-off thing?

JP: So I do think this is the result of the radical change, this massive shock that we experienced during the pandemic, but that shock led us to do things that unleashed, uh, entrepreneurship and dynamism that we should have done years before. So it led to faster FDA approvals. It led to less red tape preventing telemedicine. We, we just ran over those Medicare, Medicaid rules, preventing medicine, uh, from being practiced across state lines. We saw these massive investments in research on mRNA technology that'll have spillovers for, for years to come.

So I think some of the changes that we made were very exciting and could actually lead to an increase in entrepreneurship for the long-term, if we understand how beneficial some of, of those changes have been, and we preserve them. It's very difficult to leave the security of a job with a regular paycheck and to branch off into the unknown and become an entrepreneur.

Uh, especially as a society becomes wealthier, people become more risk averse often. In a normal year, there are only 20 million layoffs. So only 20 million people are pushed out of that comfort. But in 2020, there were over 40 million layoffs. And you know what was waiting for them on the other end? Upwork, Etsy, Instagram, YouTube TikTok, Robinhood. All of these technologies were there waiting for them and giving them opportunities to become contractors and freelancers.

And the- and these companies are now competing to help people become entrepreneurs and to become successful. Facebook just said it would invest a billion dollars in rewarding creators. TikTok is committed to spending two billion to support creators. All these technologies existed before the pandemic, but I think people were kind of scared to, to use them and go it alone. Women in particular have traditionally been sort of, uh, reluctant to move into self-employment and entrepreneurship. We're, we're just less risk loving, you know, according to a whole huge, enormous body of research.

But a lot of people just got pushed by layoffs or by having to supervise Zoom school to do things differently. So women are now 80% of new sellers on, on Etsy. They're 84% of social media influencers. And I don't think that trend is going to change anytime soon.

CG: Yeah. And I mean, you, you make this point about how more people have been leaving, like, stable jobs. And it seems like that's also kind of combining with a turbocharging of trends that had existed before the pandemic. Uh, to give you a very simple example, uh, Aimee Keane, the executive producer of this podcast, and I, we started this podcast production and consulting company having left very stable jobs, uh, Aimee at the Financial Times, and me at NPR. But we're able to do this, in part because of the advancement of all these different kinds of telecommunications technologies.

In other words, podcasting for one thing, but also just, like, the ability of- that, that we have now that you and I can speak. You know, I'm in New York, you're in California.

The connection is really sound, and it's easy to transfer these files back and forth after we speak to put it together into a nice little package.

And it also raises the issue that, like, the industries that have seen a lot of these startups have been the ones that have been disrupted by the pandemic. For example, one of the biggest industries that's had these startups is online retail. Well, I think the economy was kind of headed in that direction before anyways, like you mentioned Etsy. But now, it's like, well, you have all the actual in-store retail situations, either closing entirely or in some cases just evolving, shrinking. And so you have all these, like, potential entrepreneurs who suddenly become actual realized entrepreneurs, partly because they were forced into it, but also because the opportunity presented itself even sooner than maybe they had expected

JP: 100%. No, this is- this has accelerated trends that were there before in a tight labor market and just pushed them forward 10, 20 years.

CG: Yeah. And I brought up the added entrepreneurship because that can also be societally beneficial, not just beneficial to the people who successfully end up starting a new business that makes them a lot of money and the people that they hire and whatnot, but also because new businesses can be a source of new innovations and new ways of doing things. There would be more productivity growth. And I, I think that can also have big spillover effects for the rest of the economy.

JP: 100%. And I think we've seen this huge shock, uh, force companies to adapt, to adopt the best technologies. We've seen a very dramatic diffusion of video conferencing technology. Uh, you know, as you said, everyone's doing TV interviews now from their own homes. We're all our own producers these days. But a lot of these movements have been very exciting.

And if harnessed correctly, they can, uh, increase not just individual productivity, but organizational productivity. Having virtual conferences means many more people can participate. Of course, I love, I love meeting in person, um, but, but I think one can't deny, uh, the huge possibilities that these new technologies open up, not so new technologies, but, but newly adopted and normalized technologies.

CG: Yeah. And also to, to your point about, you know, in person versus virtual, well, it could just be that you- you're just exposed to more of these opportunities. So let's say you were gonna go to just one in-person conference a year anyways. Well, you can still go to one in-person conference, but now you can go to like five virtual ones, because you can do them from home. You can sort of log in and out when you want, and you have access to more and more opportunities to meet people that way than you would have in the past, precisely because the technology is so much better.

JP: That is the story of my life. I recently participated in two virtual conferences at once during maternity leave. I would've had to miss both. So, uh, I, I'm very excited

about the remote work revolution. I think it will stick. And we see, in our surveys of, of job seekers, how enthusiastic they are about remote work.

CG: Oh, really?

JP: Yes.

CG: What are they saying?

JP: So every month this year, more than, more than 50% of workers, around 55%, typically, have said that they would prefer to find a remote job. Uh, the reasons they cite are that it, it saves them money on transportation, saves them time. Firms also say that it saves them money, and not just because of reduced real estate costs and, and operating costs, but also because of, of vastly reduced absenteeism.

So it can open up up, you know, huge opportunities for different kinds of workers, for workers with disabilities and health problems, but it also opens up better prospects for, for firms and can make them far more economical and, and allow them to use those funds for, uh, more productive uses. I'm also excited always when I see a way to thicken a market.

CG: Wha- what does that mean? Explain that for our listeners, thicken a market.

