Hiring for the Future:

How IgniteTech's CEO Rebuilt His Company with AI DNA

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Andy Sack: This is AI First with Adam and Andy, the show that takes you straight to the front lines of AI innovation and business. I'm Andy Sack and alongside my co-host, Adam Brotman. Each episode, we bring you candid conversations with business leaders transforming their businesses with AI. No fluff, just real talk, actionable use cases and insights for you. Welcome, everyone. So glad for today's episode, have Eric Von, CEO of Ignite Tech. Welcome, Eric. Welcome, Adam.

Eric Vaughan: Thanks Andy, thanks Adam, great to see everybody and I'm gonna have to revise my talk track as you said no fluff. I showed up with nothing but fluff so I'll have to revise that and see where we go with that.

Adam Brotman: Morning.

Andy Sack: Yeah, please. Please make that revision. This podcast only no fluff.

Eric Vaughan: It's funny you say that because I cannot tell you how many internal dialogue or discussions that we have back and forth with our marketing team about words like seamless and unmatched and unparalleled. We're like, we got to drop these words. Nobody wants to hear these anymore. We're all numb. Let's stop with that fluff. So I've reacted to that word when you said it. It's just true. Nobody believes it's like it's just too much garbage. Straight talk.

Andy Sack: Yeah. Yeah, we straight talk. let's have some straight talk. We've had we were we interviewed you for our book. You were a pioneer in AI transformation.

Eric Vaughan: Yeah.

Andy Sack: I think you embody in many instances what Adam and I talk about as an AI first CEO. And you were recently featured in Fortune Magazine. So you've clearly had some success. I think how to overcome challenges in your AI transformation. We just wanted to check in and have you back on the podcast. let's start with just tell people, tell the audience, remind the audience of what is your business briefly. And then if you could start to just tell us the AI journey of your company, that would be a good place to start.

Eric Vaughan: Yeah, happy to, you bet. Yeah, so I'm the CEO of three different companies. The first is called IgniteTech and IgniteTech is kind of our mothership. IgniteTech is an enterprise software company with companies, customers all over the world, global customers, and they're enterprise customers. So they're not small or medium business. They're large name brand companies that people would know and recognize, of course. About four months ago, we acquired another company called Khoros. That's K-H-O-R-O-S. And Khorus has a long history and lineage in the community space. Also an enterprise software company, but we provide software for communities. People know these communities like community.apple.com or community.lego.com.

It's a place where consumers in particular go for help beyond just the company kind of support. And they're very much a leader in the community space. Also, they specialize in what's called brand care, which is providing software solutions that bring together social media traffic for brands so they can be managed and moderated and delegated and responded to for a number of different things. Everything from pharmaceutical companies watching for people posting about drug interactions to news alerts that refer to company. And then the third company is called GFI Software and this is our SMB or Small and Medium Business Market software a company that is sold through a network of partners throughout the world. So all three of those companies are relevant to this AI journey.

Andy Sack: And just so people know, let's focus on IgniteTech, because I think that's the biggest of the three companies. Is that true?

Eric Vaughan: Actually, Khoros was of equal size. So we're a private company, we don't release numbers, but IgniteTech and GFI were a nine digit software company before we acquired Khoros. Khoros is another nine digit software company, meaning it's between 100 million and a billion to give everybody a range, global and space.

Andy Sack: And order of magnitude, number of employees of both companies.

Eric Vaughan: So we're in the hundreds, but I will tell you that revenue per employee leads almost every enterprise software company in the world, including Google, OpenAI, Meta, our revenue per employee. So it's a much lower number of employees than most enterprise companies have, enterprise software companies certainly. So, yeah.

Andy Sack: And do you have more, leaving Khoros aside, just focusing on IgniteTech, do you have more or less employees than when we spoke a year ago?

