

Maurice Fuller

Today I'm with Lauren Jones, founder of Leap Consulting Solutions. We'll be talking about the keys to successful technology adoption. Lauren, welcome to the show.

Lauren Jones

Thank you so much for having me, Maurice. I'm excited to be here.

MF

Absolutely. Alright, if you could, tell us a bit about your background.

LJ

Absolutely. So my name is Lauren Jones as you so eloquently said in the beginning. I have been in the staffing and recruiting industry for 24 years. My career took a pivot almost a decade ago when I built my first sort of technical ecosystem whereas it's referred to today as tech stack—not my favorite terminology. But at that point I became obsessed with technology. Two years ago I opened my own consulting firm to service the staffing and recruiting industry, and we focus on three areas.

First is expeditious acquisition of technology. You know we're just no longer in a time and space where we can have these lengthy RFP processes and many steering committees, and so we help the buyer make intelligent decisions on where they are, where they want to get, and the resources that they have to get there. The second is business process change management, which I'm excited to talk about today. It's a meaty topic but really important to the ultimate goal which is adoption. And then finally: evangelization. We spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on our investments and yet we don't spend a lot of time telling our customers, whether it's the candidate or the customer, all about our differentiators that are supported by the technology that we purchased.

MF

Alright, fantastic. Let's start by talking about effective change management in the context of technology adoption. So first of all, what is change management, and why does it matter?

LJ

So change management as I see it is a collective term for all approaches to the preparation, support, and help that individuals and teams within an organization need to execute on an effective transformation or implementation. Change management like I said is a super meaty topic because there are so many things that it touches and so many things that we are required to do to ensure that our ultimate goal of consistency in adoption is met.

MF

Yeah, exactly. And within change management, executive buy-in is super important. So let's talk about that a little bit. Tell us about the importance of executive buy-in and sponsorship during the change management process.

LJ

Yes, so I've seen a lot of missteps as it pertains to change management. We see Forbes put out a statistic on change efforts within large organizations that the vast majority, to the tune of almost 70%, fail. Part of that failure is communication and part of that failure is not helping people understand the why, and that's part of the vision. So executive sponsors are the visionaries, and helping each individual that's affected by this change understand why we're going in a specific direction or why we're implementing something and what's in it for them and what their part is is such an important part of getting that initial buy-in. Executive sponsorship will help people see that this is something that we are all doing together. It's not that this is something we're doing to you, because change management can be taken really personally like if we're taking the perception as if we're taking something away. When you don't have that executive buy-in and you have inconsistency in how you're implementing, it can really affect the sort of mental health of or attitude towards whatever this change might be.

MF

Yeah, exactly. So let's take it one level deeper and think about the organization throughout, and specifically overcoming resistance to change. You mentioned the importance of people understanding the why of the change.

LJ

Yes, transparency is so important particularly today when there has been trust lost with employers. As you know we had massive layoffs with Covid-19 so there is work to be done on the part of employers to keep and maintain trust. When you have resistance, again, usually it's due to lack of transparency or sort of what I call ivory tower decisions where we haven't collaborated. We haven't asked for any information from the field. We may not have any real understanding of what frontline issues might be going on. So just inclusivity, and I think that's the perfect word for leaving that resistance to change is just inclusivity, communication, transparency. Tell people what's going to happen when it's going to happen and if they understand what's coming next, there's less fear behind it.

MF

You mentioned communications, and you have a lot of experience with change management within the context of very large organizations. How do we communicate effectively the change that's coming and how do we leverage internal marketing to facilitate that?

LJ

Internal marketing is your secret power. It's the wizard behind the curtain to communicate appropriately and get people excited. It was Matt Fisher who said at Gig Economy last year that digital marketing as a core competency will be a difference

maker for organizations as we navigate. I'll take it one step further and say digital marketing internally and externally will be the difference maker in having that competitive edge. If I'm implementing a new product I ask for eight weeks of lead time if we have it, if it's not a we're bleeding type of implementation where there's this extreme sense of urgency behind it. There's always a sense of urgency, but sometimes we need to implement things really quickly as we did in 2020. Eight weeks of, again, getting people and informing them, giving them the why, communicating with them in a number of different mediums. So if you're emailing them, texting them, talking about it in a meeting, it's going to feel familiar and that familiarity is going to remove some of the fear of change. So I like an eight week marketing case. It's like an internal marketing campaign to inform people, educate them, give them the why, tell them what's coming, how it's gonna be implemented, how we're gonna hold them accountable, how we'll be coming back around to make sure that they're getting all of the goodness out of what we're trying to implement. It is so fundamental to executing a successful change management. Yeah.