JP: So, if you put all the sellers and buyers together in the same place where it's easy for them to find each other, they are more likely to find what they want, to find good matches. What's happened over the course of the pandemic is not only that the average job seeker scrolling for jobs on ZipRecruiter is seeing 50% more opportunities, but they're also able to consider opportunities in 20,000 more cities across the country.

And that means that there aren't just a few more opportunities, there are vastly more opportunities. And that's true for firms too. They don't just need to hire people in their tiny little city. They can hire people from across the country. They can hire the best of the best. And so they, they have vastly broader possibilities too. I think that's gonna lead to less sort of employer monopoly power.

So let me give you a, a concrete example. Let's say that you work at an airline, you know airlines, you know, that's your thing. The big four are headquartered in different cities. So if you worked at one, moving to another one, if you were unhappy, or if you wanted degree a growth and you weren't getting a promotion, would've involved a huge cost. It would've involved uprooting your whole family and, and moving to a different city.

Not anymore. If all of those jobs are being done remotely, you can now leave costlessly, right? If there's bad management, get out of there. If you don't like government policies, if you don't like the tax burden in your state, you can just, uh,

you know, leave far more easily because there are just so many more jobs available to you.

So I find this very exciting. I think it has huge implications for the way places are run. We're already seeing states, which before were doing crazy things to throw money at Amazon to set up its headquarters there, instead of now throwing money at jobs and trying to attract jobs, they're trying to attract workers. And, um, we're seeing lots of places offering bonuses to people to move there. Increasingly, people are gonna vote with their feet and move to the places that are best run. And I think we could see not only employment practices improve, but, but governance improve too.

CG: Yeah, I, I love this point about better matching between workers, and companies, and employers, because that also can yield some big benefits for innovation, efficiency, productivity if people are able to take jobs that they may not have been able to take before, either because they lived in the wrong place, uh, and maybe they couldn't pick up and move before for family or other reasons. And now they can take these jobs, and it might lead to a better match between, like, a worker and that worker's individual skillset and then the company that they go to work for, which might be able to provide better resources for that worker to take full advantage of their capabilities. And that in the past, you wouldn't have had that match because there might have been a geographic distance or a geographic barrier between the worker and the company.

And, uh, I wanna also just tell you and tell our listeners, uh, about this little anecdote that I think is super relevant here. Um, and this is about a former intern at NPR's The Indicator podcast, which I used to co-host, and his name is Sean Saldana. And he has told this story publicly. So I'm not like giving something away here that, that was private.

Um, Sean had applied a few years ago to a job at Planet Money, an internship. And that internship is based in New York, Sean is from Austin, Texas. And he got the job. In other words, he was offered the job. He made it through all these different applications. It's like hundreds of applications. And his came to the top, aced the interview, et cetera. They offered him the job. He couldn't take the job because he could not afford to move to New York, and the internship did not pay enough for him to live in New York. So he had to turn it down. He really wanted it.

Well, a couple of years later, he applied for The Indicator job, and this was during COVID. And we had made the job remote. And so this time, once again, because he's [laughs] such an impressive guy, he rose to the top of the pile. We loved him, and we offered him the job. And this time, he could take it because he was remote.

And I think it's instructive because it means that like, for example, there's gonna be a lot more competition throughout the country for that specific job. But it also means that everybody else throughout the country also has access to way more jobs

because more jobs are being offered remotely. You know what I mean? Like, it's really interesting to think of how this could affect cities.

If first, for one thing, not as many people have to move to the city to get the job, they can take the job so that companies that are based in big cities, you know, can hire people throughout the country. But also, people in parts of the country that traditionally did not have a ton of employers in their area, well, now they can pursue jobs that are everywhere. And so it just seems like you're just gonna have way more kind of competition for some jobs, but also competition between companies for the best employees, because those employees can work from anywhere, not just the companies that are in their area.

So like, it- it's like there's just gonna be more sort of sorting between companies and workers all over the place. It's tremendously exciting. And I don't, I don't quite think people understand that if remote work really does stick around... And I'm, I'm pretty optimistic on that. I'm trying to be open minded about the possibility that I'm overestimating this chance, but if it does stick around, I think people might be underestimating the extent to which the scale of all this sorting, all this, you know, know reassessing where I can work, where I can't work, you know, who's gonna hire me? What are my chances of getting a job? Like, it's gonna just change radically, you know?

JP: Yes, I agree. And something I find really exciting is, uh, what happens when there is such variety in the labor market? So typically, companies converge on doing things the same way in the same industries. So if you were working in whatever industry it was, if you're a nurse, you're likely to get pretty much the same pay and pretty much the same hours, uh, in, in any hospital in your area. Uh, if, if you're in tech, if you're in HR, you know, jobs are, are very similar. You get the same structure of your stock compensation and, uh, the same contract terms, and the same latte machine.

And what's happened now, after this pandemic, or during this pandemic, is that companies have responded to this shock in different ways. So some companies are forcing people to come back to the office full time, and other companies are getting rid of their office buildings, and reducing their office footprints, and moving to a fully remote hybrid model going forward. And that means that we're seeing people vote with their feet and sort themselves into the working conditions that suit them best and where they're most productive and happy.

I think some of the leaders in adapting to the new situation are, are doing, you know, fantastically well, and the laggards are sort of scratching their heads saying, "Well, I don't know what's happening. We, we we've, we've been in HR for 40 50 years, we've never seen anything like this. We're losing all our best people. You know, we don't, we don't know what to do." And I think you're gonna see huge pressure on employers to rethink the way they do things and to adopt best practices, to, to listen to their employees and to job seekers, and to be a little bit more innovative.

