

Tyler Carmody:

All right. Hello and welcome to another episode of UCX USA Talks. My name is Tyler Carmody and I'm the conference operations manager at UCX USA, and it is my pleasure to introduce David Danto. He wears many hats. He is the director of UC strategy and research at HP and Poly, and also the director of emerging technology at the IMCCA.

Tyler Carmody:

Today we'll be talking about a very interesting topic that is surely to get everyone thinking and is definitely one that David is very passionate about. There was never a water cooler. How IT determines your culture and how your culture determines your IT. With that, let's get going. The first question is, David, I want you to tell us a little bit about who you are and your journey to being a UC expert.

David Danto:

Oh, well, thank you very much, and thank you for having me here. It's a pleasure to speak to the audience. I've been doing what it is, trying to figure out what I'm going to be when I grow up, for about four decades now. A little bit more than that...started in 1978 when I was an intern at corporate television at a little company you might have heard of, called AT&T. I went on a journey that first took me into broadcasting and cable television and corporate television.

David Danto:

I was a director of engineering for Financial News Network before CNBC bought it. I built all of Mike Bloomberg's TV and radio stations from the engineering standpoint, and right around Y2K, right around the beginning of that, I switched over to work more on the corporate side in communication for financial services companies, a number of them, most of them, actually. Then for the last, I don't know, 10 or so years, I've been a consultant and now with Poly and HP working on thought leadership and what's going on in the industry and UC and all the collaboration pieces. So it's been a fun and interesting journey.

Tyler Carmody:

Cool. All right. So you speak passionately about the concept that there was never a water cooler where impromptu collaboration took place. Can you share what you mean by that?

David Danto:

Oh, sure. Of course there was a water cooler, I'm not denying the obvious. But the situation we've been in over these last three years, the horrific pandemic where all of us were forced to work away from the office in many cases, or have a lot of protection and a lot of space between us, it started to make a number of people look back at the past with rose colored glasses. This great time when we would all be in the office together and we would all go out to lunch together and have these impromptu moments that we would connect and share and collaboration would happen. That's not reality.

If you're working in a small hardware store or maybe a small company, maybe everybody's in the same office. But, like I said, I've been doing a large business for four decades. I'm in New Jersey, in New York,

my colleagues are in Chicago, they're in Florida, they're in Atlanta, they're in North Carolina, they're in California, they're in London, they're in Tokyo. There is no water cooler that we're going to be able to do to share with my colleagues across the company. If we haven't developed the technology and the capability to be able to have those impromptu conversations and those culture building moments over technology, we're just not going to have them at all.

David Danto:

So looking back, and for everybody to be saying, "I want everybody to be back in the office because then we can finally collaborate in person,"; that's a joke and it's a lie and it's revisionist's history. What we've got to do is really build technology and build a culture and build smart managers so that we can manage remote staffs and make sure we have a strong company culture, regardless if the person is in the next office or the next building or the next country. That's just the reality.

Tyler Carmody:

Absolutely. We're going to shift the conversation to talking about hybrid work. The first question is, how do organizations reset the assumptions and misconceptions about being future ready/hybrid work ready?

David Danto:

Well, what we just talked about is actually a lot of that, this misconception that everybody could be in the same office and we're building culture because we're all together. A lot of people look at the concept of hybrid working and think of it, worst case scenario, everybody's remote, nobody's connected. People jump, they're doing nine jobs. They're lying in bed eating ice cream, or all the bad misconceptions that they have. A hybrid really isn't an or, it's not an in the office or at home or on the road. Hybrid working is an and. Hybrid working is the ability to have good collaboration from wherever an employee happens to be. One of the most important tenants of hybrid working is letting that knowledge work and letting that employee who has the ability to be remote make a decision on their own what's the best place for them to be at any given time.

David Danto:

Sometimes that's the office, sometimes the office for a couple of months. Sometimes it's a new office being built and you're working with staff and technology. Sometimes it's the client's office. Sometimes it's a technology trade show like the one we're going to be having in Austin per UCX USA. Where you need to be on any given day should be the decision of the person doing the job, not a company setting a formula, "Well, you'll be here for two days and there for three days and there for a day and a half." That's the whole concept, is to reset those misconceptions. Make sure people understand that it's an "and", and you get the best of all worlds by allowing it and having that flexibility.

