

Alison (00:06):

Welcome to The Breakthrough, where we talk with technology leaders about their successes, struggles, and everything in between. I'm Alison Dean, VP of operations at TheoremOne. And today, we are talking with Drew Martin, currently Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer at Jack in the Box – which is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. That's a long time. That's a while.

Drew sent me this quote from George Bernard Shaw, one of his favorites. And I thought it particularly poignant given our current times. "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man." So, hello, Drew!

Drew (01:02):

Hello, be unreasonable. That's what I say.

Alison (01:05):

So what does that quote mean to you?

Drew (01:07):

I think it just means that there are times in life when you want to accept things as they are. And other times, especially when you're doing digital transformation, you have a vision of how you think it should be. And you know, it takes a lot of unreasonable persistence sometimes to make that happen. So it was the thought behind that quote.

Alison (01:27):

I like it. Can you walk us through what a typical... and people are answering this in sort of two ways – pre-pandemic, post-pandemic, or current today... what would a typical day look like for you?

Drew (01:41):

Yeah, well, actually there's a cadence that I think I find a lot of leaders have adapted to this. It's a kind of a cadence during the week where, you know, the beginning of the week, you're checking in with your directors and seeing, you know, what's on their plate. What barriers are in their way that you can help them with?

What bad news do I need to know about? Usually, I don't spend a lot of time on their good news but find out what all the issues are out there. And then, as I do that during the day, I'll take notes about things that are cross-functional. Things that other team members need to know about. And then usually we'll sync up,

you know, on a Tuesday and kind of lift it up and say across the team, "How's everything going? What are those barriers or points of maybe lack of alignment, and what are we gonna need to get into them?"

Drew (02:19):

And then I spend the rest of the week trying to address all those things. So that's the cadence. So it depends on the day of the week, but I typically also find, especially with COVID, that I'm a bit of an early bird. So I get up pretty early and get ahead of my emails and other things, usually sometimes so early that I turn off the send feature because I don't want to frighten people.

But then I'd say by mid-afternoon, I'm kind of done. So I don't know if that'll stay when we get into going back to the office. But I had to go to the office the other day, and I found it was really inconvenient to shave and shower and actually commute. So it's very unproductive to do all those things. So we'll see how that goes when we go back into the office.

Alison (03:00):

I totally get it. So you've worked for some of the most well-known brands, Pepsi-Co, Sony, and now Jack in the Box, what is the most crucial aspect of a company's IT strategy?

Drew (03:11):

I think the most crucial thing is to get the alignment right. You know, I think sometimes you can have some great technical ideas that just aren't really aligned with the business outcomes that people want and what the business priorities are. Sometimes you've got tremendous aspirations from a business point of view, in terms of what things can mean in digital, but you might not be resourced or capable from a technology point of view.

So, you know, I say sometimes I'd always rather have a good strategy with an amazing execution than an amazing strategy. So I think a good strategy that has good alignment, as long as you can marshal the resources and execute that well, I think that's the most important thing about a strategy.

I think sometimes a strategy can be a little bit over, overdone, or overemphasized as opposed to culture and execution.

Alison (04:02):

So in the 2017 interview that I read, you mentioned that franchisee-owned restaurants were a focal point for the business that year, and thus, the importance of robust IT services was of necessity. Have priorities shifted in 2021? Is the strategy still centered on franchise operations, or have things changed?

Drew (04:23):

Yeah. Yeah. So I think what I learned a lot about in Jack in the Box as being a corporate officer, and we talk about alignment is the investor community. So before I got to Jack in the Box, you know, the investor community came up with a model and said, you know, they say they have a hypothesis. Which is another way of saying, this is what we want you to do as investors, and their hypothesis is that there's a much better, reliable cash flow if we franchise our restaurant.

So that was a real culture shift. I think that actually, again, actually getting that was pretty straightforward in terms of finding franchisees that wanted to take on more stores and everything. But the cultural aspect of thinking and realizing that it's a 95% franchise system. The only way we're going to be successful is with successful franchisees.

Drew (05:15):

And so in a company-owned environment, we could be a lot better about controlling our destiny. But in this model, you know, we had to start looking at our franchisees as customers and making sure that, like any customers, that we understood what their needs were, if they were happy or not, what their satisfaction was, and make sure they were viable and profitable. And that was a focus in 2017. I think this year, we've actually, for the first time, surveyed the franchisees to see if they're happy now across a bunch of different dimensions?

