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New Speaker: Now, on this episode I discussed the human condition and mental health in the workplace with my guest cofounder and CEO at Unmind, Nick Taylor. Sit back, relax and enjoy the show.

Nate: All right. So Nick, thanks for joining me today.

Nick: Thank you so much for having me on.

Nate: You bet. So I don't like to admit these things, but I'm not that familiar with Unmind. I'm hoping that you can tell me a little bit about your company and a, what you guys are all about.

Nick: Yeah, absolutely. So Unmind is a mental health platform. We've been around for two and a half years now. And we've developed a platform purely for workplaces around mental health. So it has two functions. The first is to empower employees to look after their mental health proactively. And I'm sure we can touch on what that means as we chat. The second is to enable organizations to become data-driven and then mental health strategies for too long. Mental strategies have been built without any data behind them and I think we will look back in years to come. I kind of flabbergasted that that's the case. Because I think data has so much power in helping organizations build strategies to help get that people to the right care at the right time.

Nate: Yeah. And that's, and that's one of the issues, isn't it? With the, just the general I guess ancillary, you know, wellness programs, if you will just throw in a big sort of group around it. That's one of the perennial issues is, you know, not using data or not having proof that something is actually moving the ball forward.

Nick: Yeah, I think that's right. But, but even with mental health, it's an interesting one because we all have it all of the time and therefore we naturally, well how good days, bad days and so to what organization, so, yeah. Well, I guess from a data point of view, from an organization, we can hope that the data points show and ever positive [inaudible] trend towards everyone being well, the reality is no matter how great an environment we create, there will still be down days. So it's more just tracking to enable a response to whatever the data is showing as opposed to always having to show an improvement. Although of course that's what we aspire to.

Nate: Yeah. It's interesting because I'm, if you take, you know, a manufacturing organization for example, they're extremely good at looking at data of when this line is having production issues or quality issues or what have you, and they immediately put, you know, a SWAT type team on it and bring engineers in and try to figure out what's going

on and, and remedy the problem. It's a fascinating thought that you're talking about here that we could have something similar for the emotional health of the organization.

Nick: Yeah, absolutely. So really because we all spend so much time out of what place and therefore if the workplace, I think the organization can no how the people are in anonymized way, then they can provide support to people, which we all have a right to a healthy mind and [inaudible] and an environment that facilitates that is essential.

Nate: So I want to step back to something you said in the intro. There you use the word proactive and I do know that that you're pretty passionate about meeting people at the right time. Meaning you've experienced situations where you've not met them at the right time too late or too early there, there is a right time for people to, to sort of get help. Is there not and, and what are you thinking about trying to get ahead of mental health with your project here?

Nick: Yeah, I think that was absolutely the right time. So my background I spend my whole life working in mental health and charities as a clinical psychologist in the national health service in the UK and lecturing and universities on the subject of mental health son. Yeah. Deeply passionate about to the most spent many years working one on one with people as a clinician. And I can't think of a single time that I've ever anyone at the right time in the gen towards mental health. I've only ever [inaudible] sat down and thought if only I'd met you six months before or nine months before. And I think most clinicians I know would tell a similar story, if not all. And that's a reflection of the fact that people are not getting the right care at the right time for mental health problems. I think there's a number of reasons for that.

Nick: One, there's a high level of stigma that makes it quite hard for people to have an open conversation, which would otherwise help them get to the right care. But also it's that resources are hard to come by either because they're just very limited or because they're expensive or inconvenient. So we live in a time when actually when mental health homes are coing, people have rarely ever going to the right care at the right time and that that's a big problem. And we wouldn't dream of leaving a broken leg for three months after it broke or even the damage too. We would expect to be able to get to the right care at the right time for those health conditions. So we have a right to demand the same from mental health, but, but I've never personally as a clinician seen that happened. So it was a major driver for me with our mind is with digital you can create the platforms that are available in people's pockets on that phone or on that desktop or laptop whenever they need them. And by that, that level of service facilitates the right care at the right time.