Eric Vaughan: Marginally the same. You mentioned the Fortune article, and the Fortune article, by the way, I think they did a remarkable job, really appreciated, they fact checked, which doesn't always happen in articles before they publish it. If people read the story, I think they'll understand it. However, the title made it sound wicked. AI First CEO fired people that refused to do AI, and there was a lot of social traffic kind of in a little viral about like, see, that's exactly what we're talking about. If you read the article, though, you learned that what happened was there was a full year, 12 months of investment across our companies with our legacy team, first with, you mentioned, things like bringing in outside experts and giving points for just trying. We were just trying to see if people would try, we were motivating them with education, tuition reimbursement back when prompt engineering was a big thing and people needed to learn that skill, unlimited up to $1,000 for any tool.

Please buy the pro version of every tool and experiment with it and bring that back to the team. And then AI Monday, as you mentioned in the opening, that was a dedication for a full quarter of 20 % of our payroll every single Monday for a full quarter one was allowed to work on anything except AI projects. It could be AI education, AI development, and we were very serious about that. Unless there was a customer fire, something that needed immediate attention, no one was allowed to work on anything. And it was the conclusion of that last, of that 12 months of investment and time that we then took a look at the team and said where we needed to make changes. And that ranged from people who outright refused to do it, I mean you get that sometimes when you change the culture.

Andy Sack: And what percent of people refuse to make the AI transformation?

Eric Vaughan: Yeah, I...don't know the number, I wanna say it's less than 20%, maybe even as low as 10%, that just flat out refused. Like they declared, yeah, I'm not gonna do this. And that's fine, they certainly have that prerogative, it's just that they had to leave and we told them that. Then we had the next round of people who tried but not really. I mean, they kinda said they tried but they didn't. And that was revealed by their own self-assessment, which we did at the end of the three quarters. So three quarters in we had everybody do a self assessment and even by their own admission like you know What GPT's have you written? What LLMs are you proficient with? Can you share some of your recent chats like you know? They said they were trying but not really and they kind of self selected themselves out.

And then after AI Mondays it was about aptitude and it was about proficiency and we told everybody entering that quarter that we through their own self-assessments, we had stack-ranked them. And if they were in the bottom section of that stack-rank, that they were at risk of being what we call top-graded, which means we were gonna hire somebody that had this mentality and wanted to bring it forward. But we wanted them to succeed, and we were gonna do everything to help them succeed, and we wanted them to. Some were able to clear that bar, some were not. At the end of the day, it turned out to be 80 % of our entire team from start to finish, 80%. And that's the way the article was led. 80 % that we replaced, 80 % that we transitioned out, 80 % in that year, that's right, yes, exactly.

Andy Sack: So you had turnover over the last year of 80 % of your staff in this process. Adam, let's bring you into this conversation. You want to tee up the?

Adam Brotman: Yeah, so I'm sitting here taking notes and thinking, because you are, Eric, you're, that's a, like, there's a lot of AI memos from CEOs that have been going around, right? Famous ones. You were sort of the original, but there was like, know, Klarna CEO and...you know, and Dropbox and Duolingo, sorry, not Dropbox, Box, yeah, Walmart, Box, Duolingo, you know, and so there's this notion where a CEO has an aha moment and goes, my God, we need to be incorporating this, like, I love your term, the DNA level, like, we need to be making this. The first thing people turn to, we need to make sure everyone's proficient, because they have the aha moment that says if the workforce, by and large, is adopting this, proficient, believes in it, has been access to the right kind of training and understanding of what this technology can do and you peanut butter that across everything you're doing all day every day, there's going to be this competitive advantage uplift that's going to happen at the organizational level.

And you believe it, you put your money where your mouth is, we believe it, we're out trying to help companies transform. But there's a difference between I'm going to mandate it or I'm going to write a memo and seeing it through. And you just described actually a really good, like what happens in the middle, the messy middle of like, wait, some people are just gonna refuse. Some people are just, they're not gonna refuse, but they're really gonna like, almost like quiet refuse. And then there's the people that just aren't that good at it. And so you actually pointed out like a pretty significant process. What would your, now that you've gone through it, if you're talking to another CEO and they said, I've had the aha moment. I'm ready to go do this. What advice would you have for them? Like, what would you say? Like, is it like follow my lead is like what would be like your top couple things you'd say to a CEO that says, I want to I believe, you know, should I do what you did, Eric? Should I do something else? What would you tell them?