And we brought in a third party to do that. And it really, as much as we might've said in 2017, you know, "Hey, yeah, we do have to take care of the franchisees." We really got it broken down into some specific things that they care about and that were gaps with their expectation, what they wanted from the brand.

So being able to get that more quantified data and execute a strategy to make sure we're really focusing on the franchisees. It's a kind of an ongoing cultural evolution.

Alison (06:13):

Can you talk to us a bit about the first large-scale project that you spearheaded?

Drew (06:19):

Sure. I think a pretty big one was at Sony electronics. I was the CIO for the US electronic division, which was about a \$13 billion entity at the time, before we did battle with Apple, in terms of numbers. And it was pretty, if you like supply chain as I do, I was a little bit of a kid in a candy store with, you know. We had stuff coming in from Mexico on TV manufacturing.

We had computer manufacturing for laptops we had done in San Diego, and we had stuff coming in from the cameras, Sony cameras, from Tokyo by air. And then we had a bunch of other lower-cost items like media coming over by boat that somebody manufactured in Alabama.

So it was quite a complex supply chain. You end with a very dynamic demand pattern talking to the Best Buys of the world.

Drew (07:09):

And so there were four different ERP systems. So every time the business said something like, "Hey, we want to make this change." The conversation with IT kind of started at a million dollars and six months, that was opening up the conversation.

So the transformation essentially was about being able to make those changes to the supply chain. If they said, "Hey, we want to source this out, we want a DC (a distribution center) in Chicago, instead of Pittsburgh, you know, again, when we had 40 RPS, it was well, that's at least six months and probably a million dollars. And when we put an SAP, by the end of it all, it was a weekend of changing some tables.

It was about a \$130 million project. And I was heading that up. And I think a lot of people were expecting that we were going to find \$130 million in headcount savings, which is a lot of people. But actually, what happened was, you know, the value of being able to capitalize on a market opportunity, like moving your warehouse to Chicago or, changing pricing dynamically, which again, used to be a couple of weeks exercise... The speed to market benefits is really what justified all that spending and all that transformation.

Alison (08:20):

And to piggyback off of that, what's the most recent large-scale project that you've implemented.

Drew (08:26):

I think the other project that I would talk about is just a Jack in the Box. When I got there, we were talking about the scheduling systems for the restaurant workers. And they literally told me that the system that we're using was FoxPro, which was two years ago, three years ago. And so I was shocked to know that it was actually in production, and we had a, kind of elderly consultant who we had on retainer. And I always want to make sure he was feeling good and healthy because he was the only one who knew the FoxPro code. But anyway, we were able to go to a SAS-based cloud model.

It's a project that had actually been going on for a while at Jack in the Box. But because I don't think we had addressed properly the change management aspect of it. You know, I think it was one of those projects that were trying to replicate the old functionality, instead of saying, no there's new functionality, that's actually better.

Drew (09:24):

And the catch is, you have to change your behavior and, you know, it's uncomfortable going from one system to another system. But it's always amazed me how in all technology and on this project, the goal is to seamlessly and transparently replace a legacy system.

Like unless you've been on that project. You have to say that out loud, a few times yourself. The best we're going to do on this project, the best possible outcome would be that no one would notice anything changed and we will spend lots of money and lots of effort. And we'll declare victory by saying no one even noticed there was a change.

So it kind of, when you think about it that way, I think if you go onto projects saying that we're going to get a benefit, but things are going to have to change. Systems are going to have to change. Processes are going to have to change. Jobs, job descriptions are going to have to change. And if you start with that, I think you have a better chance of success than just saying, "Hey, this is a great new system that other people have had success with. And we should be able to put that in and good things will happen."

Alison (10:25):

What's your temperature around purchasing off-the-shelf software versus building custom internally?

Drew (10:31):

I think early in my career, I was working at Pepsi Cola and I'm back in New York, we were doing a lot on the customer side. You know, going into retail stores with truck drivers, with handhelds. We were really pushing the envelope on that. We were customizing Windows operating systems. We were custom designing actual hardware because we had about 30,000 handheld units that were going out there. So we had enough scale and everything, and that process of selling into a gas and convenience store, getting the right price and, you know, understanding the dynamics of the other inventory, the competitors in the stores, super sensitive and competitive advantage if you do it right.

