

Transcript - In Conversation with Tim Campbell - Diversity, apprenticeships and working for Lord Sugar

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Host 00:04

Welcome to Future Talent Learnings In Conversation podcast series, where we talk to business leaders and thinkers to uncover their perspectives about the changing world of work. This episode is hosted by future talent learnings, Tom Ritchie.

Tom 00:18

Today I'm joined by Tim Campbell, head of global citizenship at Alexander Man Solutions. Tim first became known to the general public in 2005 when he won the inaugural series of The Apprentice. After working for Lord Sugar for two years, Tim has become a passionate advocate of future talent initiatives, both through his work at Alexander Man Solutions and through founding the Bright Ideas Trust, a charitable organisation which encourages young entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds to start business ventures.

Tom 00:46

Tim is consulted with many high-profile organisations and has served as the London Mayor's Ambassador for Trade and Enterprise and also as UK Government Secretary of State's Enterprise Advisor. In this podcast we discuss Tim's passion for future talent initiatives, in particular the increasing appeal of apprenticeships for young people, how businesses can promote greater diversity in their workforce and also what it's like to work for Lord Sugar.

Tom 01:11

Hi Tim, thanks for joining us today. What have you been up to since you won the apprentice? It's been 12 years now. How has your career progressed since then and has it followed the path you expected it to.

Tim 01:23

It's been an interesting journey post-apprentice. I think it's a positive thing because essentially I haven't been on the normal route through career as most people who will be listening to this may have gone.

Tim 01:37

University, work for your chosen employer, do a different couple of roles and get up to senior management positions. Essentially I've had a very entrepreneurial journey and I started a couple companies, I consult with a of businesses, and I also have my true passion of HR by working with Alexander Mann Solutions and leading lots of their emerging talent, future talent initiatives within the company.

Tim 02:02

So I'm quite fortunate that because of that round way I've taken in a career, I have seen how businesses from an entrepreneurial side need and have to attract talent and also from within a structural progression and I've seen how business develop talent internally.

Tim 02:19

And both of those are positively and negatively impacted by future talent initiatives.

Tom 02:25

So, yeah, just to touch on that, you've been a passionate advocate for apprenticeships in your role with Alexander Mann Solutions and also elsewhere. How are you promoting them as a viable option for young people who may feel that they need to go to university?

Tom 02:39

And do you wish they were more of a viable option when you were starting out in you career?

Tim 02:45

The way that I'm, I have taken to it is that there is no war between vocational and academic qualifications or routes through education. I think there are different strokes for different folks and based upon who you are, there might be a pathway that's right for you, which is purely academic, go to university, or that you may need a more vocational hands-on route, which touches into the way that you learn and develop.

Tim 03:08

I think for far too long, we've had an education system that predicated on the old way of doing things, which is that you'll sit at a desk, someone will tell you from on high what's supposed to be done, and you will go away and then take a test.

Tim 03:21

When you look at the industries, every single one of those industry sectors has changed dramatically over the last hundred or so years. When look the education system that lots of people recruit talent from, it's very similar in terms of the kids are still sitting at pews, they're still looking at maybe white boards as opposed to chalk boards now, but they are doing similar ways of learning.

Tim 03:44

And they're tested on their memory. What we're finding now is that employers are saying, I need you to be employable. So actually the vocational way is taking more of an emphasis because individuals have to prove they can do the job while working on the jobs.

Tim 04:00

So that's why apprenticeships are so interesting for me because they couple the academic element of education with the hands-on can you do the work that you're actually trained to element which the people are tested on.

Tim 04:12

I think how you square the circle now is with the two things firstly the government agenda around the levy payments which is forcing lots of companies now to think about L&D and training and development of talent and where they come from and then also you now have degree level apprenticeships which a real powerful tool to convince some of the biggest influencers around future talent which is parents because if Mr. and Mrs. Biff still want to tell Johnny and Jennifer went to university to the neighbours, the degree apprenticeships allowed her to do it.

Tim 04:44

So I think there's a bit of a false argument between either or, but now, thankfully, we have a level playing field where vocational skills are seen in the same light as academic.

