

## AT THE EDGE PODCAST



### SEASON 2, BONUS EPISODE A ROSEMARY REIN – CFO Actually Means “Chief Fun Officer” Interviewed by Michael Lee

**Rosemary Rein** is Senior Vice President of Product at Innovation Minds. Previous to this, she was Director of Learning and Education at Wikipedia. She is an author, international speaker, and global citizen who has helped Fortune 500 Companies, non-profit organizations and private clients achieve their highest potential by mentoring them on leadership, innovation, and engagement. Rosemary is the recipient of South Africa’s “Beyond Award” for her contributions to the field of creativity and has served as Vice-Chair of the Creative Problem Solving Institute. She has taught Creative problem Solving and Innovation in the US, Latin America, UAE, India, South East Asia and Africa. Rosemary has lived in Latin America for fifteen years and currently is based in Ecuador.

In this bonus episode, Rosemary talks about the importance of connection and of fun in today’s world of work, the Great Resignation and its impact, why empathy and transparency are the top qualities needed in leaders today, the sources of great employee experience, why ongoing feedback is way better than occasional pulse surveys, and the power of explaining Why.

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#### **Michael Lee**

*Rosemary, welcome to At the Edge. And thank you for being here.*

#### **Rosemary Rein**

Amazing to be with you, Michael. We have so many global parties involved. I'm from Ecuador, you're in South Africa. Of course, our organization is in San Francisco. So we're touching all parts of the planet.

#### **Michael Lee**

*We just need to get someone from Singapore on here. But we had that last season. So let's start, Rosemary, just by giving us a background. Why or how have you achieved the status of an expert around the areas that Innovation Mind works?*

**Rosemary Rein**

I connected with the amazing Bala from Innovation Minds when he was Chief Innovation and HR Officer at LinkedIn while I was in San Francisco. I led Learning and Development for a little organization you might have heard of called Wikipedia. Of course, that's about democratized content and how to get people engaged as volunteers, all around the world. I had my own facilitation business, always focused on employee and customer engagement and innovation. I worked around the world with the Young Presidents' Organization. Facilitating that process in person led me to the fact that we also need to be able to connect and communicate virtually with employees and customers. And thus the love affair with Innovation Minds.

**Michael Lee**

*Let dive right into that issue of how we do business being something that's changing. Obviously, the hybrid work situation is sudden. At the same time, it's been looming for a long time. How is it changing the situation around how employees are going to relate to each other and to the company?*

**Rosemary Rein**

No time in our history can we remember where connection is more important. Having experienced almost the unthinkable with COVID, we had this pause. When they talk about innovation, you need incubation time. I think we had some incubation time individually, as well as organizationally, where we looked at our priorities, we looked at the way we live and work and connect with each other. So now more than ever, the feeling of belonging is critical.

And I'm sure Michael, you've heard of the Great Resignation and the fact that on the low end they're saying that 25% of our employees will think about moving to a new company, and up to 45%. We want to feel connected.

Thankfully, there is technology and solutions that will help us better collaborate, connect, understand each other.

This is the critical challenge facing leadership. Twenty years from now we'll look back and say, "Boy, after COVID, we redefined how we connect, work, play. Now we have balance. Now we're focused on the health and wellness of our employees."

Technology helped us get through the bumpy roads. Innovation is happening right under our feet. The way we look at work, how we engage, how we look at health and wellness and values. All the stars needed to align. During COVID, we were like, okay, let's keep everything as calm as we can, because everything else is imploding. So there is this restlessness there. How do we retain and engage our employees in an ideal employee experience?

**Michael Lee**

*Well, how DO we engage our employees in an ideal employee experience?*

**Rosemary Rein**

I'm going to begin with empathy. They say that an engaged employee gets five positive reinforcement points to every potential "You could do a little better next time," in terms of negative feedback. A five to one ratio.

Number two is transparency. Transparency and connection. I feel heard as an employee, and I feel part of something that is not just lip service.

One of the secrets is that we incorporate engagement touchpoints with our employees year round, not once a year. This is really a critical component of what Innovation Minds is focused on. How do we make it easier for employers to connect with employees, partners, customers, in a real and authentic way? It's much more important to have regular, meaningful conversations with employees. And that involves not only in-person connections, but virtual connections. Because we are living in this hybrid world, there's a connection there, where, you know, the need to automate or the opportunity to automate is colliding with the fact that people are now demanding to be treated as people rather than as machines.

Data can be our friend. It can tell us how we make decisions, that all our employees cannot be treated with one very broad brush. We have individual needs, and we like to be heard. And so while a lot of your technical tasks that can be automated are now off our plate, we contemplate more the connections we have with those in the world around us.