CG: Yeah. I, I guess the way I've been thinking about this, too, is that it's not like every single company has to go fully remote or hybrid remote or whatever. I understand that some companies and some businesses just lend themselves towards having people together or in an office. But it seems like it's very likely that companies will have to compete along this dimension for at least some workers, including many of the best workers.

In other words, if you think of, like, the overall packages that you offer to potential workers, if you're a company, well, there's- obviously, there's wages, you gotta pay them. There's benefits. You know, there's a certain work environment that might be suitable to the worker. And this is just a part of that, that, like, as part of the overall compensation package. Well, one thing that workers are gonna be able to demand, especially if there's a continued tight labor market is, "Hey, I really wanna work remotely. You don't have to offer me a remote job, but then I'm more likely to take a job at a different company at a competitor of yours who is offering it."

So I'm not saying every company's gonna go all the way, but I am saying that in a lot of industries, I think companies are gonna have to compete for workers in this domain. You know what I mean?

JP: 100%. And, and this is still a new area. So we still have a lot to learn. Companies have spent decades developing best practices for offices and how to cultivate company culture and office culture. Uh, we- we've seen companies develop these, you know, these huge campuses with gyms and dry cleaners, and catering, and fun events, and ping pong tables, and pool tables, and video game rooms. Uh, now they're going to have to figure out how to cultivate connection in a remote world.

And some companies are already doing really amazing, exciting, and innovative things. Uh, I've been impressed at my own company, for example. You know, one, one risk of remote work is that there'd be, there'll be less connection to the company, less sort of face time between people, that the people will, will be less connected to the mission and the vision and, and know less about what's going on in the business. And I think we responded by leaning in totally the opposite direction and turning those quarterly all hands in-person, you know, presentations from the CEO into weekly and now biweekly, you know, all hands, uh, presentations from the CEO that have given everybody far greater insight into the operations of the business than they ever had before.

So some- some of these technologies actually allow you to create more connection than you had in the past. I love Slack channels devoted to employees of- with, uh, shared interests. Um, I love things like the Donut app that randomly pair, uh, workers in an organization for a, a 30-minute, you know, coffee Zoom meeting. I, I think, I think we- we're only just starting to scratch the surface of the possibilities that, that these technologies allow.

CG: Yeah. I, I think we're pretty much in lockstep on that, but I gotta say that I, I have been surprised by how powerful the status quo bias has been on remote work,

because there has actually been a furious debate about, number one, whether or not remote work, you know, will be here to stay, or the extent to which it will stay after COVID and people start going back to offices and, and have the ability to interact indoors. But also about whether or not it will be a good thing.

And some of them bring up some of the issues that you just brought up about, you know, maybe people will feel less connected to the company, or they bring up the idea that if you don't have a lot of people in the same place, you don't get those, like, spontaneous interactions that lead to good ideas. And you have maybe a, a certain... you lose a certain sense of, like, that spark, you know, the idea that these ideas are sort of in the air when people are near each other and they're collaborating with each other, and then all of a sudden, they stumble into something new.

To which my response is, okay, it's possible that you'll lose some of that, but also there will be new experimentation with this new technology to either recapture some of that magic or to maybe even come up with something that's better. It's just another choice that you have, you know? That it's possible that these online interactions to which everybody's still becoming accustomed to... I think we're only like a decade or two into this... um, will also lead to certain kinds of interactions that lead to interesting ideas, and new innovations, and things of that nature.

And so I, I have been a little bit taken aback by the resistance from a lot of people, uh, to this trend. And I don't know, I, I guess I'm not even leading towards a question here. I guess I'm, I'm curious to know how you would respond to that.

JP: I think there are wars going on inside C-suites. I think that there are big, big, uh, differences within companies about whether to keep that office building that right now is just, you know, housing plants and nobody else.

Uh, and, you know, different people in different parts of the organization have a different perspective. So we know that senior executive leaders, CEOs, typically, are more positive and upbeat and, uh, look more favorably upon working in the office than, uh, lower wage workers do. And, and that's probably because the, the corner office is pretty nice. It's, it's the people in HR departments, it's middle managers who are hearing from their best people that they're going to leave for companies that are allowing people to work remotely.

It's, it's those, you know, talent acquisition professionals who are failing to get the candidates they want because their stodgy old companies are insisting that the people come back. They are seeing the future. And I think it's incumbent on them to, to speak up and to share what they're seeing with, with leaders higher up in organizations so that, so that this change happens and so that, um, you know, people aren't blindsided later.

I think many organizations that have been slow to adapt have been blindsided by how hard it is to recruit and retain workers when you don't adapt. So let's take the nation's schools, for example. Schools are very slow. Those government

employment contracts don't get updated very quickly. Uh, schools are kind of locked in. They can't really offer different amounts of pay to different people. They can't suddenly offer a, a signing bonus to somebody, uh, when they really need someone.

And so what we have now is a situation where our schools have reopened in person with 740,000 fewer staff than before the pandemic. And they're, they're seeing more quits than hires each month. Uh, that's, that's completely unsustainable. Something's gonna have to change.

One major reason is that teachers have worked remotely for a year, and now don't really want to have to wake up at six in the morning, commute for an hour, and then work face to face in what are sometimes quite unpleasant, uh, working conditions. So the Los Angeles Teachers Contract, for example, gives teachers almost no prep time, uh, between classes.

