Maurice Fuller

Hi everyone, I'm Maurice Fuller and thanks for joining us today. Today I'm with John Healy, CEO of Whrrr.work. John was previously Senior Executive at Kelly, where he led the Office of the Future of Work. John, welcome and thanks for joining me today.

John Healy

Excited to be here, Maurice. It's been a while since you and I have had a chance to have a good conversation, so I'm looking forward to entertaining your audience a little bit here today.

MF

Thanks! Yeah, not since the StaffingTec blockchain event that we did in Nashville

JH

In Nashville, yeah. A great, great time.

MF

Alright, so could you please start by giving us a quick breakdown of your time in the industry?

JH

So thirty plus years in the industry. I spent 27 years at Kelly doing everything from frontline recruiting as I began and kind of launching the technical business for Kelly, to leading large accounts, to being seconded off to live in Australia and work for a mining company redesigning their services procurement function, to coming back and creating and then ultimately leading what we call the Office of the Future of Work, which was really focused on internal disruption if you will. Then over the last year I left Kelly, just about a year ago now, and I took some time away to take care of an aging father-in-law and his bride and helped them through their transitions in life. Now I'm diving in and living the gig workstyle consulting with a series of different organizations. I'm sure we'll hit on a couple of the points in there, but we formally launched it under an organization known as Whrrr.work.

MF

Well, you've certainly had a very exciting career and you've been able to really work at the cutting edge of the staffing industry. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the future of work and how things are changing and what some of the big drivers are.

JH

Cool. Yeah. When you think of what's changing and what's going on… we're at the beginning of the year and so you always have this opportunity to kind of pause and reflect on what's there. I was looking and McKinsey summarized it in my opinion the best of anyone that I've seen out there. What they said is that right now it's all about envisioning sustainable inclusive growth. So that's our purpose. That's what every

business out there is trying to do. But then they laid out a little bit of the impact points that we're all living with: the pandemic lingers, a new talent crisis emerges, digital dominates, the growth agenda and sustainability gain steam. What I really like about that more than anything is the fact that they're acknowledging a talent crisis is there. Whether you want to hit on the Great Resignation, whether you want to hit on purpose driven focus of what's there, technology collaboration, remote, all of these things are coming. But the net is that organizations are struggling to engage talent in the way that talent wants to be there, and that's a real opportunity in the Marketplace. No doubt about it in my mind.

MF

Yes, for sure. Can you tell us about open talent and the Center for the Transformation of Work, of which you're a co-creator?

JH

Yeah. This was as I stepped away and got a chance to look into the market. John Windsor is the founder of Open Assembly. John is the Executive in Residence at LISH, the Laboratory for Innovation Science at Harvard. I had gotten to know John a little bit just kind of exploring the gig economy and some of the changes that were happening, what's going on. So he had launched Open Assembly to start really looking at exploring why it is that organizations are struggling so much to get to know that marketplace. So if you fast forward to where we are today, Open Assembly is an established organization that's out there consulting with businesses to teach them how to deploy open talent strategies, and I'll come back to open talent on that. The Center for the Transformation of Work was created really more as a mission, if you will. It's this manifesto that was created through a design thinking workshop with hundreds of people on the line saying, we've got to rethink this world a little bit more. Why can't I work the way I want to work? Why aren't organizations engaging? So The Center for the Transformation of Work has a very clear mission: it's to transform work for a billion people by 2025. When we look at that, we're really focused on the creator economy, the passion economy, and the platform economy that's emerged and allowing people to engage in work in different ways. So that's kind of at the core what we're trying to get done in that marketplace

My sense from my time innovating in the staffing industry is that a big hole in the market right now is the lack of standards and the lack of consistent language that exists inside the organizations. When I sit with enterprise companies and try to talk to them about why they are not tapping into the gig marketplace when they all hear it's growing, why are they struggling to really plug this into their overall talent strategy? You hear, well, what's the difference between top coder and top tal, and when do I go to this platform, and where does crowdsourcing fit in? Everyone's got these slightly different approaches in the 800+ platforms that are out there in the marketplace. And there's some really good examples out there, whether it's leads in what they've done in building a grading system in the green building marketplace or how agile design has a consistent playbook for what's there and how it's iterated and evolved over time. There's a series of other

different examples that you could run into, but those two organizations are about helping companies look at their talent strategy in a much broader way.

I want to just cite one example if I can because I think it's the one that stands out the most to me. It's NASA. NASA is one organization I just want to call out that I think has done something really unique.