Eric Vaughan: Well first of all, you said the magic word. You said two magic, one phrase and one word. AI memo, that's a great phrase, I love that. Lots of AI memos out there. But belief is the key. At the end of the day, what we found was the differentiator was belief. When people believe something can do something, right? What's that phrase? Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right. It's really very true, right? The people that worked in this environment, the people that were able to jump in with both feet believed it. They like said, my gosh, I've been given this amazing set of tools that are gonna help me do my job. So from a CEO standpoint, earlier in the year I was speaking at a CEO conference and one of the things I said was it has to come from you. It has to come from the CEO and it can't be like a delegation to the technical team.

If you posture this as a technical experiment, you're doomed. You've got to get, you know, if you will, almost the religion that this is and that's the way I felt. My aha moment was one of existentialism. I thought we're just gonna get run over from behind if we don't get on this to the deepest level possible.

And I did believe it. mean, three decades in this business, in the tech business, in the software business, never seen anything like this, kind of like the title of that movie, everything everywhere all at once, like everything is being transformed and you don't wanna miss it. So that's gotta come out from the CEO because it's a culture change. It's not a tech change. It's a, we're gonna blow it all up start again, which is exactly what I did. I mean, we blew it up and started again. mean, 80 % turnover and transition is tough.

Andy Sack: So Eric, well, OK, people are listening. CEOs are listening. What advice do you have for them?

Eric Vaughan: Yeah, well, be completely committed from the very start. It's gotta come from the CEO that says, are doing this. We want you to come with us. If you don't want to come, please go ahead and self-select out. And when we say we want you to come, we want you to come with full vigor because we believe in this. And we are going to now change the way we're doing everything to incorporate this in everything from workflows, which frankly I find at this point almost boring. mean, we all know that AI can improve efficiencies and all that, I'm not getting up every day like, God, I hope I improve efficiency. I want the CEOs to think we can create, we can innovate at a pace and at a level that we never had before. One great example is coding. We now have, we're a software company, so we have a lot of coders by profession. None of them are writing code anymore.

Literally none of them sit down and type, you know, lines of code. They just don't do it anymore. They're cursoring or clod coding or windsurfing or a combination of those things. And I asked them, we had an all hands meeting a couple of weeks ago and I asked them, hey, all of the actual coders, the people that had software engineering as a background, do you miss it? You wish you were doing that, all of them rejected it. They said, heck no, don't care, don't mind it at all, because I'm able to bring my ideas to life so much quicker in such a rapid fashion. And the people that resisted were the engineers in particular who felt like, no, no, no, I want to write code, and that's what I want to do.

Adam Brotman: Eric, Andy, real quick follow up question. I love what you said about religion and belief and all that kind of stuff. How do you, it's interesting, because you've gone through a situation where you've described some of, if you don't believe you're gonna, I mean, somebody who vehemently doesn't believe they're gonna self-select out. If somebody is, what about that sort of middle ground of like, do you have to help somebody believe or do you, like tell me, explain a little bit more about like in the moment of going through the transformation, do you just sort of look for people to sort of, I'm going to hire people that already believe and I'm going to let people that don't believe go and eventually we'll get to a place, a company of believers or do you help people believe?

Eric Vaughan: So I'll come back to your question, what advice would I give? It's that one. I tried for a year to make people believe. You can't make people believe. It just doesn't work. Like you can lead it, you know, I had several slides that I'd put my presentation of a horse standing at the water and it's totally that. Like, you know, it's like, no, it's beautiful water. Like many different flavors of water. Like, yeah, I'm not going to drink. I, no, what are we going to do? I now, you know, in the year 2024, when all of this was culminating and the changes were really happening, it was very disruptive and very very difficult in lots of ways as we were exiting and hiring, but we started this massive, aggressive hiring spree and we put the words AI innovation specialist in front of every domain. AI innovation specialist finance, AI innovation specialist marketing, AI innovation specialist customer success, because we made it clear even in the job title that hey, you're not here to do finance, you're here to do AI work in the finance domain. And we started recruiting dramatically.