Um, it's, it's a, it's actually a very grueling, demanding job that requires you to be on your feet all the time. It has very limited flexibility. And I think schools and other, uh, less adaptive, flexible organizations are going to have to find ways to foster a more exciting, comfortable, engaging, flexible work environment in order to restaff after this pandemic.

CG: Yeah, I like to remind people also that a lot of workplaces aren't all that conducive to getting work done in the first place. In other words, in-person workplaces, they could use a bit of competition. You know, if you are sitting in like a cubicle environment, for example, you've got constant interruptions, very little autonomy over the environment in which you actually work. You know, it's hard to shut people out.

So yeah, you might have somebody coming over to of discuss an idea with you, but a lot of the times what you really need to do is, like, really deep work that requires intense concentration for long stretches of time. And it becomes almost impossible to do it in that kind of an open plan office environment. And so, yeah, again, going back to the C-suite folks, like those guys usually have offices where they can close the doors, you know what I mean? And a lot of other people don't. And this could give them a little bit more control over their environment.

And also, I gotta say, you know, in, in a lot of office places, it's not necessarily a good thing that you have, like, a lot of this kind of socializing, especially the kind that can take place after work that not everybody has the same access to, and that can lead to actual results in work in terms of who gets promoted, who is liked better, who gets raises, that kind of thing, as opposed to the results of the work itself, you know?

And I mean, the, the, the sort of clear example here... And again, I- I'm sort of speculating here. I think this is something that economists are now studying, but we're, we're far from having, like, any conclusive data on this. But the obvious example here is that the vast majority of people in executive roles are men. And we

also know that people tend to hire, and promote, and give raises to people who are the most like them.

Well, in an in-office setting, you've got like the guys there, the men who are in the C-suite roles, possibly, like, hobnobbing, I don't know, playing golf or whatever, having drinks after work with the other men that work in the office. And so it sort of creates this sort of unfair environment. Well, if you go remote, there's at least a chance that levels that playing for field a little bit, 'cause now it's about the work. It's not about the hobnobbing and the socializing.

So I don't wanna, like, take this example too far. Like, I think, you know, it's totally great to, like, have friendships at work, to socialize at work, to be- to have pleasant interactions at work. That's all great. I'm just saying there are downsides and benefits to all kinds of environments. And I think some of the downsides to in-person work have been a little bit underappreciated here. Like, I think there are pretty significant downsides in many cases.

And that remote work, again, it offers another option. It's another choice, which is also why I've been a little bit frustrated by the reluctance of some folks to, like, sort of fully embrace its, its possibilities.

JP: So, of course, only 37% of jobs can conceivably be done remotely in the United States, according to economic studies. So there are some jobs that need to be done in person. And I think the next thing that needs to happen now to get this labor market back on track is that in those in-person jobs that have to be done face to face at a physical workplace, companies need to make better and bigger investments in making those physical workplaces conducive to, to creativity and work.

So let's take our schools for example, where they are struggling to restaff and, and get people back after this pandemic. I, I find the nation's schools often look like a bunch of, of warehouses. I mean, they're, they are hideous, teachers' break rooms often don't have coffee machines. I mean, they don't have the basic things. They don't have running water often. They don't have art. They're ugly. They're hideous. I, um, you know, teachers don't have little offices, typically. They don't have a private place to, to prepare or store their things.

Workers in stores often don't have physical security. There's been an uptick in assault. Um, so maybe, maybe while we see the companies that can move remotely do so and lean into the new technologies and the new possibilities offered, I think we shouldn't forget the, uh, in-person jobs and how unpleasant some of them can be and have been. Uh, and now's the time perhaps to invest in improving those, not just office jobs where companies have made huge investments in, in those ping pong tables and, and latte machines, but in stores, and schools, and hospitals. Uh, perhaps we need to beautify those physical spaces and make those more comfortable if we want people to return to those kinds of jobs.

CG: Yeah. It's a super important point, uh, to make here, that we are talking about a very specific kind of work that could potentially be made to go remote, either entirely or in hybrid. We are talking about, like, white collar office jobs. We're not actually talking about, you know, a big swath of the American labor market, where it's just impossible, you know? And so you're absolutely right. You know, schools, certainly hospitals can't be fully made remote.

I think you can do a lot remote. I think you can, you know, you have telemedicine and things of that nature, but there are some, there are some jobs that have to be done in person.

JP: Exactly. And you can make some tasks within jobs remote. So you can allow people to do some of their paperwork from home. But even beyond that, you know, e- even among lower wage workers, there are lots more opportunities now to work remotely than in the past. For example, in call centers, before, people had to crowd into call centers in these little cubicles and try to make calls while the person next to them was making a call and, and distracting them. Now, many companies are allowing people to make those calls from home on their own cell phones with their own laptops.

Um, and even junior employees, companies have been surprised. They've learned something from this pandemic, that even often junior employees can actually be entrusted with the responsibility to get up and do their work when they're at home. And don't have a mo- you know, a, a supervisor are glaring over their shoulders. P- people actually like having autonomy over when and how they do their work. And it sometimes gives them a greater sense of ownership and improves their performance.

CG: Let's talk about another potential trend that I'm not sure if it's gonna take hold, but it could be potentially fascinating if it does take hold more widely. And that is the shorter work week, a potential four-day work week. Some countries have experimented this more than others have. And some companies, even within the US, have started playing around with it. And I think these are still early days, but what do you think about this idea of going to a four-day work week instead of five, whether that means longer hours for each of those four days, or just going to a 32-hour week?