So at the same time, at the same company, we also were proud to have the world's... oh, at the time, the oldest version of PeopleSoft.

So the point being, you know, it was kind of stark, but the point being that, you know, when things are a competitive advantage where you really want to differentiate yourself to your customer from the competition, then it makes sense to take on some of these things like custom in-house development.

Then other things that are not particularly competitive, like ERP systems or HR systems, we typically would not go custom and you can have standardized applications and really just do the bare minimum on those.

Drew (11:50):

So it's not a one-size-fits-all. It really depends on the business outcome.

Alison (11:54):

The times where you've decided to do something custom in-house, do you ever leverage outside consultants for that? Or would you just bring on more employees or, you know, use more of your internal team to handle that?

Drew (12:07):

That's really a good question. When I got to Jack in the Box, one of the things I wanted to be clear about, is—what is, from an organization's point of view, what are the core competencies of the organization? And to your earlier question, one of the things that I thought we needed to do was be a professional services firm, because we were actually providing a professional service to the franchisees and they actually have to pay for it as part of the franchise agreement.

So we were lacking some of those professional services kind of skills. And at the same time, we wanted to be clear on where we would develop again, what are our core development skills? And to answer that question, one of the things you have to be aware of is how certain you are, that that's a long-term skill that you need. And typically what I've done in my career is for new emerging technologies that you're not sure about.

Drew (12:55):

And then if it gets to a point where you say, yeah, this really worked, and this is something that's going to be tomorrow's crazy innovative technology becomes today's standard. If you get to the point where that innovation, that you leverage a third party to make happen, you say, yeah, this is really something that's going to be around for the long-term.

Then, you just do the math, and it makes more sense to bring those skills in house. But sometimes you try different projects that are kind of pushing the envelope and you're not sure. And then that doesn't work out that well. Well then it's a much easier conversation to execute your out clause with a third party than to let people go.

Alison (13:31):

Okay. So to transition from that, you almost have to have customers because you have your franchise owners as a customer, and you have the customers of the franchisees, right? So you have like this dual layer of customers. So that means you have two opportunities for data and feedback.

So I guess I'm going to be asking this in both aspects, what actions have you taken in response to the franchise owners' feedback and also the customers of the franchisees?

Drew (14:01):

Yeah. And that, it's a great question. And we trip up on each other enough ourselves that kind of standardized the terminology as guests of the restaurant are our customers and their franchisee is a

customer. So we actually don't say customer that often, we more often would say a franchisee and that's implied more one type of customer and another as a guest.

And I think in both cases, there is a classic CRM opportunity that they tend to be different, sometimes requiring different processes and different solutions to satisfy the needs. So an example of franchisees, we have just over a hundred franchise operators but that's a very deep, critical relationship obviously. And so we, we certainly want to understand our billing to them, their legal documentation and their commitments on development, everything we're doing from a supply chain and their restaurants, the building and layouts of the restaurants, every ticket that gets called in from their restaurant.

Drew (15:02):

So there's only a hundred, but there is a tremendous amount of information that we need to collect and manage and, and we have a lot of touchpoints in the organization. So we even want to know if someone had a good conversation with a franchisee, or they were talking to me about technology, but they asked a question about a new product coming out in a window that I'll be able to use a system to communicate that, to product marketing and vice versa.

So that's a very different type of CRM. Then, you know, the millions of transactions we would have every year from our guests. And, historically that guest has been not much more than a credit card number. You know, before COVID and some of the digital and loyalty, and some of the mobile things we're doing. So we could derive some information about, Hey, this, this credit card, which we assume belongs to the same person, came back for another visit this month, or they didn't. And we can kind of derive some conclusions from that.

But the opportunity now is, obviously, to do a lot more one-to-one marketing with each of those guests. To leverage some of that new technology. So it's a very interesting spectrum on the two CRMs because there's a great opportunity in both, but they're very different need sets, and potential solutions as well.

Speaker 3 (16:16):

What has surprised you the most about Jack in the Box's journey?

Drew (16:21):

I think what surprised me when I took the job, if I can be candid, is I said, wow, what a great company. It's been here 70 years, or almost. I hope it's going to be interesting enough and be dynamic enough. Because I like digital transformation. I like change. Without getting into too much, all this stuff is public information. But certainly, when I got there, there was...we had another brand called Qdoba. And again, the activist investors had a hypothesis that maybe we should sell it. So we sold it. Then they had another hypothesis that we should consider going private. And so we had to go through a whole process to see if

anyone wanted to take us private. And then they had another idea that we should be at five times debt to EBITDA ratio. And to do that, we would also have to securitize our debt.