Nate: For me, there's, and I've been pretty open about this, there's sort of maybe a third that ties into maybe both have one and two that you just talked about, which is I think a lot of people get excited and passionate or I'm the type of person who when I get involved in something, I'm, I'm 110% and very heads down and into it, and the individual such as myself might not even notice that they're going to a place of, that's going to be a problem later. That's going to create stress, anxiety, depression, whatever it is. And so I

think there's this sort of emotional blindness when you get caught up in some of the some of the excitement of what you might be doing day in and day out.

Nick: Yeah, that's an interesting way of looking at it. And I think I, the way I've always thought about it, and it kind of mirrors on onto what you said though, is that I think our mental health literacy is quite low. And we're not necessarily very good at checking in with ourselves and recognizing how we're really doing. And that also mm. You know, prevents us from spotting problems early in ourselves. And I think the way to avoid that is to focus on mental health and prevention in the same way that we do in a dental health visit. We're thinking about mental health every day and think about what can I be doing to look after my mind and my brain? Yeah. My most valuable asset. Then of course we'll stop noticing when foams are cut a little bit earlier. In the same way that, you know, people that love cars are always aware as soon as the scratch appears on their pain, what? Cause they're checking it every day, you know if we paid that much attention to our minds, then I think we would achieve a similar outcome. You know, real awareness and recognition of how we're doing and soon as start to occur, kind of reflection on what can we be doing to help that situation.

Nate: Yeah. And I do want to dive into sort of general workplace mental health awareness and where that a trend is going and has gone over the last seems like 18 months, but it's probably been building for a lot longer than that. But to your point, it seems like there's also a trend of once a person does realize to your point earlier, there's, maybe it's because of stigma. Maybe it's because of fear. Maybe it's because of a, just trying to take care of themselves, but the wider community generally doesn't become aware of it. So I'll give you an example. The person works really hard there. They're all over LinkedIn and Twitter and Facebook and everything. And everybody's seeing how successful they are. They're going and speaking at conferences and whatnot. And then they just kind of disappear into the background. And I don't really ever talk about what's happening. And so to me it feels like there's this, this spiral of over achievers. And everybody's doing well and looks like they're doing well, but doesn't talk about what it takes to be that successful or to be that person. And so we have this kind of striving towards the top, but nobody's talking about how you take care of yourself and the in between periods.

Nick: Yeah. And I think that's, I mean, that's such an interesting subject, isn't it? Because with so many social media platforms now and generally with technology where and more equipped than ever before too, essentially presents a facade of how we would like to be seen as doing. And I think that that can be damaging for everyone else because in the end of the day yeah, she makes people feel like failures. If everyone around them looks like they're really succeeding. And rarely is it truly the case as you've described. And I think whatever level of success you achieve, they will be hard times on that journey. And I think there's something to be said for [inaudible] real honesty about that. And I do actually think there's a lot of senior business leaders now talking openly about the mental health challenges they've personally experienced. But I also think it is, it shows sometimes how kind of nit personal or mental health can be because yeah, I, I've been to a lot of social events in my life where people say, what do you do? And I'll say, I'm a clinical psychologist, and they, and make a joke and say, Oh, I better hadn't kind of,

yeah. Talk to you or something. A step back is though, by being a clinical psychologist, you somehow have like Jedi powers to see what's in the head. But the, you know, the reality is like, you can only really know what's going in on, in someone else's head.

Nick: That's kind of the reality of it. And you know, I think we can all relate to those times when you see someone, they say, Oh, you're looking well, or are you seem so relaxed and, and inside you're feeling unwell, you're feeling really stressed. And kind of goes, it was always a bit shocking in that moment. You're like, goodness man, like this person, genuinely tell how I'm doing. But again, like unless we are able to tell them how will they know that? And, and in a way, the only way that we can, I mean there's loads of things we could be doing around that to overcome it, but one is to help people learn how to have the conversation around mental health much more honestly, and to know how to ask questions properly, to know how to listen. Well, generally speaking, I think people find listening quite a difficult thing to do. And I don't think people do know very well how to do it. So I think w by increasing awareness and understanding around mental health, we can have a huge impact. And that's one I think the web-based can really focus on.