JP: So let me share with you the, the share of job postings offering a four-day work week. So in 2016, it was 0.14%, in 2017, 0.15%, in 2018, 0.18%. Then 0.31%, then 0.48%. And suddenly this year, 2.22%, okay? So there, there has been a sevenfold increase since the, the pandemic in the share of, of jobs offering a four-day work week. Uh, it's a lot.

CG: Whoa, hey, Julia, let me just, uh, let me just jump in here for a second, 'cause, like, you hit us with a bunch of numbers, but, like, actually, what you're describing

here is kind of a staggering amount of growth. I mean, how many times more did it go up from like 2016 to, to now? 'Cause it sounds like a lot.

JP: 20 times since, since 2016.

CG: 20 times.

JP: But, but seven times just since 2019. Yeah. So this, this is a very, very, very big increase. We are seeing more and more companies offer this and experiment with it. You know, often, often this is in industries like nursing and trucking where people have long shifts. So you, you cram in the work in four days and then get three days off, but we're seeing it expand to sales and other professional and business services type jobs.

And um, you know, this may be one of those areas where middle managers should, should speak up and, and suggest it to their, uh, supervisors. Uh, I think many people and companies knew that remote work was possible and that they knew that they as individuals would be more productive if they could work remotely, but they didn't wanna rock the boat. It wasn't the norm in their company. They didn't want to seem like prima donnas or, like, uh, like they were lazy or shirking.

Uh, and it's the same with a four-day work week. You know, I'm convinced I would be more productive with a four-day work week. I always feel so refreshed and restored after a long weekend. And, and I've often spent one of those days thinking about work, but, you know, from the poolside, um, and, and having great ideas.

And, and get... you know, I come back with all this energy and excitement to, to get back. I've never raised it with my supervisor, but, you know, perhaps this pandemic has, has taught us a lesson that some of these things are possible, that these norms can be broken, shattered, uh, changed, that sometimes the organization will benefit from those norms changing. And so perhaps we should, um, be a little bit bolder.

CG: Yeah. And you mentioned that, in your case, when you do have a longer weekend, you feel refreshed, you actually still have some ideas that could be potentially useful at work. And I'm wondering if you think that, like, we can extrapolate from that to, like, you know, other jobs. Do you think that, overall, that people can be just as productive in four days a week? And that this would also lead to, I don't know, maybe other benefits like retention? More people would stay at their jobs for longer because they're happier? Uh, if you think that this would be a real advantage in terms of, again, competing for workers,

JP: I think it certainly could, and it could reduce absenteeism. I think one, you know, one reason people are often absent from work is because they have to take their kids to the doctor at some point, and they have to go to the IRS at some point, and they have to do all these things that have to be done on a weekday. They gotta go to the bank, you know? They've gotta go to the social security administration. Um, if

you give people one day in the week when they can go and do those things, they can be more focused on their work the rest of the week.

CG: This is one, by the way, where I'm a little bit less sure of what the future holds, right?

JP: I don't think it's going to, to happen very soon at all, um, but I do think the pandemic has accelerated even this trend, which, uh, you know, admittedly, is, uh, still only seen in a very small percentage of jobs.

CG: Yeah, totally. No, it's, it's a, it's a fascinating trend. And one of the reasons I'm a little bit cautious about it is because I think there are some kinds of work where people actually would, would choose to keep working anyways, you know? In other words, for jobs that are really great, jobs that are competitive, jobs where, you know, people really just want to get ahead, a lot of people would just sort of expand into that extra time, just like a lot of people right now still do expand into their nights or into their weekends.

And I wonder to what extent there'd be resistance from that channel, right? I mean, I, I just am not really sure, but if it becomes a more kind of accepted thing societally, I have a feeling that a lot of people will, will sort of flock over to it quite quickly.

In other words, this is one where if it does take hold, I could see the potential for, for it to happen, like, all at once like an avalanche, you know, where it's like, "Oh, wait, a couple of our competitors are now doing this, now we can offer it." And then the workers see that, like, their neighbors are doing it, so then they're like, "Okay, yeah, no, it's fine to take Friday off. I can actually do it. People won't assume I'm shirking."

Um, but yeah, but I don't know. It's, it's an interesting question, whether or not, uh, people will fully embrace this. I think it'd be great.

I think it'd be totally wonderful. Um, but I'm not sure if people will embrace it. And I'm also not sure, in this case, if actually less work overall would also get done. Like, I think people could become more efficient in a smaller amount of time. Will it be enough to offset all of the work they would've done if they would've worked the extra day, even if they were a little bit tired that extra day, because it was a longer work week, you know what I mean?

JP: Right. And it may not be necessary to take a, a day fully off, uh, with remote work, right? You may be able to spend one day a week working from the pool, working from the garden, or working from a bar, even if your company doesn't switch to a four-day work week.

CG: True. By the way, whi- which day of the week do you prefer to have off if you have a three-day weekend? Friday or Monday?

JP: So I really prefer to have Fridays off because I'm Jewish and I, uh, practice the... I observe the, the Jewish Sabbath.

And in the winter, that comes in at, you know, four o'clock. So I like to be able to get off early and cook, and prepare the house, and have a house smelling of challah. And, uh, I, I like, I like spending a Friday, uh, you know, winding down and, and getting ready for the weekend.