And I can tell you now, Adam, a year later, no, I don't have this problem anymore. It's the opposite because we've moved from being AI first, which means think first about AI before you do anything, to it's in everyone's DNA. We're AI DNA now, which means it's just natural. It comes off your tools, just like you would never dream of using a regular screwdriver to put a screw in, know, 50 screws in a wall that you're building in a house because they invented the power screwdriver. Like you didn't have to convince people, right? That's what I have now. I look back now and these people are set. We measure this. We measure this. We keep track. Actually, we track usage of tools and we track it across the entire org and our entire company, everybody from start to finish is using AI 75 % of the time. 75%. That's not because we tell them they should, it's because that's what they want to do, it's what they do. One other piece of advice if I could Andy though, because I really keyed on that, and that is fund it. Fund it.

Andy Sack: Given you meds. Yeah, please.

Eric Vaughan: Tell people, go buy the tool. We don't have to talk about that. There's no budget wreck. You've got freedom. I mean, we're not talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars or even at a scale with thousands of employees, right? Just, you're not gonna get anywhere if you try to restrict it and fund it, right?

Andy Sack: What tool do you use predominantly at IgniteTech?

Eric Vaughan: Yeah, I mean, there's no way to answer that question. We use all of the LLMs. mean, every day on my computer, yeah, absolutely. And in fact, I think people need to be very agnostic to LLMs. The race is fascinating. It changes constantly. Yeah, we've got everything from open source, know.

Andy Sack: So you're a multiple LLM shop. Do you have one that is sort of the leading one, are they used interchangeably?

Eric Vaughan: Yeah, no, it's definitely based on use case. We'll go to Gemini for some things, we'll go to Claude for others, we'll go to ChatGPT, OpenAI for others, Llama for others. And in our software, our software is built platform agnostic and it switches out and sometimes we'll do a battle. It'll call Anthropic and it'll call OpenAI and compare results and stack rank them and decide which to use, right? So, yeah.

Andy Sack: What was the most challenging part of the last year, the transformation that you made at your companies?

Eric Vaughan: Well, I would say that it's, you know, that old adage about changing the...the tires on a bus that was moving down the road and we were running a business, it's not like we closed up shop and said, hey everybody, we're not here for you for the next year because we're retooling, know, closed for AI retooling. It's not that. We had to still deliver software, we still had to support our customers, we had to still innovate and that was certainly difficult but we did it and we ended the year in our first year not only with a reconstituted organization that's AI DNA, built, but we innovated three brand new products from the ground up written by AI people using AI tools delivering AI capabilities. And that's the way I measure success.

Adam Brotman: Would you, if you were, I don't know how to ask this question. If you were trying to, I'll call it measure the capability set, the speed, the velocity, innovation, innovativeness, creativity, whatever you want to call it.

However you would measure your organization. If you were like, that measurement thermometer in your organization three years ago versus now. like try to real A-B of, you you're an AI DNA, you're AI first to AI DNA company for sure now. You weren't when you, before you started this journey, if you were to sort of stick the thermometer into both and I'll let you answer like, is it...We just produce more, is it volume, is it creativity, it productivity, is it growth? Does it translate into sales? Maybe it's all the above, but can you give us a sense, and our listeners, sense of what that thermometer is saying on the one versus the other organization?

Eric Vaughan: Sure, two great points to lead with. The first is innovation. Because of the ability to quickly, we actually call it the cell design build concept. Okay. And what that means is not literally sell, like take funds from a customer, but instead of putting a deck together and pitching a roadmap to customers, we put together prototypes of working software with AI features on top of them already. And then we sell that. It's like, Hey, isn't this the most fantastic thing you've ever seen in this software to the customers? And they're like, well, you know, yes, but if it did this, it'd be great. It's like, okay, great. So they're helping us and then we go back and we quickly like in days, iterate and come back and say, you mean like this version too?