17,000 full-time employees. 50,000 contract workers. Documented input from 110,000,000 citizens of the world. So when NASA asks how they're going to solve a problem, they look at it in a very different way than most organizations, who look to their internal employee base and then maybe that next wave of organizations who look to their contractors or consultants or their outsourcing partners. But very few have really opened themselves up to look at things differently. So that's where OA came from and where LISH got involved—the Lab for Innovation Sciences at Harvard. They got involved helping NASA figure things out. Jeff Davis is the gentleman at NASA who engaged that. It's an exciting group looking at things in a different way. You open some opportunities as you start looking at new technology and specifically Web 3.0 tools in a very, very different way. Hopefully that gives a quick perspective.

MF

Yeah, it's very exciting. It's a very ambitious goal on the part of Open Assembly. You just mentioned Web 3.0 which is a really exciting area. I'd like to jump into that. If you could, talk a little bit about Web 3.0 and the technologies that are coming into play.

JH

Yeah. I think Web 3.0 has recently emerged as a language that's getting people a little bit more comfortable, and a lot of it is about eliminating the intermediaries that are not bringing value into the process. Blockchain technology certainly jumps into that. I think some people are just using Web 3.0 to avoid saying Blockchain because when you bring up Blockchain, people go to Crypto and they start getting panicked about some things. I think there's some areas where if you start really looking at the practical application, you start changing a view into what's getting done, how it's getting done, and maybe start seeing that hey, I can see where that fits into my life.

I referenced that I've got a kind of a portfolio career. I still consult for Kelly; I represent them on the board of the World Employment Confederation, and in that organization I chair the Blockchain Task Force. Whether it's the CIO or the Chief Digital Officer or the Chief Innovation Officer from a lot of the labor market intermediaries—the Randstads and the Decos and Manpowers and Recruits have come together—those organizations are in. What we looked at is when a worker comes into our offices and they provide us this set of information to apply for a job or to advance their career, whose information is that? Is that our information? Or is that the property of the worker? The very quick understanding of this group was that that's the property of the worker. There was also an equal understanding that none of our systems are set up that way. So as we continued

on, and as COVID came into play, you started to be able to see the challenges. Think of all the hospitality workers that lost their job. But the ability to migrate them very easily over to COVID testing facilities with basic customer service skills, some different ppe, but the same competencies that you needed to have to do that work… we couldn't just move people there. We had added so much complexity in every labor market around the world to be able to do that.

So we started really digging in, and we've joined as a group the Velocity Network Foundation. They're one of the aggregators who's out there looking at things differently. They've brought together this coalition of organizations, and I think they're pretty special in what they've done. In fact, for your audience, if you look up 'velocity' on YouTube and look under Olivia Hafez, you'll see a quick seven minute video that describes and shows you how in Olivia's career arc she's claiming credentials. Those credentials are being issued. They're being verified. So you have this sense of exactly what's going on inside her career. As we look at that, I see digital wallets as that first entree of Web 3.0 tools that are really standing out as a visible way to improve the way people gain access to work. We've already commercially transacted 80,000,000,000 in the year 2020 using our digital wallets. We've already accepted that, whether that's Apple Pay or Paypal or whatever it is. And now we know through vaccinations that we want to have our COVID vaccine and we want to verify our identity and have all of that with a nice pretty QR code rather than carrying out the crumpled piece of paper in your wallet that you got from the pharmacy. So that's come into play, and then the logic that we'd be operating under is that the next great thing to add to a digital wallet that makes sense is information that gives people access to work.

The Web 3.0 tools start to allow us the opportunity to share information more easily, more seamlessly, and to migrate that from one organization to another—to recognize that it's the property of the individual. Allow them to share when it's appropriate, and when it's not. Some of those standards, whether it's Sovereign or it's what Velocity has done and what their members have done to create them, are beginning to form and be real. I'm really excited for Velocity. It's January 1st: fifteen companies nodes went active, a total of twenty-eight nodes on the blockchain, where people are able to go in and actively use their digital wallet right now. The next effort is to really start focusing on market adoption across the ecosystem, and that's the big challenge.

MF

The idea of a career wallet as you've been describing it is super exciting, and we've been talking about this for a long time. How, this blockchain with the fifteen nodes, would mere mortal people be able to access that and sort of test it out?

JH

Right now you can go to the Velocity Career Wallet. Go to the, whether it's Android or Apple, store and you can pull that down and get it in in the first iteration. Your identity is the main piece that they're keyed into as everyone brings their nodes active. But the

Sandbox, which is what they call the Velocity Career Center, is for organizations who are members where they're going in and they're actively working through those different career arcs. An example in the World Employment Confederation is our team that came together and said we feel like not enough attention is being paid to the blue collar worker. So we said okay, well, what happens in the career arc of a blue collar worker, and what's the story you want to tell? So we built one out that shows a worker who started as a pick and pack worker in a traditional logistics center and. They had good attendance and good work quality that they were doing, and as a result they got access to some learning credits, which is very common in the staffing industry to provide as a benefit for people for doing well on their job. Well, this individual ended up recognizing that she had good skills from an assessment to go into UX design. So next she takes a UX design software class, and then you see her applying for jobs in UX design and all of a sudden you see that career arc.