Drew (17:07):

And that took another couple of months to do all that kind of due diligence and everything. And while that was going on, this is pretty public information. Our franchisees were also struggling with some economics and, and unhappy with some of the direction from the brands for various reasons, right or wrong. So that became a public lawsuit that I can't... they filed a lawsuit against us. So that led to a lot of obvious consternation that the board or the franchisees as well as turnover at the management level.

So I was wrong. It actually, there's, the companies doing great today, but the amount of change, I think that's maybe just a sign of what you need to do to survive 70 plus is to be resilient through these changes and make sure that you have a culture that can sustain these kinds of headwinds and tectonic shifts and all the things I mentioned as well as COVID also have to be pretty nimble and agile about that.

Alison (18:03):

What is the culture like at Jack in the Box?

Drew (18:07):

The culture is very much to take the work seriously, but don't take yourself seriously. So, and I also think, you know, it's a hot topic these days, but I think there's a very natural diversity of inclusion.

Now, as you think of Jack... he's kind of a weird guy with a big white head and pointing out a quirky sense of humor. And so we, we all try to emulate that and be accepting and like he is another folks, but also did it in an offbeat, you know, kind of a fun way.

So that's a, that's a lot of what the culture is, but with all the changes we're having to, we're trying to, you know, stay true to our values, but also update it to be some, some of the cultural elements to be relevant to our guests, our franchisees and the employees that we want to attract and retain.

Alison (18:54):

Okay. So how is Jack in the Box using technology to differentiate itself from other food chains?

Drew (19:01):

Yeah. I'll give you an example as, as we kind of think that through. And McDonald's is pretty public about new technologies that they're pursuing. So they've acquired a voice recognition company, called Apprente, and they've also taken an equity stake in an AI-based personalization engine. They've gotten lots of investment in digital menu boards and the drive-through. So you can see all this stuff.



There's also very public information about the franchisees of McDonald's, and they're really struggling to pay for all that technology. And so we can read about that or do another podcast on that one, but then the other one that is on the other and we expect them, and I've actually spoken to this CIO at a Chick-fil-A, which is obviously, you know, in our space and doing very well from an annual unit climb of each restaurant.

Drew (19:50):

And they have handhelds, but they don't have digital menu boards. They don't have a lot of that kind of technology. What they've done is take their dining room experience of great service and, you know, really very welcoming, polished instead of associates in the store where I think you can't even talk to someone, a guest, at Chick-fil-A until you've worked there for two weeks and gotten the right amount of training and everything. So they pick the technology that's appropriate for them. I think in our case we're figuring out what that means for us. And what's the right, on-brand, engaging in Jack's humor, Jack's voice personalized... And so a lot of people are heading down that path of, you know, frictionless guest experiences and one-to-one engagement. So I think we're similar in that way. What's differentiating is that you know, Jack has a different type of brand.

Drew (20:43):

And so the humor that we would use, the voice that we would use, those kinds of things are what we hope to be differentiating, as well as the other things that are relevant to our brand, which is more the only folks who have 24 hours, anything on the menu anytime a day. And so, so that's, you know, tie that into some of the technical things that we'll do, which I have to manage technology for the 2300 restaurants that are opening 24/7. So, there are slightly different technologies that you have to use with someone who can only be open eight to 10 hours a day.

Alison (21:14):

Okay. Did you say that there were 100 franchisees because I know there's over 2000 locations, so these franchisees, they, they own quite a few?

Drew (21:27):

Some alone, you know, own up to 50, 60, 70... more, and then there are a bunch that just own one. And yea, so back to your point around the CRM, we kind of have to figure out how to cater to that one that has a certain set of needs.

And, and then these others who might have a hundred restaurants where they have scale, they have, you know, CFO, they have an IT person and everything else. And so how do we kind of tailor the professional services and technical solutions that we provide to, you know, someone who's just you know, running one

restaurant with his family or her family, and then someone who's got a hundred restaurants, a lot of scale, like how do you adapt that?

So that's, that's one of the challenges that, that presents again, Chick-fil-A has a different rule, which is only one, you can only own one. So that kind of creates a different dynamic. Good event or a strategy is a little different than those.