MF

That all makes sense. Lauren, you mentioned implementations, and let's talk specifically about a|ATS implementations. Why is it that some ATS implementations are better than others?

LJ

Well I think there are a couple things and a couple components of a really great ATS implementation. First, it's that the data that's coming in has been well taken care of and maintained. I look at it like always being prepared to move; you had your house and you had your master bedroom, everything's in a box and it's labeled and we know exactly where it goes when we pick up and move to the next house. The same thing is applicable to your data and making sure that we have good data hygiene. That makes you so flexible and agile in implementing or moving your information or data from one ATS to the next.

The second is going to be understanding your requirements and not trying to pigeonhole the new experience to the old experience, so understanding what do I now require this ATS to do that my previous ATS didn't do and not trying to over configure or over customize. Clarity of requirements and what you need the experience to be like is fundamental to a really good ATS implementation, and if there were two that I could pick it would be clean data and a good handle on your requirements.

MF

Yes, agreed. And on your point with clean data, it's never been more important to have clean data as we enter this era of automation and after that AI and ML.

LJ

A hundred percent.

MF

Alright, so let's talk about PMing the deployment of a new ATS system. What's the importance of having a PM to ensure a successful ATS implementation?

LJ

Oh, this is where I see a lot of falldown is that there is no clear ownership when on the client side, particularly in the small to mid-size firm. Everybody's taking a piece of it and that's how we end up with a clunky parsed out solution post implementation. Digital transformation must coincide with structural transformation. Who is going to own this, who is going to continue to stay informed as my ATS develops and upgrades and we have all of these—Bullhorn has an update a couple times a month. So it's really really important to understand and have somebody responsible for maintaining that and maintaining the vision and clarity of how we want the new ATS to function. When you have too many hands in the cookie jar... I'm all for steering committees because if you can have a steering committee that has a diverse view of the tool you have, you're going to have every end user served. But if you have too many hands in the cookie jar, then we just have messiness. So I think there's a PM that needs to be had in that structural transformation, somebody to own it, and then an organized group of voices to ensure that all viewpoints are met, so to speak.

MF

Alright, excellent. What are your thoughts on how we pick an ATS at the right time to maximize success and minimize risk?

LJ

I call this timing and tolerance. In one of my classes that I did a few times last year, The Five Considerations of Digital Transformation, one of the primary ones is timing and tolerance. There is a time when you can maximize the success and it's probably not gonna be during your busiest season of the year. And tolerance: if you've gone through an abundance of change and you have end user learning fatigue, it may not be the right time. So as much as you desire that this happen right now, you really have to understand, is the organization and each of my end users ready for this? Is this the right time for the organization? Or should we hunker down, fill our orders, wait a month to implement something so that we can maximize the return on our investment.

MF

Alright. Let's talk about another topic which is an ATS that has been deployed and the vendors we're working with which are constantly adding new features, and yet our staff is barely taking advantage of the features that are there. What are the best ways to keep our staff up to date with using new features and capabilities as they become available, especially considering that some of these features with automation and bots are pushing users into spaces that they're not necessarily comfortable with?

LJ

Yeah, I think that that ownership that we talked about, that pm, that structural transformation that needs to be aligned with your digital transformation, that mentality shift is where it starts. then it is you know. It can't be a one and done commitment to training. This is an ongoing commitment, so call it monthly optimization, call it monthly stop and learns because here in California you can't do lunch and learns, right? So wherever you are, have the organization stop and learn and invest in your investment. I think that one of the most frustrating parts is buyers thinking I'm just going to buy it, it's going to fix my problems, and then I can move on. That's just not the case. Technology is moving too quickly for us to ignore all these features and capabilities that are being added continuously post-buy.

MF

I like that expression: invest in your investment. Speaking of training, what about on-demand training resources? Do those actually get used and do they help?

LJ

I think yes if they're in bite size chunks. If I'm building a training program for a customer I try to have my videos be no longer than 3 to 5 minutes, and that's because our attention spans have continued to decrease. There's a great book—it's Hook Point, How to Stand Out in a 3 Second World. Our users are also consumers who are getting so much information every second. If you look at Tiktok, we're down to milliseconds as to how people consume information. So on-demand training resources can be exceedingly effective if they are done and organized appropriately. I think that's the other error when it comes to on-demand training materials. There's no organization that makes sense to your specific workflow. Many of the ATs have these robust training resource centers but you can get very lost in them. So finding a way to take those resources, apply them to your specific workflow culture whatever that might be, and if you have to, cutting some of those downs to the meatiest part, that will help the end user capture whatever function it is we're trying to train them on. But they cannot be lengthy because there's no tolerance for that anymore.