There's a saying that we become the five people we spend the most time with. Well guess what? One of those five people is the organization that you're affiliated with.

**Michael Lee**

*What are some of the other techniques we can use to give our employees an experience of being treated with care and the fact that they are actually valued?*

**Rosemary Rein**

Positive reinforcement has to be not once and done, once a year. Regardless of if we are in an in-person or virtual environment, we need to maximize the opportunity for positive touchpoints. Recognition and reward are key.

I heard recently about a study where if a leader were to touch base with their employee, their direct report, once a week, that would be enough to have that employee remain in the organization. That's the power of positive reinforcement.

Gamification, where not only is it the individual leader that's providing positive reinforcement, but the infrastructure for engagement and innovation provides rewards and then shows the employee that they're contributing.

One of the things I often tell leaders in my workshops is one of the greatest ways to motivate and inspire your employees is to give them a challenge. One of my favorite features of Innovation Minds is, it presents a fun and engaging opportunity to offer industry challenges, organizational challenges, and get all employees involved.

I believe most challenges that businesses have - and you can take it from project management to financial to operation - the answer lies with your employees. As a consultant myself early in my career, as a VP in Financial Services, the first thing I would do is go to the front line and see what the employees said needed to be fixed. Very often, it was not in the boardroom, but it was the voice of those employees that gave me the power to enable a solution. So making sure that people have challenges I think will be key, and leveraging technology as much as we can to make collaboration authentic and transparent. And not once a year, but built into everyday workflow.

What we're now calling the employee experience - before the employee is even hired, what does that experience look like? Onboarding, mentoring and coaching. Is every new employee assigned a mentor? Because that is key to the sense of belonging. So thinking through the entire employee experience and mapping that out and making sure you have key touchpoints will be the key to keeping a lasting, healthy workplace.

Then of course, there's the fun things. At one point, I had a position in one of my organizations, a CFO, and you might be thinking, oh, Chief Financial Officer. No. Chief Fun Officer. You have to build in healthy, fun laughter into the daily workflow, because work is challenging enough. We need to make it not only interesting and engaging, but allow for a bit of play.

### **Michael Lee**

*Well, now that you've gone there, let's talk about fun. Because everybody knows that fun is important for creativity. But some people don't realize how important it is for the employee experience, employee engagement. A lot of studies have been done in terms of how it reduces stress, how it improves relationships, that it actually energizes people and makes us smarter. And I guess it's quite clear that having fun in the workplace is really important for success. And yet, I don't think that's something that's been inculcated into the mindset of most employers, right?*

### **Rosemary Rein**

Fun needs to be part of the job, without a doubt. And you're right, there needs to be a mental reset. "Oh, if you're having fun, you must not be working!" Now more than ever, fun is important. Sitting in front of your computer screen as a virtual employee for eight hours a day is draining. Companies that are meeting this challenge are doing creative and innovative things. We have "Water Cooler Connections" at Innovation Minds. We have "Innovation Snacks." I have seen companies do - my favorite - virtual wine tastings, where they send a bottle of wine to the home of the employees. Not only are they appreciated, but they actually make a connection between wine tasting and leadership. I've seen comedians come in to break up the workday.

If you think about what is your value proposition for new employees, to be the best employer, you want other people, other employees saying, Gosh, it's great to be here; it's not only

engaging, we do cool and fun things, we have virtual happy hours, we make sure that everyone feels included.

**Michael Lee**

*Some fun statistics around fun. Apparently giving employees a free lunch gets them to work about forty minutes more productively in that day. So although they're taking half an hour to eat the lunch, they actually get forty minutes more work done. Apparently, the lunch would cost about two or three dollars. So if the employee is earning more than \$5 an hour, it's already a win, just on a basic financial level. It seems that doing things that are considerate for the employee, doing things that make them feel cared for or valued is automatically profitable.*

**Rosemary Rein**

I remember having nineteen bank branches reporting to me, and it was a basic premise of our then-CEO that if your employees are happy, that is going to carry over into the mood and vibe of your branch office and with customers.

At Wikipedia, we would bring in lunch for the employees and have a really engaging innovative speaker. And all the staff was there and connected and collaborated. We'd also do that with evening talks that we had, with interesting topics, particularly health and wellness.

One of the things I'm really excited about at Innovation Minds is that we're building in some of that fun factor. Part of daily engagement is incorporating fun engagement, empathy, into everything that the employee sees, feels, hears and touches. So kind of a multi-sensory approach, if you will, to how do we craft a workplace where employees can't wait to start working in the morning. Because they have a challenge they're excited about, they're engaging with their peers, they feel listened to, and they have a flexible work environment.