Tyler Carmody:

Great. Our next question is, how does hybrid working impact the role of managers and their style and knowledge, and how does this impact developing and maintaining organizational culture?

David Danto:

That's actually a really important question and a really important part of this. I've worked in a lot of organizations. I'm sure that people watching this have as well. Somebody is a terrific performer. They're either knocking it out of the park with sales or they're really good with clients. Whatever they do, they're great. So automatically because we're giving them a pat on the back and a raise, we're promoting them to the role of manager. Typically, what you need to have in terms of skills as an individual contributor is almost the exact opposite of what you need to have as skills as a manager. And if we don't take those managers and give them the skills and the training required to manage a remote workforce, that's our key weak point. That's where a lot of this culture will fail. That's where a lot of this hybrid working will fail.

David Danto:

A lot of organizations adopted this concept of management by walking around. I see people, I see their butts in the seats, I see their jackets hanging in the coatroom, so I know they must be working. I see how they've punched the time clock, so they must be working. All of those are wrong. That's not the skills. How do you take the remote workforce and make them feel seen, even if they may not be in the office all the time? How do you make them feel like their contributions are valued? How do you take, just as a simple manager, the manager's job is to make sure people stay focused? It's really easy to criticize when someone's going off track. It's the manager's job, in fact, to do that.

David Danto:

But how do you remember to compliment? How do you remember to recognize? How do you remember to make sure that the dispersed team around the world all knows what everybody else is working on so they don't walk into a room at some point in a month or two months down the road and say, "Why are you doing that? I was doing this," and it gets all kinds of confusing. We need specific training for managers in order for hybrid working to work, and there's very little of it in organizations. You'll see training required for sensitivity training, cultural training, compliance training, but you rarely see, here are the courses you need to take as a manager. That's what's got to change.

Tyler Carmody:

With that, we're actually at our last question, which is, what are the most important actions and opportunities for organizations to be working on right now?

David Danto:

Well, in order to be ready for now, now's already gone and passed and that now's already passed. You have to be working for the future, the concept that we call future ready. You have to make sure that what you're doing, what you're buying, the plans that you're putting in place, you're not going to be just effective for the current market, but they're going to be effective for the market in a year, in two years, in five years, in 10 years, to the best of our ability to understand.

David Danto:

One of the key points is this technology that we're relying on to build culture and have communication has gone through such a revolution over the last two or three years that if the technology in your offices has not changed, if the layout of your offices have not changed over the last two or three years, you're already lost. You need to be making very specific updates, changes with the technology, with the office layout.

David Danto:

There's this concept that goes around the industry right now about wanting to bring people back to the office. There's this idea of magnet or mandate. Are you going to force everybody back into the office by giving them a mandate, or are you going to make your central office something that's so attractive to the employees that they're going to want to come in and they're going to want to be there? So redesigning, rebuilding, upgrading the technology.

David Danto:

By the way, the upgraded technology doesn't represent a huge investment. The conference rooms, video conferencing, collaboration, are a fraction of what they used to cost. They're smarter, they're easier to use. The complication has dropped; the price has dropped. You can walk into a conference room right now and just focus on your subject matter expertise, whether that's being an accountant or being a doctor or whatever it is. You don't need to be an AV expert in the rooms anymore because the systems are smart enough to do everything for you. You can almost throw the remote controls out the window at this point.

David Danto:

That's one of the things about being future ready, update the office, train your managers, update the equipment, and really get yourself set for the next five or 10 years.

Tyler Carmody:

For sure. Well, like I said, I know this would be a topic that would get everyone thinking, something you're obviously very passionate about. I would like to see if you have any final takeaways or anything you'd like to tell our audience?

David Danto:

Only that I'm excited about working with UCX USA. I'm excited about seeing everybody in Austin in September, and I look forward to that interpersonal contact and teaching and learning. "The day you stop learning is the day you die," is something my late father used to say. I do appreciate the idea of walking around and hearing from people and learning what they do and being the best of all worlds.

Tyler Carmody:

Absolutely. Well, David, thank you again very much for your time today. And thank you all again for your time and attention. Our session will be available on ucxusa.com and if you found this valuable, please make sure to share it with your colleagues and your peers. Remember, you can also follow us on social

media at UCX USA and at UCX USA Expo for more information on today's session, as well as other trends and topics in the unified communications, AV, customer contact and customer experience industries. We'll see you next time.