CG: Sounds wonderful. Uh, I wonder if it's partly because of my Roman Catholic upbringing, but I'm a Monday person. I, I love arriving to the end of a long week and being like, "Oh, wow. You know, next week I have the first day off, which means that I'm gonna be super rested. And by the time the work week starts, it's already a shorter week." You know what I mean? I love that feeling you get on Friday, but it's interesting.

Okay. So we've talked about remote work. We've talked about, uh, the shorter work week. I'm kind of curious to know if there's anything else about, like, the workplace that you think could be radically different in, I don't know, the next like 10 or 20 years, but that people aren't maybe paying as much attention to. You know, whether that's the relationship between workers and their companies, workers and each other, workers and their bosses.

Like, I, I can imagine that there's gonna be all kinds of difficult to anticipate things that would come of a tight labor market that actually is sustained into the future. And I don't know if we're gonna get that. I wanna be clear, I don't know if we're gonna get that and I don't know what other thing are gonna happen in the future, but is there anything you're kind of paying attention to that, uh, that maybe, uh, you think other people should know about more?

JP: So one trend I find quite exciting is the shift towards firm-initiated job search. So firm-initiated recruiting, basically. You know, in the past, companies would post a job in the newspaper classifieds section and job seekers would, would scroll, trying to find something that, that, that match their interests and desires. And now, in a tight labor market, especially, we're seeing more and more employers, uh, shift to doing the work of finding job seekers.

They're paying referral bonuses to their staff and turning all of their staff into recruiters. Um, they are using tools like ZipRecruiter's Invite to Apply tool and looking at databases of, of candidates. They're looking through databases and resumes, um, and, and proactively inviting job seekers to apply.

The reason I find that exciting is because the, the number one job search still on ZipRecruiter is a blank search. People don't know what they're looking for. They just, they just kind of wanna see what's out there. They don't know what job they want. They don't know which jobs are out there.

Employers often have more information about the nature of a job and, and who performs best in those jobs 'cause they've gone through this multiple times. And so they often are the best people to, to, to make that decision and initiate that search. And when people are recruited, when they are invited to come to a job, when they're told, "Hey, you look like you'd be great for this job," that's a really great experience. It's a very affirming, uplifting experience for job seekers. And it helps them know their own worth and value. Uh, and it often opens up possibilities for them that they never thought of before.

I, I love that. You know, to me, it's, it's like a, a nationwide larger version of the story of, of some musician busking in, in the subway station and a music executive walking by and saying, "Hey, I, I like that sound, you know, come play for us. We wanna produce you." Um, that, I think is now happening in the labor market to a large degree. It, it was happening before the pandemic. Uh, so a study by, uh, Harvard Business Review and Duke Business School Researchers showed that the, the share of workers who were recruited to their jobs went up from about 4% 20 years ago to almost 20% before the pandemic. I think that's going to rise even further. And I think it's very exciting.

CG: That is very exciting. So you're saying that, like, the companies now, throughout the economy, are gonna be more like that roving music producer out there in search of the undiscovered talent, and making it clear to the talent out there that, "Hey, we're hiring. And this could be the job for you." We're trying to let people know that we've got jobs available, and they're pretty good jobs.

JP: Exactly. And employers are leaning into employer branding, into sort of advertising, uh, themselves in a more compelling way and providing more information than those, you know, silly job postings, those dry, bland boilerplate-filled, corporate language-filled job postings.

CG: You know what this reminds me of? Uh, it reminds me of in the time when I was graduating from college. And full disclosure, this was like almost two decades ago. And in my senior year, I remember that there was a very aggressive recruiting effort by mainly finance and consulting firms, but not really by other kinds of companies. You know, like, if you only took your sort of... if you only took the representative sample of the companies that were recruiting on campus, you would think that all the jobs in the world were like finance at banks or in consulting.

And I am assuming that this has changed by now, that, like, it's not just those kinds of companies that have these very formal, aggressive recruiting efforts. I'm sure certainly that, like, tech companies are out there doing the same thing. But I wonder if what you're saying here is that there will be a much more expanded set of industries that will be making this kind of push and not just, like, the super rich, you know, companies that can afford to have constant presences on campuses and that kind of thing.

JP: Exactly. Now that job search is mostly online, it's actually quite cheap and easy to find people and recruit people, uh, proactively as, as a company. And we are seeing employers do this, not just in white collar work, not just on Ivy League campuses, but even for blue collar workers who are in very high demand right now.

CG: Do you think that there will be more jobs that are available and which will pay well for non-college graduates in the future?

JP: Yes. Well, I think the whole college enterprise is, uh, is going to experience pretty, uh, significant disruption. We saw the pandemic just accelerate some of the trends we were already seeing. Uh, college degrees are very expensive, and many schools have been shutting down or consolidating, meaning that the people, especially who live in rural areas, have lost access to local nearby colleges.

And I think that's why we're seeing such a rapid uptick in the number of people who are studying online and a proliferation in, in these online course offerings. Uh, many of the courses that are being developed now are being developed with input from businesses, and the, the companies that, that want people to take these courses need to prove to the people signing up that they will help them get a job. Many of them have, uh, internal job boards now where employers who participated in developing these courses, because they need exactly those skills, end up, you know, immediately hiring graduates later on.

I'm excited to see what happens to education in the United States now that these technologies have sort of been unleashed, now that we've had every kid in the country uh, spend a year learning on an iPad. This, this really is potentially the, the future of learning. And I think there are huge, huge possibilities, very exciting possibilities there.