Like now that's it. So we're selling and designing iteratively and then we write code. That's the build parser. so the ideation and the iteration of these kinds of capabilities is unmatched. And here's the cool thing, it's not just software engineers. I mean, we've got people across sales and finance that keep producing these new AI tools that we're using internally. Some of them may even take on a commercial opportunity because they're so good. That's empowering for people. They used to have to ask IT, hey, could you maybe write an app for us that did this. Now the sales people are like, I'll do it myself. Like I just put it together, here it is. They're cranking it out in cursor for heaven's sake.

Adam Brotman: And that's translating into faster, faster close times on projects with new customers, because you're able to sell in that different way, get to a yes sooner, maybe a close rate improvement. mean, everything you just said makes sense to me. I like, I'm not, so, but just even translated even more to someone who's like, so at the end of the day, Ignite Tech or whichever company it is, or the broad, the umbrella holding company, is you would say, like healthier from which metrics if you were just like, forget about how you just described the how the result is faster sales, shorter sales.

Eric Vaughan: Quantity and velocity of innovation that is able to be sold. You really can't sell a roadmap, right? So we can get licensed sales from our customers when we actually deliver tangible function. And now we're doing it in weeks, not in quarters, not in years. You know, remember I mentioned in that first year, we created and designed and wrote and delivered two, sorry, three brand new AI software products from the ground up. In a year, mostly with people that didn't work here a year and a half ago.

Adam Brotman: How does that compare to like, go back to my example, prior to becoming AI DNA, how many in a year were you doing?

Eric Vaughan: If you, well, from scratch, zero. I mean, you know, those typical dev cycles in corporate enterprise software, not, you know, little startup, but in an enterprise software environment, you measure that in five, six quarters at a time. I mean, now it looks so archaic and snail's pace like it is revolting, honestly. But that's where we were, you know, and Q2 will add the UI and in Q3, we've got the database. It's like, really? I mean, how about we just do the whole thing in four weeks. So to illustrate, we had a very immediate need to create something for our customers.

Forget what it is, it's really not important. And we went to the AI development team and said, could we do at least the base functions, not the full functions, of course, but the base functions that's so critical for the customers with our AI team in a very short timeframe. We had the first iteration that we were able to show to customers working code in five days. That was from can we to first demo with a customer in five days. That's not anything we've ever been able to say, ever, in our history, in any history of software. So it translates into sales because you're doing your best innovation quicker better and you can iterate on it at a speed that no one's been able to match ever before.

Andy Sack (25:45.617)
That's well said, Eric. I'm curious as you look back, particularly in light of 80 % turnover, what's the biggest mistake that you made in the AI transformation?

Eric Vaughan: Well, I made it honestly, but I think trying to change so many hearts and minds. I mean, I valued our people, I valued our team very much. I really believed it was about, hey guys, there's a new boat. We're gonna get in this boat. We're all gonna row the same direction. It's gonna be great. We're gonna be going fast down that river. It's gonna be amazing. Some people are like, yeah, I'm not even getting in that boat. I'm staying in this boat. And then other people got in, they wouldn't even pick up the oars. Or they'd pick them up and they're like, kinda rowing. That just doesn't work. A year's too long to try to change minds. I wouldn't do that again. I would declare it.

Andy Sack: How much time should people allot other people to get into the new boat?

Eric Vaughan: Well, I think you've got to define what it means to be in that boat and somehow find a way to take that inventory, whether that's testing, whether that's interviewing, whether that's aptitude, I mean, or a mix of all of those things. You've got to determine, you know, who's with me and who's not. yeah, I don't think it was a mistake. I just wouldn't do it again. It was not a mistake because I wanted my people to come along. wanted that. position this as a gift. I said this. mean, my gosh, this is a gift. If we're gonna train you and teach you faster than most of your colleagues out there in the world, they're gonna be AI experts quicker, you know?