Tom 04:54

So kind of as part of those new wave of apprenticeships that are coming through, more of a focus is being put in on future-proofing young people's skill sets. Like you said, the education system might not be the best way of ensuring that people are prepared for work but how can we help young workers prepare for their future once they come out of education and what skills are going to be the most important.

Tim 05:18

It's really interesting I think businesses for far too long have waited for education, the education system to produce potential candidates, which they can then go recruit from so whether that's being on campus and talking to lots of candidates, or it might be around getting earlier in that career curve and going and doing assemblies at schools to make sure that the brands are in front of the young people.

Tim 05:47

That's all well and good, but I think businesses are now having to do much more. I there's a big push around sensible and valuable work experience and businesses offering and opening up those opportunities.

Tim 06:00

And also being very clear about what they actually want from young people because there are mixed messages from the business community, unfortunately, because you'll hear lots of companies talking about, well, give me the right person, forget their qualifications, if they've got the right attitude, I'll train them to do the stuff.

Tim 06:15

Fantastic, all encouraging. But then they come to the company's website and it says, well unless you've had a 2-1 or you have had this qualification, we don't want to speak to you. And it's like, well what do you want?

Tim 06:23

So I think businesses have to be very clear about what they actually want to make their businesses work. And they can do that in a number of different ways. Look at the superstars within their own companies and look what personality traits, what

performance criteria they measure those by and reverse that into their application process.

Tim 06:39

I think the way that companies future-proof the talent they're looking for is constantly be feeding back into the education system about what they need. I'm doing an awful lot of work with young people at the moment who are all involved in blockchain technology or cryptocurrency.

Tim 06:56

Many will know it by Bitcoin and some of the nonsense and things that they'll be hearing on the news. But it's far deeper than that. Having a distributed ledger system which can transfer information immediately between two parties is a fundamental way that business is going to change in the future and it's going impact every single one of our businesses the way we're doing that.

Tim 07:14

I don't hear many companies talking to young people about that technology or what it means. I don't hear many young people who actually understand what that means and the implications for their own lives.

Tim 07:23

There must be a better conversation where businesses which is at the front of development can reverse that into or inform the education system about what they need to be teaching young people in order to be future-proof for the future.

Tom 07:37

We'd like to get your opinion on what can be done to encourage greater diversity at the top of UK business.

Tim 07:43

Essentially we're in the state where we have had discrimination laws in place for a long time. Unfortunately the reflection of our work practices is not backing up the power of that law. So in fact it is illegal to discriminate on people on personal characteristics etc but we still see from our numbers the lack of women, the lack of ethnic groups who are in senior positions.

Tim 08:07

What can companies do about that? I think firstly, they've got to look at the structures and processes within their business around how they recruit and where they get talent from, both in terms of developing their own talent, because you look at lots of organisations.

Tim 08:20

At the bottom of the pyramid, there's lots of diversity. But then that's not going or transferring to senior levels. And also, how do they attract talent from outside? Who are they talking to? How are they talking to those individuals and what feedback are they then using to make that process more efficient and not being in the position of discriminating against talent?

Tim 08:42

I think what's forcing this conversation to be much more interesting is that the world is getting smaller. We're having to do businesses with different territories. For any business on a global scale they know that Africa and Asia and India are colossal powers now and not just seen as the work horses or the dumps of the world to put rubbish.

Tim 09:05

Essentially, talent is coming from these places. And if people want to do business in these particular areas, which were seen as emerging markets, they have to have a workforce that's reflective of those.

Tim 09:14

In addition to that, the business case is now well justified around why that diversity works. Diversity of thought, coming from diversity of people and genders is incredibly important around coming up with the solutions of tomorrow.

Tim 09:30

What I think businesses have to be aware of is asking themselves challenging questions. Are we recruiting people who just look like us? And are we recruited from the same places? And all we missing out on talent because if you are missing our talent, that means your competitors are going to get that talent and you're going be in a bit worse position.

Tim 09:48

So this isn't about doing the right thing. this is about doing a business sensible decision around attracting talent into the company.