Nate: Yeah. And I want to get into that the sort of awareness piece. It seems to me that there's just so much need right now in workplace mental health. Maybe it's just a heightened awareness of that need and a changing of [inaudible] society too, to recognize that it's OK to, to try to be your best self. But getting right down to it, how much of the stress, anxiety, depression, alcohol, drug abuse, those things are brought on by the same workplaces that are going out and seeking solutions for their employees. Are we just sort of trying to squeeze too much out of the human condition?

Nick: Oh wow. I mean that's the, yeah, that's a fascinating question on I'll, I'll definitely come onto it. But just the first off the question as well. I think it's also super interesting. Like why is this suddenly a subject that is at the forefront of, you know, board level of discussions, the forefront of mind when people having conversations about wellbeing and mental health is suddenly just appeared as this enormous subject. And, and the reason for that I think is, is yeah, led by a couple of things really. One is this I think the stigma is being broken down around the subject. You know, in the UK we have the Royal family now talking about mental health that's unimaginable from 30 years ago, even 20 years ago. There's such a thing could happen. And that really helps to normalize the conversation. And I think throughout the world there are examples of people not talking about mental health who previously wouldn't have done so.

Nick: So I think that's highly valuable in breaking the stigma in the line, people to talk. But also the second reason I think is that actually the scale of problem that we face is finally being measured and recognized and is a giant normous problem. And wherever you look, you can see how big a problem it is. If you look at the U S in this size of this spend on mental health care, it's astonishing if you're looking in the UK. There was a review written in 2017 that showed the annual costs you can employ is 37 billion pounds as a result of mental ill health. I mean, Vince cable, a leader political leader here, said that it's the equivalent to going through Brexit every single year. You know it's [inaudible]. He's awesome. Big, big numbers have thrown around the subject of mental health, so it

is a subject that can no longer be ignored. I think that's one of the reasons that it's coming out in combination with the stigma and then in relation to are we trying to squeeze too much out of the human condition? I think that's a fascinating subject. I mean, I certainly think that if you consider how our modern life looks and feels in comparison with the life of someone a hundred years ago, 500 years ago, 2000 years ago, it's very different, isn't it? With technology and the 24 seven existence that we all have bought about all this incredible technical innovation. Even being able to kind of not

Nick: Live by normal circadian ribbon rhythms and putting the lights on until three in the morning and then having your emails come in from the other side of the world. It's, we live in a fast paced world that is incredibly exhilarating and exciting but also well the, it's filled with many more people than ever before with much less access often to environments which, and then to be really good for mental health. And you know, we live in cities with limited space, with pushed finances, with ever intense work environments and social media. So I think there are whole load of pressures which are contributing to how we experience life in today's world as a human being. But it's not the only reason that the subject of mental ill health has been talked about. I think it is important to recognize the stigma aspect being lifted as well and therefore as a positive aspect to it, which is finally we're able to talk about this.

Nate: Hi guys, this is Nate. Illuminate HR is supported in part by our patrons, Jeff Oldham. Thank you for supporting the show. For more information on the benefits of becoming a patron, please visit www.patreon.com/illuminatehr. Now, the rest of my discussion with Nick.

Nate: Yeah, it's, it's really fascinating to me and, and makes you wonder what the world is gonna look like in five or 10 years in regards to how we interact with all of these technologies. What sort of awareness we get what responsibility the companies that are providing these technologies might take on and might have or might be forced to have. You could see a world where maybe things are going to change pretty drastically in the way we interact with these devices and they'll become even more ingrained and aware of our as I said earlier, human condition.

Nick: Yeah. Look, I think that technology has an incredible role to play in helping support people get the right care at the right time with their mental health and [inaudible]. Coming back to this idea of responsibility, which I think is great, where to describe, well, we have right now as a generation, we have a responsibility. All of us too addressed this situation now for the sake of our children, for the sake of future generations. I don't want my children to grow up in a world waive. Their mental health is not a great, great place for whatever reason. They're unable to talk about it. Well, there's not enough resource to support them. I don't want my children to be in a workplace where they're not being supported. And, and what I would love to see is emotionally mature leadership and businesses recognizing the value and benefits of investing in people as a total number one priority. And I would love to see the generation of people coming into work kind of schools and colleges and universities voting with their feet and not going to work anywhere. That doesn't demonstrate how they're supporting the wellbeing of that

people. And by all taking that level of responsibility, we will make this change that we need to see.