Andy Sack: So Eric, if you followed your advice looking back and you had to go over it again, you would shorten the time frame of your AI transformation. Is that accurate? And what does that mean? does that mean for the organization in terms of you're less tolerant of people's slow adoption? What's that look like?

Eric Vaughan: Well, it wasn't that we were more tolerant. We didn't expect it. We just didn't expect it. Like we were surprised. Who knew that the, of all the groups, that the most resistant would be the technical people? Who knew that? I didn't know it. I thought they'd be like, my God, let me show you. This is incredible stuff. They're like, yeah, no, it doesn't know the code like I do. I'm like, no, what do you mean? It does, it completely does, you know? So it can't write code like I can. I've been in this code for 15 years, like, uh-oh. That's the problem. So I think it was awareness. Now I'd have different awareness.

Andy Sack: Adam, any final question for Eric before we conclude?

Adam Brotman: Yeah, last question for you Eric is talk a little bit about org design. I was interested in the article that said that you hired a chief AI officer that ultimately I think it said in the article anyways that everybody reports into the chief AI officer in some ways, which I get now that you've said the job description says AI innovation specialist finance, AI innovation specialist sales, AI innovation specialist development or coding. So talk a little bit about what this has all meant for your org design.

Eric Vaughan: That's right. And to be clear, we hired an SVP of product who we transformed into a chief AI officer. I don't know how bleeding edge we were to name somebody a chief AI officer, but I decided to declare that. And it was more of the AI innovation org that everybody reported into. And so it was, you know, if a finance person reported to the CFO and the CFO was very much AI first, but the CFO was not an AI expert, isn't writing Lang chain, LLM calls, that kind of thing. The CFO would tell the finance people, hey, here's what we need to do. And then all of these people would go spend time with the AI innovation organ and say, here's what I need to do. I'm thinking about doing it like this. This is the how now. And that organ would say, well, wait a minute, we've already written something. You can just plug that in and let me help you get up to speed. And so that's how we're meshing it all together.

Adam Brotman: Yeah. I see, so your AI, what you call an AI innovation org, and the way you described it makes a lot of sense. And it's similar to what Andy and I might call an AI council or an AI task force or like a group of people cross functioning that are like the best in the organization, the most thoughtful, the most cutting edge about both inside and outside the organization, what they're doing with AI, that you call that the AI innovation org. And they are a function under themselves within the company.

Eric Vaughan: That's right, they are. And they're responsible for a lot of the innovation and delivery for external consumption, by complete procedure or process, they become experts in how to use that internally as well, right? And that's maybe a key differentiator. People shouldn't look at this AI culture change as, well, let's have some people work on some internal tools. And if you're in the software business, and external tools, what if you cross-pollinate those? What if you don't have a sales guy sitting in a corner, all he does is call customers? Don't you want the AI innovation org to say, hey, welcome to the team, new salesperson. Did you download all of the transcripts from all of the customers that you have and do an AI analysis so you can see what the sentiment is before you go into those calls. You have it? Let me help you do that, you know? Now you got the guy up to speed in two days versus two weeks, right? So it's that kind of thing.

Adam Brotman: Yeah, that's great.

Andy Sack: So I have one last question that I'm going to sneak in. So you've got to give a short answer, Eric. Let's assume you're in an interview for an AI, what did you call it, AI innovation specialist marketing person. What question do you ask to determine whether or not they're AI first capable or not?

Eric Vaughan: Yes. This question is always, what's on your AI tool belt? Meaning, when you come to work every morning, what is wrapped around your waist of the tools that you'll wield to get your job done? And the depth of that answer is very revealing. get a lot of, well, I mostly just live in chat GPT. We get a lot of that, which, you know, that's great. Everybody's intro, but we're looking for a little bit more depth in that. And then awareness of what is available. that's the question. What's on your AI tool bill?