Tom 09:57

And on that point, will greater emphasis on apprenticeships help with that? Because if you're historically just going to be picking up graduates from Oxbridge, which we know is not the most diverse of institutions, but instead you are putting a focus on training people up from the get go and then you coming in from different talent pools, is that gonna help?

Tim 10:18

I think on current statistics, no, is a short answer. Unfortunately, the apprenticeship proposition hasn't been the saviour of the diversity talent pipelines that lots of people were hoping it was going to be.

Tim 10:33

And I feel because the assumption was predicated on that, those from ethnic minority groups had lower aspirations, they may therefore be more attracted to apprenticeships proposition. That's been far from the truth for two reasons.

Tim 10:47

One, the apprenticeship proposition has been about attracting top-level talent who are making a conscious decision about their career paths to go in a different direction, not about those who can't make it to university, the old way of looking at vocational education.

Tim 11:01

And there's a lack of awareness. If we're talking about ethnic minority groups or even if we are talking about gender diversity, to make the assumption that people will take that pathway without understanding what has forced people in different directions is always on a hide into nothing.

Tim 11:18

Within the ethnic diversity groups that we speak to interested parties are not taking the apprenticeship group not because they're not interested in the qualification but it's not seen as prestigious as going to a university route and once again going back to that the influencer group around that decision maker if your parents are telling you that you have to go to university, you're not going to think an apprenticeship is any good.

Tim 11:45

We need to educate the parents around the power of an apprenticeships and get them to help the young people make wiser decisions and choices.

Tom 11:52

Good stuff and now just to kind of move back on to more of a personal kind angle, what has been the biggest challenge you faced in your career?

Tim 12:02

I think the big challenge I faced is understanding what I actually want to do as a career. I've gone in lots of different directions and in the old way, the old days of recruitment, I would have been seen as a flip-flop-er, which would've been a negative thing.

Tim 12:17

It's quite interesting how the times have changed and now we talk about portfolio careers and young people will have seven or eight jobs before they end up retiring. Whereas when I was growing up, if you were seen with several companies on your CV, you weren't seen as reliable.

Tim 12:35

So it's quiet interesting that it has changed. But I don't have a straight line progression around where I want to be. I do things that I know are going to help the next generation make wiser decisions, hence why I focus a lot of my time on apprenticeships and emerging talent and I do an awful lot with regards to entrepreneurship amongst young people with bright ideas to us.

Tim 12:56

So I wish if I could go back and change anything, and I don't really want go to the time I had lots of spots and an afro, but I would want to tell my younger self is trust in your heart. Trust in the things that you're good at.

Tim 13:15

I think we spend far too much time in human resources and in education telling people what they're bad at and to improve those things and actually we should be focusing on what we're good at because specialists usually make better headway than generalists.

Tom 13:30

Yeah and how would you describe yourself both inside and outside of work? Is there much of a difference or are you pretty much what you see is what you get?

Tim 13:39

I'm really fortunate that I'm afforded the time to be able to bring my whole self to work. I think when we're talking about DNI we should be talking inclusion much more and inclusion is the pinnacle for me.

Tim 13:57

Diversity is quite easy because you can just look at numbers get quotas etc but making those people feel inclusive where they can be themselves at work is the big challenge. So there isn't much difference around me being at home or here.

Tim 14:10

I'm a bit more of a bum when I am at home, I don't wear as nice clothes but I'm not going to mess up your suits but anyway that's another thing. But I think I m lucky enough that I can let my personality and my experience and knowledge all come together at work just as I would at a home .So I do not have to put on a mask and I think lots of people when they are trying to get on in work feel they have to put on a mask to be somebody else in the work environment and the difficulty that has particularly from a well-being or mental health perspective is it creates this dichotomy where you you feel that there is two things that you have to do in order to survive and that's hard to maintain over a long period of time I think.

Tom 14:52

We'll just finish up with some quick-fire questions. So we're gonna do some either-or's and then favorites. Okay cool. So either or coffee or tea?

Tim 15:03

Tea.

Tom 15:05

Sweet or savoury?

Tim 15:06

Sweet.

Tom 15:07

Early bird or night owl?