Similarly, we took one with an individual who was a Serbian refugee who had come into France. Unfortunately, his engineering degree is not accepted from Serbia in France; the way that the European labor law is structured doesn't allow that for highly specialized skills. But he picked up some skills related to cleanroom work and was able to quickly get work in a cleanroom on a temporary assignment. He migrated from France to Switzerland and then to Germany. So then you were able to see how those credentials were shareable across borders and across companies! The speed of both of these individuals changing roles and having access to opportunity improved dramatically, and that's what we're targeting is to take two weeks out of that cycle of I need work to I'm receiving a paycheck for the worker, then for the company it's taking two weeks out of that I need work done to I'm getting productivity. The real benefit to society in general is we're going to see governments who are not paying out social welfare or dealing with wellness challenges inside markets. So one, absolutely go grab that career wallet. There are going to be plenty of other career wallets out there; Velocity is not intending to be the only one out there. That's going to be a democratized market. I think it's something we should all expect, and if you're in a staffing company, you should certainly be looking at how digital wallets are going to fit into your front office strategy.

MF

Fascinating. I want to return back to something you said early on about the data and the worker owning the data. So even in the context of that Blockchain, the worker would have control over their data and the Blockchain and who has access to it.

JH

Yes: their education credentials. They go out and claim I graduated from this university, this trade school, this certificate program. Now it's in their wallet. So the next time they apply, "show me your education credentials," it's there. I can provide it. You're even seeing background checking vendors who are providing continuous checking—Checkr is one. There are some other startups. There's one out of the Uk, Veripass, who's going down that path of providing continuous background screening that's being updated.

Credential Engine is involved in helping to translate the certificate that you and I get, that you get from one place and I get from another that are named something different, but they're for the exact same thing. Credential Engine does a really nice job of helping synthesize that information.

Now I have that in my wallet and I will be able to share it when I'm applying, whether it's my identity or my education or my licenses or certifications. Even my vaccine information is all sitting in my wallet. When I'm applying, more often than not, I should be able to look at a QR code and scan it. They ask for certain information, I tick tick tick boxes of the information I want to provide them, and they have it. To me, the nice part is it frees up that interview process to be about who you really are. Now that we have all the technical aspects about your capability to do the job, let's talk about whether or not you and I are going to fit together and that there's the right relationship in place. That's the big opportunity that I see here.

MF

You know, there's so much friction in the staffing industry, and these kinds of things are going to eliminate a tremendous amount of friction and also speed up the entire staffing process dramatically as more and more of this comes into play.

JH

Improving trust throughout the process. There's some cool tools out there addressing different aspects of it. But it's the ecosystem of all of these partners coming together and realizing that if we can streamline this across the whole, that's when we really make improvements. I'm proud when I see industry partners putting their competitive pieces aside to say, what's the right thing to do for the industry as a whole? That's where you raise the tide for all boats.

MF

Yes. A lot of this seems really futuristic but it absolutely will happen. There's just no question about it.

JH

Oh, that's the fun part that it's real. We're entering into that market. Again, I think as we start breaking through some of these barriers and people realize, oh, I have used a digital wallet for transacting, they suddenly feel a little bit more comfortable there. If I was in the job market right now and I thought that by updating my own background screen I could get a job faster, I might do that. If there was more of a quid pro quo in some of the credentials, that someone could tell me if you get this certification it's going to increase the probability of having access to this type of opportunity, now I'm genuinely interested and maybe I take more of an active position in in my own career development as opposed to the passive position that a lot of people take in the market today.

MF

Fascinating. Okay, I want to cover a couple other topics, specifically AI and bias in AI. It's a pretty hot topic right now, and I want to explore your views on that.

JH

I have a book that I'm looking at here called Competing in the Age of AI. I love what Ai is doing from an opportunity perspective. I get very nervous, Maurice, when I hear people tell me that they have a phenomenal algorithm but they haven't trained it with any data. Or they have graded data but they've not run it through algorithms. We need people to come together and to not rush to bring something to market before it's ready.