MF

Alright, fantastic. I mean we talked quite a bit now about digital transformation. Let's dive into that a bit and specifically structural transformation and how that plays a role in the overall digital transformation.

LJ

I don't think this can be emphasized enough that we're just not in a time and space where digital transformation can not have structural transformation aligned with it. I've said it a few times that we have to have a watcher. We need a shepherd for all of these tools. And in many cases it truly is a tech stack or a complex tech stack or ecosystem that we are managing, and each one of those technologies comes with their own new features and capability upgrades. So having this spread out throughout an organization without centralized ownership I think is mayhem for an organization to have clarity of

purpose with how they're going to leverage in an ongoing way their newfound digital transformation.

MF

Yes. Let's specifically talk about how to lead the digital transformation internally and how we cultivate future leaders that can lead the digital transformation.

LJ

I love this question because I feel like I was in a position where I was a very early adopter of this sort of digital transformation role before we even knew it was going to be a thing. I think that companies who have talent that are diverse... So the people that I'm seeing really successful in these digital transformation roles have come from the desk, have also worked in sales, love really good, clean operations, and love collaboration within the organization. If marketing technology and ops aren't working together, your digital transformation isn't going to make it. I think anybody that can act as the glue for those three entities or departments within an organization is going to find themselves leading successful transformations. So I have worked with a lot of organizations to say who within your organization could you rise up through the ranks who loves technology, loves to be enabled by it, has a diverse background, and can bring people together in a collaborative way? Those are a lot of soft skills, you'll notice. I don't necessarily think you need this, you know, meaty technical background to make all of that work. This is a collaboration effort.

MF

That's really insightful. So talking specifically about training and taking people internally to prepare them for that digital transformation, in what areas should we be training them to lead the digital transformation, and does that include technology skills as well as soft skills?

LJ

Yeah, the soft skills is the collaboration part, bringing groups together and taking it all in and having clarity of what each department needs. When we buy in silos is when we end up with these really disrupted user experiences both internally and externally. So if you have marketing that says okay, we're going to go buy HubSpot then you have operations that says okay, we're going to go buy Bullhorn, and you're cultivating all of these new leads in HubSpot without giving thought to what the transition is from: I have HubSpot, I have a lead, I need it to now go to Bullhorn so that my salespeople can go capture it. What you often see happen is we end up with these two CRMs. Well, we'll pick up HubSpot's CRM capability, cultivate more sales over there, and then we'll just send it over for an order repository in Bullhorn. It just doesn't make sense. When you have disparate buying and not collaboration you end up having a really clunky process.

So how do you support digital transformation through training the future leaders of this digital transformation? Well, I think that it's going to be somebody that lives and breathes

the culture of the organization because I believe that the tech stack can reflect the core of an organization. So it's somebody that's got a really good stronghold on the culture and vision of the organization. Then the easy part is exposure to all of the tools that are out there. That's what I think—exposing them to all of the technology that is out there to support the organizations. And that doesn't mean, because I had somebody in my class in September that did some crazy 200 and something demos, that there is a balance, but exposure to what is out there and engaging in informative groups that can inform best practices is a great way to provide training in this future skill set.

I don't think that there are a ton of resources out there for this sort of Director of Digital Transformation, VP of Talent Technology, and all of these new roles that we have coming out there. I think it's going to be about information. We have this beautiful, free information out there. So I think those that capture it, can organize it well, and apply it within the organization working well with others—some of that can't be trained because those are a lot of soft skills. The willingness to collaborate, align, ask questions, and listen, those are soft skills that are required for a position like this in my opinion.

MF

Yeah, I completely agree. Alright, do you have any final thoughts you want to share with our listeners about the digital transformation and technology adoption and doing that successfully?

LJ

Proper planning prevents poor performance. I will leave you with that. I think some good planning to prepare the organization for this change is just.. where I see a lot go wrong is when there isn't good planning. We buy in reaction to something that might hurt and so that proper planning is good prevention for poor performance.

MF

Completely agreed. Alright, thank you very much, Lauren. This has been a great discussion. Thanks everyone for listening and we'll see you on the next Staffing Technology podcast.

LJ

Thank you, Maurice.