Andy Sack: That's a great question. Thank you, Eric. I'm going to turn it to Adam. Adam, that was a great interview. What jumps out for you? What do you want to call out from the interview for our audience? What stood out to you of Eric's narrative and story?

Adam Brotman: Yeah, a couple of things. one is, is the, word when Eric zeroed in on the word belief and talked about mindset and culture, that was like really important. I think like how Eric zeroed in on that and said, to some extent, that is the, the foundational power source that powers this entire transformation.

And secondly, that that has to start with the CEO actually he or she having that belief, not just an aha moment, but kind of similar, like aha moment that turns into belief where they're really going to drive that, willing to drive that all the way through the organization. thought that those were two things that came to mind that I thought were worth pointing out. And then, I was fascinated by the topic we talked about with Eric just now of, you know, do you make them believe or do you have to just sort of like allow for like selection and self-selection around belief?

Eric basically said, hope I'm representing this right, Eric, that it was not. At the end of the day, one of the things he didn't realize what happened is that getting spending time and effort and cycles, trying to get people to believe when they just weren't going to get there was something that was like was a lesson learned and that at the end of the day, it wasn't about how do you get people to believe or make them believe it sort of allow for self selection and selection to get to a corpus, a core group of people that do believe. And like now he's like, it's like it just it sort of the organization just has that DNA and goes. What I would say, I'm not disagreeing with that, I'm actually fascinated almost from a researcher's perspective that what Eric has done is not for the faint of heart and I believe in it.

I think it's a great case study. It's why we put you in the book, Eric, and it's why we're having you on here in that I actually, I actually agree with where you're coming from. And I think a lot of CEOs are going to go, I think you felt the same way, but a lot of CEOs are going to my God, I can't do this. I can't, I can't actually like self-select select only believers. I, so I, the one thing I I'm taking away is I think Eric, gave a really good example of it is that your AI innovation group can help people along, people that are like, to believe and are more than just going to pick up an orb, but kind of mail it in. think people that are like, I've got the DNA, I've got it, but I could use some help. I think there's an interesting sort of middle ground of helping the organization along. But I think my takeaway is, people should listen to Eric's point that, you know, if somebody's not, doesn't wanna believe, it's gonna be hard to get them to believe. Don't think it's about a conversion exercise.

It's more about bringing out people's belief if it's already latently there or else letting people self-select on some level. I thought that was an observation. And then finally, I would say that there's this concept, there's this new function in an organization that has to kind of come out, which is you can call it a chief AI officer. You can call it a AI innovation group or council. You can't just hire a chief AI officer or just set up a council. That's not going to do it. But if you can put all the other pieces in place like Eric described and Eric had to like spend blood, sweat and tears getting it there, then this function is amazing then this function actually has a receptive audience, has culture, DNA, and training and whatnot that allows a true AI innovation function to thrive in an organization, which is what you want to get to. And I think that was my final takeaway that I'd want to point out. Andy, what about you?

Andy Sack: Excellent. Yeah, I echo all those without rehashing the entire interview. I would say the thing that stood out for me that, you know, I think Eric truly is an AI first CEO and you could tell from his answers, he's been through it. He's turned over 80 % of his staff. And so I think that's not for the faint of heart. Eric believes and I think I think he claimed that it was absolutely worthwhile and it was an existential moment for his company I think in writing our book you and I are Adam are of the in the same camp and it takes a lot of courage and bravery and And speed I mean his big his big point is do it faster.

I wouldn't I wouldn't I wouldn't be I was well intentioned, but his biggest mistake was trying to get people to swing hearts and minds. So I thought it was a fantastic episode. I'm so glad we captured it. It's a great anecdote of what it means to be an AI First CEO and transform your company to be an AI First company.

Eric, thank you for being on the podcast. With that, want to thank you all for listening to our podcast, AI First with Adam and Andy, for more resources on how to become AI first, can go to our website, forum3.com, download case studies, join our email list. We have lots of resources there. We also invite you to connect with our AI First community, a curated hub and network for readers and executives turning AI hype into action. We truly believe you can't over invest in AI. Onward.

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