Alison (22:16):

Okay. So since Jack in the Box pioneered the drive-through, which I did not know this, what is on the cutting edge now, in your opinion, what's innovating the typical fast food drive through experience?

Drew (22:30):

Well, it's a really interesting space for me because digital disruption has come so late to their QSR because it's a, it's inherently very, has been very physical, you know, in terms of, or analog, you come up, you either drive up or you walk up and you speak your order, you know, traditionally to someone in a drive through window or behind a register.

And so we had this kind of background mobile app, and hey, you notice some of these folks come into our restaurants or they use this credit card that says door dash on it. Like, what's that all about? That was a couple of years ago, right. To where we got to the point, we said, hey, this is, this is a thing. And then there was COVID, you know, it really accelerated a lot of that technology. So we're all, we're all figuring that out.

Drew (23:14):

What exactly it means, what are some of those new technologies? But again, it's very much around personalization, one-to-one marketing and, and dynamic and engaging and things like loyalty and in-app delivery and not only for any product, any food, you can get 24/7, but anywhere, too.

So, you can get it through our app, in app delivery, or you can go into your Doordash or Uber eats or Postmates or GrubHub customer. You can get it that way too. And then there are other kinds of non-traditional possibilities. Airports, college campuses, things like that, we can also use a lot of other exciting things around dark kitchens and virtual kitchens. So dark kitchens, meaning we're only in 22 States. So there's a lot of opening, open roads for us to expand.

And in some markets we could go there without having to build a traditional restaurant with the drives, from everything else. We could just do a delivery, only location and people sitting in different markets that were traditionally haven't been, can pull up their delivery app and realize, holy cow, I can get Jack in the Box now in this location where they didn't, they hadn't seen a restaurant around and we didn't have to go through the same process of all the permitting and building and the long lead time it takes to bring that kind of a market presence in a place where we're not in that

Alison (24:33):

Super interesting. All right. So for these dark kitchens, would that be corporate owned or would you ever allow franchisees to own our dark kitchen also?

Drew (24:42):

So that's a good question. It's a good question. And there's also a third path, which is that it's licensed. So there's companies that you know, great dark kitchens and you do licensing agreements with them. I think market by market, you have to be sensitive to the franchisees who, maybe if they're in an adjacent market or there's any kind of over spill, we want to make sure we're taking care of our franchisees.

So there's that kind of approach as well. And then there's licensing and franchising that together that can possibilities as well. So a lot is going on in this space. And I think we're in a unique position where we haven't saturated the 50 States. And so we have a lot of, you know, there's a good book called Thank You for Being Late. Sometimes with innovation, it pays to be late, so we might take advantage of being late to some of these markets.

Alison (25:34):

Hmm. So Melanie Hildebrand, she's the former SVP of corporate IT at Sony. She was recently on the podcast. And has this question for you, what do you think the most important aspect is of a future state CIO?

Drew (25:50):

I think it's a great question from my former Sony colleague. And I think you hear from Darden that it's composable and, you know, maybe a few years ago it was being able to manage the developments, even other technologies as well.

And I think it's much more about orchestration now. So you're orchestrating solutions from third parties and then kind of like we were just talking about a minute ago. Sometimes you're licensing, sometimes you're getting a SAS solution and building APIs into it. And sometimes you have your own project team and then your core internal resources, sometimes you're, you're staffing up with a partner to do that.

And then you've also got more and more, I think we used to be, get away with being functionally siloed in the old world when you know, operations would work the kitchen and the restaurant marketing would do the marketing thing and et cetera, et cetera.

Drew (26:46):

And now, you know, from a seamless guest experience, all those parts have to work together and integrate. So again, from a technology leader orchestrating the solutions, the partners, the business

arrangements, the executive sponsorship, the funding, you know, the, into your very first question around, what's a good strategy that is aligned with what the business is trying to accomplish.

And then I think, you know, we certainly can get off track sometimes if we're in love with one technology over another or action, and find a solution and start looking for a problem, some of us technologists sometimes do, that can get you off track.

So I think that orchestration of really being in tune with what is the business strategy and the mindset and the mood and the trust level of the stakeholders, and then sets a clear direction and there's alignment there then orchestrating and know that the solutions from various potential sources, internal, external, SAS, partners, et cetera.

Alison (27:44):

Got it. What is the biggest lesson, or what are the biggest lessons that you've learned from being a leader in technology?