CG: We had on an earlier episode, Anne Case and Angus Deaton, and, you know, they, they presented sort of data point after data point showing all the ways that the labor market was failing, and for decades now has failed non-college graduates, in particular, which, they also reminded us, are the majority of the workforce, right?

In other words, the majority of adults in the US don't have college degrees, and the labor market has been failing them. And the point they made was not that everybody should get a college degree. The point they made was that, actually, the labor market needs to be made to work for people who don't have college degrees, that there has been a massive policy failure.

And I wonder if part of that policy failure, a big part of that policy failure is just that the labor market has been slack for so long. It hasn't gotten to the point where it's tight enough that companies really have to compete for people to the extent that they're not only raising salaries, they're raising wages, and benefits, and things of that nature, but also to the point that compels them to offer the training and the education that's necessary and that's specific, that's contextually specific for the jobs

that they're looking for so that it's available to more people. And what you just described actually paints kind of a hopeful picture in that regard.

JP: So I think, you know, for- employers are not gonna turn into universities anytime soon, right? That, that, that's not... training people is not what they're designed to do, but with so many online training providers now partnering with employers and finding out what their needs are, and developing curriculums in partnership with them, I think we could see that need filled. And, and we could see more and more people finding the, the sort of new college jobs that exist throughout the economy today where you don't need a college degree, but you need to know maybe one software tool. You need to know Facebook really well, or you need to know Instagram really well, or you need to know drone photography or web design.

There are lots of jobs like that. Uh, an increasing number, you know, by our count where you can actually become pretty good at that job after doing a 12-week course or a six-month course. Um, and I think that's, that's exciting, uh, news for the future.

CG: Yeah. And how important do you think it's gonna be in the future, relative to where it is now or in the past, for workers to keep updating their skillsets? Because, you know, you look back at the last 20 years, and at least in terms of certain kinds of technology, certainly information technology, things seem to have moved quite quickly. In other industries, maybe not quite as quickly. But in terms of what happens, you know, in the next couple of decades, like how crucial is it for workers themselves and not just... so not... it's not just about employers continuing to fight for workers in a tight labor market, how crucial is it for workers themselves to also keep updating their own skillsets to stay relevant and that kind of thing?

JP: I think it's going to be incredibly important, and it's going to be easier than ever before.

Uh, I know, just in my own job, that I'm constantly looking at YouTube videos, uh, that provide tutorials on how to do various things that come up. Uh, there are, there are always new platforms and new programming languages and, and new possibilities within those tools. Uh, and the only way to, to, you know, to stay up to date with them is, is to spend a little bit of time learning about them.

But fortunately, one can now do that in so many different ways. Uh, sometimes you can even do it on TikTok. So, uh, I think, I think it's going to become easier, and easier, and easier for people to, uh, get that lifetime lifelong learning, um, and to find it in ways that are fun and engaging. Not just for the best scholars, but for people who are more visual or who re- recall things better when they hear them. We now have all these audiobooks and podcasts. So I'm, I'm very excited about the future of learning.

CG: Cool. And this has been a great chat, Julia. And I'd love to close by asking you about something that I love to talk to... uh, that I love to discuss with people who think about the future of work, which is, what the hell happened to the prediction of

John Maynard Keynes from roughly 90 years ago when he said that productivity and economic growth were gonna increase by quite a lot in the next century? So, you know, to write about now or 10 years from now or so. Uh, and that people would use that added productivity and growth to work a lot less to the point where we might all even be working 15 hours a week. And we clearly don't.

And it seems like instead, there has been this sort of division. So on the one hand, you have people who are lucky enough to have, you know, a good education, college degrees, white collar jobs that are competitive and pay really well, and where the workers have actually, like, used the extra productivity, um, to actually work more, you know, to produce more. And then you have, like, this other part of the population that actually struggles to get enough work. You know, the non-college folks who have lower employment, slower wage growth, way worse outcomes in the labor market. And so there's been this kind of division, but overall, nobody really works 15 hours a week.

So what do you sort of think happened here? Like, what's your explanation for, like, why the world diverged from the prediction made by Keynes? Was it that Keynes was wrong, or was it that the world went astray and could have had this glorious life, uh, and just ended up choosing not to?

JP: So I think the one major barrier to me working 15 hours a week is the supply constraints in the housing market. So if housing weren't so hugely expensive, if we actually were responding to the increase in productivity by producing more housing units and allowing them to become more, uh, affordable, then perhaps people actually would be free to work fewer hours. I think that's really the area that we need to, to focus on. We need to, you know, do a full wholesale review of housing regulations that are constraining supply, and that could lead to people really feeling that increase in productivity and perhaps being free to work less.

CG: Yeah. My, my thoughts on this, I think, are a little bit different, even though I 100% agree that housing constraints are a huge problem, uh, and that eradicating those constraints and having way more housing supply would be an unbelievably good thing for the US economy. Um, my thinking on this is that a lot of the kinds of white collar jobs that we have, yes, can be incredibly stressful for all kinds of reasons, but also that the work itself can be fundamentally quite enjoyable.

And if it both is enjoyable and it, you know, involves a higher paycheck than other kinds of work, then I think a lot of people are just gonna get a lot of- a lot out of their work, you know? Psychologically, they're gonna get a lot out of it, in addition to the paycheck. And so I would suspect, okay? And I, I hope you won't, uh, I hope you won't take this the wrong way, that even if housing were pretty cheap, that based on the joy that you expressed about your work, which I can literally hear in your voice, you probably still would not work 15 hours a week. You'd probably still work a lot more because you like it so much. Am I wrong?