**Michael Lee**

*The question is, how do you replicate that in a hybrid environment? How do you create this campus, create a place that you're actually spending time with everybody, when you're actually sitting in your own house?*

**Rosemary Rein**

A lot of what I hear from employees is about tool exhaustion, there's tools for this, we got to sign up for this program and that program and this program. There is not a sense of a home away from home, like a connected place. That's workplace playground connection.

I think what we need to do is get creative about looking not only at how employees find information, receive onboarding, connect with mentors and peers, connect with challenges. We need to look at every touchpoint an employee has with the organization and re-imagine and think outside of the box of how do we optimize that. And also build that bridge between the on-site staff and the virtual staff.

I've done virtual vacations with teams, where Yes, we were all in lockdown, but guess what? We went to Venice and we went to Tuscany! There are an enormous amount of opportunities for us to sit back, re-imagine, and re-engage employees in a fresh and different way, where even though they might not be at the office, when they log on in the morning, they're at a great workplace. And that experience also impacts not only the employee, but their family as well.

We can use AI and the latest technology, they're doing amazing things in which you can connect with like-minded employees and find individuals who have similar interests as you, who have similar strengths as you. And we have a what we call an Innovator Profile, where through some self-assessment tools, even if you have a large organization, you can find your tribe to work on a challenge. There are amazing things we can do with predictive team analytics. We can put together a pretty awesome team of diverse thinkers that will really make a project successful.

**Michael Lee**

*What you're saying is the workplace needs to become kind of like a playground with OKRs.*

**Rosemary Rein**

Yeah. If you take a look in Silicon Valley, where our firm is from, they design places, physical plans, where employees in the lunchroom, for example, connect in meaningful ways.

Well, now we have to broaden the horizon to not only look at the physical plan and the architecture, but the virtual experience as well. So I am sure there's going to be new job opportunities for virtual employee workspaces, how to design that perfect engagement.

But for now, we're relying on CEOs and HR executives and Innovation Officers to really take a look at re-imagining what the workspace looks like not only on site, but virtually. And that means examining everything the employee sees, hears, and touches and what their total experience is with the organization.

**Michael Lee**

*I guess as we move away from people driving into a building, it becomes harder and harder to shape the employee's experience of being at work.*

**Rosemary Rein**

Well yeah, for example, you know, I I've taught for many years that the first fifteen minutes of your day is critical to your psychology. So I always say, the first fifteen minutes, don't look at the news, make sure you read something inspirational, spend time with nature. The same principle, I really reinforce with my managers and directors. What does the first fifteen minutes look like when your employees enter the office? Is it a quick "Hey, how are you?" Or is it something more inspiring? So how does your experience begin virtually with your

employees? How do you begin their day? I can see very cool, motivational, inspiring messages to start their workday.

The other important period of the day is how you end the day, right? With gratitude and appreciation. So if you think about this concept of positive reinforcement, remember to bookend the virtual experience with positives, so that they begin the day on a high, they end the day on a high, and in between the work gets done and collaboration happens.

**Michael Lee**

*So is the purpose of Innovation Minds, would you say, in a sense, to be that playground?*

**Rosemary Rein**

I am saying that the future of all workplaces will be an integrated place and not going to a zillion different applications, and that it has to be designed with the human motivation and best in psychology in mind. So as we talked about, it begins with framing the opening of the day, the closing of the day, the water cooler connections, and it has to be part of not going to a separate system, but connected to our day-to-day work.

At Innovation Minds, thankfully, the best minds in Silicon Valley designed the cloud solution so that it is a playground, but it is a workplace where you not only go from idea management, to project management. I think we both know that innovation often fails because there's all these ideas and nothing happens. So you need to have that central hub, that location where work happens, play happens, connection happens.

**Michael Lee**

*Is there anything else you'd like to say before we close?*

**Rosemary Rein**

There was a 1978 Harvard study that said that we increase compliance from 60 to 93% if we use the word "Because." I think post-COVID we're searching for our Because. Our Because in our lives, our Because where we work and where we choose to work. Organizations and businesses, and I include non-profit organizations in that equation, that give us a powerful Because help us to make sense of confusing times and find meaning and value.

**Michael Lee**

*So it's the shift from the company defining its purpose to each individual finding their purpose in the company.*

**Rosemary Rein**

Exactly right. Exactly right.

**Michael Lee**

*Great. Rosemary, thank you so much for being here. I look forward to seeing more of what you come up with at Innovation Minds.*

**Rosemary Rein**

Let's play.