Drew (27:52):

I think a little bit, I alluded to it a little bit earlier, but I think back to being unreasonable, and it is to really have a vision for what are the outcomes that you want to come away with? You know what I mean, then really it's a Stephen Covey thing, to start with the end in mind. Really say that there's this outcome that we want to have, and if you can really get everybody aligned around that outcome, then, things can fall in line, technically, organizationally, the process financially... to make that happen. And a lot of times, it's like that famous quote, you can get a lot more done if you don't care who gets the credit. So a lot of times it's not about being myself, being a visionary.

A lot of times it's about teasing out from the business strategy and talking to the guardians of the world and the industry experts and staying in touch with different solutions and collaborating and saying, Hey, based on everything that we're hearing in the business dynamic, here's something you might be able to do that is different than what we're doing today.

Drew (28:52):

And would it solve these problems or go after these opportunities. And if people can start envisioning that with you then, you can start as a leader to, to set out on a path to make some good things happen.

And then again, I think the Congress of that is again, when you start from the technology out, or you have it in your head that, hey, I'm a technology leader. So I know what the right thing is, the cool thing is that we're going to do, you know, try and get everyone to, to see it your way.

I think that those are where you get off track. So again, that orchestration and having that, you know, teasing out the vision from the organization. And I'd say there's other times, you know, there's times when

you have to be patient, where that vision is not so clear, you know, and in the times that Jack in the Box says, I mentioned, you know what, hold that thought Drew on what you were asking because the investors want to do this thing. Or the franchisees just filed a lawsuit.

So not, not ready to talk about you know, that, that initiative. So knowing also when to, you know, wait for the moment to come, when people are open and ready to endeavor to kind of change.

Sometimes you can also try to force the issue without reading the room about whether the organization has the gumption to take that on.

Alison (30:09):

Oh yes. I have certainly been in rooms like that from time to time. And I have had to maybe silence myself a bit. Okay. How has your leadership style evolved throughout the years?

Drew (30:21):

one story I've told some folks that I've mentored is that I always thought I was very lucky. My first manager job, I got hired as a manager and someone, another person got promoted into manager and I had been a programmer and I got, I became a manager in a technology that I didn't actually know.

So I had this atrocious imposter syndrome and like, how am I going to manage when I don't even know the technology? And my peer, at the time, he was an amazing programmer of that technology and I felt entirely inferior to him because he was such an amazing coder.

He could sit with his developers and say, "Hey, here's how I would structure the code. And you might want to try this, that and the other." And I'd be like, "I can get pizza tonight. If you guys are staying late and, you know, put together some schedules and, and what's, what's getting in your way today, everything okay at home..."

Drew (31:14):

And, you know, just try to, I overcompensated by being very supportive and over-communicating, and let me go, Hey, I don't know how to code. So let me go find out the answer to that question, that blocker, and come back and see if I can solve that. And I was really floored after six months and, you know, people start saying, you're a really good manager.

And I said, really? I said, what about you know, the other developer manager? They said, Oh, it's a disaster. He's rewriting everyone's code in the evenings, not very empowering. So, you know, and I probably would've done that, at the time, if I knew that language, but because I didn't... So I really learned, you know, I've had a lot of conversations with technical people over the years, mentoring conversations, where there's a certain point where when you're a people manager, at least half your time is going to be spent supporting, communicating with your people.

Drew (32:05):

And so when you first become a manager, it's stressful because you used to crank through your days getting a lot of work done. And I, you know, you asked me the question earlier, and I have five siblings and they're all professionals in different respects. And they laugh at me because I said, I really just talk to people and coordinate and communicate all day, you know, cause I think I'm a programmer, but I'm not.

And so I think that the more and more, what I've learned is the communication and the support of your team. And then as I've gotten more involved with being a corporate officer and c-level board and stuff, and it's also, like we said, you know, reading the room and trying to understand what's the vibe you're trying to get done here and what, what are we capable of doing? Are we really agreeing on that?

Drew (32:49):

And even the things that I talked about earlier, some projects, and you've probably been on this project to where you said, okay, everyone, take out a piece of paper right now. We've been at this project for a year... write down what you think success is for this project. And we'd get back a different answer for every piece of paper, right? So they're really spending the time to make sure that there is that alignment and mutual commitments in getting that result. And not that it's an IT project or it's only a business project, but we're all committed to this outcome and we all have a role to play in that outcome.