Nate: Yeah, well said. So that leads us to sort of the prevention piece because we've, we've talked a lot about sort of what's happening and you know, the need to get to people at the right time, you know, out ahead of a very serious issues. So what's, what's sort of new here in this world of prevention and mental health? What's your thinking around the issue? I've long said that and I've got an article that I'm going to put out here fairly shortly around firewood is an extremely important thing to me. Not only does it provide heat for me and my family, but I love the process from a gathering the trees to cutting them up, to making them into firewood, to stacking them. And it's an incredibly valuable mental health exercise for me. So, you know, is it, is it stuff like that that people need to be thinking about how they keep their sanity, if you will, or what's, what's the prevention world and mental health looking like these days and into the future?

Nick: I think that that might be one of my favorite examples anyone's ever shared with me about something that's really good for their mental wellbeing and I can totally relate to how I would get a huge value out of that as well. So I love that. And I think in a way what demonstrates is the better the things that we can all do in our lives to look after our mental health. I don't think prevention means one thing. I think it's about finding the right preventative approaches to each person. And our mental health is uniquely made up for each of us by a biological life, our psychological life and our social life. And within each of those areas there were probably things that we can come to. We used to contribute towards prevention and mental health. So for example, in biological life, it's exercising, getting enough sleep having a really good diet in psychological life. It's practicing mindfulness or learning about positive psychology or how to learning how to talk about mental health as a psycho education or learning cognitive tools about how to interpret events. And then from a social aspect, things like ensuring that we get enough access to nature, ensuring that we see on our friends and can [inaudible] gratitude with people for the contributions they put in our lives.

Nick: Gratitude has been shown to be so important for our mental wellbeing. So I think it's really thinking broadly across all aspects. So our life thinking what are the things I can be doing to focus on prevention. But you know, I think that also there isn't really a, on a building on that, there isn't really a magic wand around this. It's about making sure that you have lots of different aspects going on. And from an organizational perspective, when organizations are thinking about how do they support prevention and mental health, it's making sure that they offer a range of solutions and tools to people, some live, some digital but making sure that they're available to cover the whole spectrum of human variation and diversity. Because different people will get different things out of different things.

Nate: Absolutely. And you know, I've heard some folks in HR and we have a lot of people who are amazing doing amazing things in HR who, who listened to us here. And I hear much like when general wellness became a very popular thing. They said, man, there's just so many mental health providers popping up left and right. And I would just encourage everybody who listens to [inaudible] check out all of them into, to really look into all of

the options out there and everybody trying to do good things. Because in my view, there can never be enough conversation or awareness brought to this issue.

Nick: I I totally agree with that. And I think it's about doing what's right for each organization from a cultural perspective, from the strategic goals of that organization. But what I would say is that I think it is important that there is scientific rigor behind what's being done. Especially if something's being scaled down on a, on a widespread basis. Especially if it's talking about more psychoeducation and bringing the science into things. I think that the science is really important. And the other thing is I think is [inaudible] is giving people tools that personalized to them. So rather like you got the value out of firewood than someone else might get the value out of swimming in the Lake or what else might get out of going and having coffee or whatever it might be. But the phone thing is it, it needs to be personalized to each individual. Yeah. One of the things I think is very important around that is to give people the tools to monitor and track their mental health. At any given time because it's that monitoring that brings to awareness for an individual areas that they might want to work on to help get to noticing

Nate: Things that maybe aren't quite so good for them, so that I can prioritize and focus on those. Well, thank you for your work and for spending time on this, Nick, and for taking the time with me today. I really appreciate it.

Nick: Oh, thank you so much. It's been a real joy talking to you, so thank you.