JP: You know, part of... I think you're right.

And we, we do actually see this in a number of, of surveys. The large share, about 40% of the people who retire, end up later unretiring. And the major reason that they unretire is not earnings. It's not because they need more money, it's because they want a sense of purpose, a sense of meaning. They want the social interaction, they want the connection.

CG: And they're driving their spouses crazy with their cluttering around the house.

JP: Exactly.

Driving their spouses crazy. How many times can you, you know, reorganize the drawers and the ca- cabinets? Get out and do something, you know? A job is someone doing something for somebody else, you know, filling a need that somebody else has. It does really build the fiber of, of society and builds incredible connection.

I, I agree with you that, that even in low wage jobs that are not that pleasant, even there, people miss the sense of connection. In my day job, I'm- uh, at ZipRecruiter, but on one weekend, a month, I'm an enlisted person in the US Navy, a Navy reservist.

Uh, and I'm a mechanic doing a very manual job that can sometimes be kind of boring. We are working from 6:00 AM till 4:00 or 5:00 PM, or whenever my supervisor says I can go, and sometimes being yelled at. And even there, I find that I often leave the day with my sides hurting 'cause I've laughed so much. And it's just, you know, it's just, it's just such fun to be part of a team and, and part of something bigger.

CG: That's awesome. And by the way, thank you for your service.

JP: Thank you.

CG: Yeah, that's terrific. No, I, I, I hear what you're saying, and I, I absolutely think that that sense of purpose exists for people in jobs all up and down the labor market, up and down the income spectrum. And it kind of reinforces the point to me that we should at least make work more widely available and more dignified for folks who haven't been able to enjoy, like, the higher paycheck and the sort of dignity that comes with a job that also treats you well.

Even if the nature of the work itself isn't super fun, at least you have, like, a sense of purpose, a sense of comradery. And it's something where you feel like you're being fairly compensated and, and, and where you have, like, that sense of, "Hey, I'm getting something done. It really matters. This work is important and dignified."

Because I think societally, because of this kind of split in the labor market, you know, even from the strict standpoint of like status, we have kind of come to undervalue a lot of work that actually is super important that provides the backbone of, you know, of a lot of parts of the, the rest of the labor market. And I, I think equalizing all that in, in terms of status and in terms of, in some cases, pay, I think would actually be a great thing for all of us, you know, including those of us who are lucky enough to have, like, these sort of nice cushy white collar jobs, right?

JP: I agree with you 100%.

CG: Yeah. And Julia, is there anything that I have not asked you about that you think is a really important trend in the labor market, or even something that you're anticipating, something that might happen in the future, but that you think is just a cool idea and that people maybe aren't paying enough attention to?

JP: I think to make the future of work as exciting and dynamic as it could be and inclusive, I, I really think we need to do a better job of cultivating innovation in our schools. Uh, you know, I look at my, my kids' homework assignments and often the, the assignment gives them some method, and then they have three questions where they just have to basically copy that method with different numbers three times. It's, it's not creative, it doesn't challenge them. It doesn't push them.

I fear that we are sort of trying to equalize people by teaching to the sort of lowest common denominator rather than recognizing brilliance and inspiring, you know, brilliance and genius in, in, in all children. Um, I think, I think we are underestimating people's abilities all over throughout the economy.

When you give people more challenges, more opportunities, you can often see really amazing things. And I think we, we need to go back to cultivating that sort of heroic spirit that Guy Raz shows in his work on entrepreneurs in America and raise people to, to be risk loving, to, to think big, uh, to break a couple things along the way.

CG: Lovely. And my very last question, is there a particular book or maybe a long magazine article, or a podcast episode, other than this one, or a movie or anything else that you'd recommend to listeners that you think is really good on the topic of work, or on the future of work?

JP: So I have three kids, um, and I spend more time reading children's books these days than, than adult books. And I was really surprised recently, when I read *Max & the Midnights* with my kids, how much this book is about work. Uh, so it's, it's set in, uh, a 14th century European empire in the middle ages, uh, where children are forced to follow in, in the career footsteps of their families, but the children in the book dream of different career paths. And they eventually speak up, and they challenge preexisting gender norms and professional norms. And, uh, and they become sort of outrageously successful, and adventurous, and innovative.

And, um, I, I think that that book should inspire our kids and, and all of us to, uh, to speak up when we see sort of medieval practices in the labor market. Um, when we see stupid things that make no sense, bad rules, uh, you know, restrictions on practicing medicine across state lines, for example, executive teams who are totally averse to any kind of flexibility or remote work, um, let's make a little bit of noise. Because the pandemic has taught us that, to bring on the future of work to, to take us forward, uh, we do need to be a bit bolder about questioning norms and, and overturning them.

CG: Are you sure that's a children's book 'cause I kind of wanna send it to some companies I used to work for?

JP: It is a graphic novel with the most wonderful drawing and pictures and very, very lively, uh, dialogue. And uh, I think it's fantastic. Lincoln Peirce.

CG: *Max & the Midnights*. Fantastic. Julia Pollak, thanks so much for this great chat.

JP: Great. Good talking to you.

CG: And that's our show for this week. We'll post links to some of Julia's articles at ZipRecruiter in the show notes for this episode.

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