Alison (33:24):

How do you encourage innovation within your teams?

Drew (33:27):

I think I've done a lot of agile scaled, agile methodology stuff. And then I think one practice in there is both retrospectives to kind of look back and say what's working, but also to build an innovation time, you know, it's very tempting in the name of efficiency to just kind of cram in all the prescribed work that you know needs to get done.

So the ability to, to carve out, you know, if the sprint schedule is you need to do three sprints and the fourth sprint is sometimes you even do it as an incentive to the team. If they can get all this stuff, the fourth sprint is in a contingency for the stuff you didn't get done, you're supposed to in the first three. And if you get that all done, then you have this time to innovate. And at the same time, you know, knowing the industry that we're in, in my prior company, Lytics or drive care, you know, that that's a technology company.

Drew (34:18):

So we had an R & D budget and we had data scientists and, and that's a whole different thing, managing R & D where it has really come up with an idea and don't worry just yet about the market and that, you know, we're not going to sell it or market it yet. We gotta figure out what are some of the, for what our company's about, what are some of the innovations that we can do. So understanding where we are in that spectrum and what kind of business we're in, you know so innovation can mean a lot of different things.

We've done a ton of innovation just in terms of how we collaborate, you know, during COVID and being virtual, that's, it doesn't have to be, you know, totally about creating new technologies. It can really just be about adapting for, for what's needed at the time.

Drew (35:01):

And then Jack is a great innovation culture. You know, I said like our building is called the innovation center, but what it really refers to, historically, is innovating with new products, new, new products. And so we have an amazing process and innovate with testing the guests' reaction to the product, you know, kind of visualizing how they visually respond, what they say about it based on their categorization, et cetera.

Do you really bring innovative products to market? We're trying to replicate that from technology and process innovation. We have great DNA as it relates to food innovation. So this is the way we can leverage that in the culture and transfer it to process and technology innovations again, all towards the brand and company mission.

Alison (35:50):

All right. So you brought up food innovation. So now I need to ask you what your favorite most recent Jack in the Box menu item is.

Drew (35:58):

Well, we do have a fish sandwich of your Lance, so that's actually really good. And in some places, if you can get it all year. So, that's why I always look forward to this time of year when I can get out of the fish sandwich and it's on our one, that's a limited time offer kind of product. And then always have to have curly fries. That's one of the things we say— in the French fries of life, be the curly fry,

Alison (36:23):

OR, have the curly hair. Yes! What do you want your direct reports to remember you for?

Drew (36:30):

I think you know, I do subscribe to that kind of servant leader. You know, I've kind of evolved to the communication and support of my team and holding them up to do good things. And it's, it's a win-win if I can support them on the projects that they're working on and in their career, you know, then, then they're

more effective. They're more engaged, they're more productive. I look better, you know, by, by the results that we get, you know, I kind of developed this other thing. When I, when I have my updates with my team, I ask them four things. What are the run of the business, kind of day-to-day things that are coming up? That's usually if there's a major issue I need to know about, but usually that stuff I said, I can't help with, and I just need to be aware.

Drew (37:14):

So then the same thing... I say, let's talk about the projects and the same thing. If there's an issue I need to be aware of, sometimes I can help. If it's an alignment type of thing or resourcing, I can help. Then I say, what about strategy? What are the issues? And then I talked about what was going on with people, their team and them. And the reason I did that, and it can be in the back of the napkin just to structure a conversation, but then they catch them on that. I don't really want to talk about the first two. I can't really help. It's just like, if something's well, not, they need to know about it. And there might be, if they ask for help, I can help. But for the most part, I can help on those two, but helping them a lot of times will raise questions about strategy.

Drew (37:52):

So I'll say wow, that's a really good question, I have to go ask some other people, and get back to you, but it's an important question because they're the folks actually trying to make the strategy work. And so if they have a question we need to answer it. Now, when people see that we are taking care of your star players or the folks who are in the middle, or we can kind of support them. And as any issues, folks that need to, they're in the wrong role or not happy, or something's going on in their life that we need to be aware of. And then for them personally, you know, just, Hey, how are you doing? How am I doing? You know, just to connect on that level. I think if you invest that time, week in and week out, then you get great results and great connection. And you build this trust.