I don't know about you but for me, when I think of my Instagram account or my Linkedin feed, I personally like diversity. I like different things coming at me. I change what books I read, what authors I listen to, the podcasts that I subscribe to because I want new things to come into my mind. My sense is a lot of the AI that we have out there right now is about homogenizing things for me, and so I'm looking for that button on it to say let me reset. I want fresh things, I want fresh ideas, and I want different perspectives. I get a little nervous that AI is being used with a good intent but with a short term vision on its implications. That's where I I think organizations have to pause and ask themselves questions. Is our product ready for prime time or does it really need more time in beta? And for buyers: hey, are we in an NVP type mode where I'm testing things and I'm wanting to see how this works and I need to run something in parallel in my production environment and find out is this right or not? Versus just making decisions out of it.

The danger I would caution people in the staffing industry to is, you, know, everyone in staffing likes to say that we're in the stage where talent is gaining more control in the process and talent is scarcer, but if the tools you're using are designed to screen out instead of screen in then you're contributing to the problem. "Look, if they don't have a degree I can't have them—" well, is the degree relevant to the role? Are we asking that question? "They have a criminal conviction, I can't hire them—" is the conviction relevant to what's there? We've got a lot of false barriers that have been created and mechanisms that were designed when it was about screening from a large number of people down to a small number of people. We're now beginning with a small number of people and more often have to think about how we expand the size. I worry that a lot of the algorithms and the tech is still designed for the old world and not for the new world.

Maurice

Right, to exclude. We have to be more nuanced about how we look at individual candidates and what they bring to each position.

JH

One hundred percent.

MF

That brings me to my next question, which is how you see the role of the recruiter evolving in the future as we bring more and more machine learning into the recruiting process, utilizing it for different parts of the recruiting process, and even automation—rules based automation. How do you see the role of the recruiter evolving this decade?

JH

The recruiter in my mind has always been an agent or a coach of some sort. The best recruiters are the ones who spend the time with the worker understanding what they really need, who spend the time with the client understanding how this person is going to impact their team, where they fit in, and what's going to happen. I am as convinced as ever that the role of the recruiter is critical. I just saw a post that said there are more active job openings for recruiters than there are for software engineers, so one, that tells us there's still a lot of demand in the today.

If you want evidence that the role is going to stay around for the long term, the most expensive talent we have in the world are our athletes and actors. They all have agents. If you're a left handed pitcher and you've got Major League Baseball quality talent, every team could use you, but which team are you the right fit for? What's the right culture? What's going to fit not just maybe on the team but in the community that you're gonna live within? How's the coach going to groom you or mentor you along the way? Where's that going to fit into it? That's what the agent is helping that individual figure out. It's the same thing for any other skilled position. We have plenty of people who have good quality acting, whether you're going to play an older man or you're going to be a younger woman or you're going to be whatever it is. There's plenty of population for the role. But who's going to hit it best because they fit the culture of what they're trying to bring together. It's about the team and the chemistry that's going to come together.

To me the recruiter's role really needs to be about: why is this position right for you? What's it really going to generate in opportunity? How is it going to evolve your career? It's the same for the client. How is this person going to influence your team? Whether that's a contract worker, a gig worker, or a full-time worker, how are they going to influence the direction of your team and help you get your next promotion by doing things? All of that coaching is going to be core to the recruiting function and going to differentiate those who use the technology to get the base things done that the tech is great versus those who use the human element to really drive what's important to make the match become a fit.

MF

John, I think you're spot on. It makes complete sense what you're saying because that function, that coach function or that agent function that entertainers and athletes have, is a very very high value function that really benefits those individuals. If we can bring that kind of coaching to a broader population, that would add significant value to people's lives and their careers. I think that as the technology becomes more sophisticated, it's

going to free up human time to spend more time working on those higher value activities and bringing more assistance and more help to candidates and employees on a much broader basis.

JH

You even see it, Maurice, if you go into the platform marketplace where you're seeing community curators. They're the ones who are trying to make sure that the right things are happening and that the right services are being delivered to people in there. Net to me is that it's been a great industry for a long period of time, and there's a lot of opportunity and fun ahead for people who are willing to help it evolve. Help the market evolve and continuously bring value to the people that you serve.

MF

I think there's never been a more exciting time to be in the staffing industry. It's just so interesting right now, and there's so many great developments happening that benefit everyone. John, I really appreciate the time you've spent with us today. This has been a really fascinating and really great, insightful conversation.

JH

Maurice, I appreciate you and all the people who are out there helping bring the voice of the market and the things that are going on and perspectives out there. Hopefully we've inspired a few people today and got them fired up about the opportunities that exist in the market that they've chosen to become a professional in.

MF

Alright, fantastic. And we're going to include links to the resources that John mentioned in this conversation. We want to thank everyone for listening, and we look forward to seeing you on the next Staffing Technology podcast.