Drew (38:30):

And that's when they can really start to move fast is when without having to wonder, Hey, can I trust if I tell my manager this, or can I trust them to get something down to the shed they were going to do, then you start moving a lot faster by investing that time. It's amazed me when I've come to take over some teams to find that managers aren't having, you know, weekly one-on-ones, they're not asking questions about, I live in a position where someone comes out of this, person's leaving. I said, when's the last time you had a conversation with him about the career? Oh, we do it every year. And like every year? Now you know why they're leaving!

You know, you have to have that. So hopefully, to answer your question, people see me as a servant leader that connects with them and builds trust. And also that takes the work seriously, but not myself.

Alison (39:17):



I like that. All right. So let's zoom out. We don't have to, we can focus on the food industry, but we can also talk about big picture innovation if you'd like, where do you see things progressing?

Drew (39:29):

I think it's all pretty related. I'm always pretty focused on the guest or the more the experience. So every there's so much stuff that's experience-based, meaning if you start from the guest experience coming in to Jack or ordering food through a third party delivery or a mobile app, if you're really focused on that experience, there's still a long ways to go in my opinion, same thing as employee experience, you know, from onboarding to performance reviews, to check-ins, you know, that's an experience.

If you give your guests great experiences and your franchisee customers, great experiences and your employees great experiences, and, and every worker in the company you approach it from an experiential point of view. I think that's where you get great results. And so there's a lot of amazing technology around that. And I also say sometimes the cool-to-creepy spectrum, where if the technology recognizes me and I know that they recognize me and I consented to that and they can serve up the technology can serve up a better experience.

Drew (40:32):

Then that's great. If it's, you know, they're taking my personal information and serving up an experience that I don't want, that's really creepy. Now I'll reject that. So I think, you know, on the positive side, there's so much more room, and that's in every industry, to talk about.

Sometimes people call it CX or customer experience, but employees are customers. Everyone's a customer. So it's, we're experiencing, there's a lot of amazing technologies that kind of marry up data and browsers and AI and other things that can, can really add a lot of value to everyone's life and everyone's experience. And if I look back at my career, that's been a running theme is, you know, how can you make people more productive by giving them better experiences to do their job with less friction and more convenience.

Alison (41:22):

So to punctuate our conversation for today, can you speak about a breakthrough that you've had recently?

Drew (41:28):

I think for me, that one project that I talked about, at Jack in the Box where we had kind of converted over, finally, to a different labor scheduling system, and, you know, the prior effort before I got into Jack in the Box, they had attempted to do that.

And as, as I mentioned, you know, they were trying to create the system, the new system to look like the old system, you know, so that no one knew, there'd be no issue changing over systems, which is a fool's errand, as we know, but at the same time, I said, how are we going to avoid that in? And to the point where we talked about the composition of the franchise community, I picked a small single restaurant operator. And I said, let's just try it. I mean, we didn't even tell anyone, I said, just try it.

Drew (42:14):

And then after we got that, after a month or two, he was happy with it. And so I said, well Steve likes it. Steve seems pretty happy with it. And so then it was well wait a second, how come he got to go first? You know, suddenly it became, you know, this different mindset. And hey, if you're coming here with that system, I'm not going to sign off on it until it works just like the old system. And suddenly its like, well, Steve got it. So I want it, and he said good things about it. And tying it back to not just Steve likes it, but hey, he got these benefits. But everyone's afraid of change. You know?

So Steve said the change wasn't that bad. And it was worth it because I got X, Y, and Z. And that was a fundamental shift, you know, some just say, Hey, this is a new system.

Drew (42:58):

We're trying to put it in, let's put it in there. So, really getting that buy-in a lot of times I say you know, the technology is the easy part. It's the people and human behavior and positions of change that that really has to be solved. So that's an example of a breakthrough. That last system was probably fine too. It's just the approach of getting buy-in that's really important. And I said it a lot in software selections, you know, I said, we're at the point when the short list, every one of these are going to work, any one of them, we could pick anyone at this point. We know that. So let's pick one, let's move on again to the real work of changing behavior.

Alison (43:33):

I like it. Thank you for all the insights today, Drew that was juicy, perhaps like a Jack in the Box burger. Thank you for tuning into The Breakthrough, brought to you by TheoremOne. Make sure to hit the subscribe button and leave us a comment. You can find us wherever you listen to podcasts and for more great content, follow us on Twitter and Instagram at Breakthrupod that's break T-H-R-U-P-O-D until next week.