Tim 15:08

Night owl.

Tom 15:09

Apple or Android?

Tim 15:11

Apple, Apple all day.

Tom 15:13

And finally Nick Hewer or Margaret Mountford?

Tim 15:17

Only because she's my board director. She's the director of our board. It would have to be Margaret but I love you too Nick.

Tom 15:25

So what were they like in terms of the kind of work with on the show and how was Lord Sugar to work on with the show as well.

Tim 15:31

Do you know what? Nick and Margaret were amazing. Nick and Margaret actually put in the hard graft because they're the ones who followed us around all the time. We spent most of the time with them. So we actually got to know them a lot more during the filming of this show than we did Lord Sugar which I obviously had the privilege of working for him for a number of years afterwards.

Tim 15:48

The two of them are incredibly bright, incredibly knowledgeable individuals who have had amazing careers. You've got to think Margaret Mountford was one of the only female partners of a substantial law firm, Herbert Smith, is now a bigger firm now, in her time.

Tim 16:07

You don't get to that point or position by accident. She was amazing, and still is, in terms of her knowledge, understanding, and management of both the corporate governance of our charity, Briar Deere's Trust, and the work that she does around a number of different charities and schools that she sits on as Chair of Governors.

Tim 16:26

Nick Hewer, another phenomenally talented individual who is an expert with regards to PR, but also somebody who has the common touch around being able to transfer that knowledge to individuals and can he tell a story?

Tim 16:40

Oh my gosh. When he talks about the Sultan of Brunei and some of the days of working in Amstrad PLC and supporting Lord Sugar when he took over at Tottenham are amazing and both of them are amazing storytellers.

Tim 16:54

So I'm really fortunate I've had to work both of them. Lord Sugar, an amazing man, belligerent, tough, if you're on the other side of a negotiation table, but somebody I have so much respect for because coming from an inner city environment, overcoming the challenges of that statistical point of not being successful if he were born in that area to the point where he now runs a number of different companies and supports some charitable causes, is I have nothing but respect for him.

Tim 17:24

Do I want to be on the other side of his finger? No, but I don't have to worry about it, so it's all right.

Tom 17:27

No you don't have to worry for that.

Tom 17:29

So just kind of moving on from there, who's your favorite Apprentice contestant from over the years? There's been a few.

Tim 17:34

Wow, there's been a few, my favorite has to be Saira because we got to the final of the first year. We were, of final four, all of us were immigrants to this country actually, quite interestingly. We're all grafters, we're independent grafters.

Tim 17:50

But I have so much respect for Saira, because although that she was perceived as the gobby, run-around saleswoman, she's a hustler. She understands the power of hard work, and she is a totally dedicated family woman.

Tim 18:03

And for me, I'll always call her my big sister, because in the show, that's how she works, but I've a huge amount of respect for what she has gone on to do, subsequent.

Tom 18:10

And some more favourites to wrap things up. So your favourite song?

Tim 18:15

Favourite song. It would be Luther Vandross So Amazing

Tom 18:20

Great great choice. Favourite film?

Tim 18:24

What's my favourite film? I like Seven but I also like Mississippi Burning yeah

Tom 18:31

Again great choices and did you have a childhood hero?

Tim 18:35

My childhood hero was aside from my mum who worked bloody hard to make sure our three kids weren't statistics coming from a single parent family was Sir Trevor Donald.

Tim 18:46

Why did I love Sir Trevor? Because he was a decent guy who represented some personality traits which I wanted to follow through.

Tom 18:56

And what's your favourite piece of advice you've been given?

Tim 18:58

Favourite piece advice. In business my favourite pieces of advice came from Lord Sugar. Get yourself a good lawyer, good accountant and always trust the numbers. Always trust the numbers. So that served me very well. Be unemotional about the decisions you make but based on the information and data that you have to make those decisions.

Tim 19:18

And in terms of life, my best piece of advice always came from my mother, which says happy wife, happy life. It's so very true.

Tom 19:24

Well, it's always good to end on wisdom from a mum, isn't it? Yeah. It was always a nice touch to end on. Thanks, Tim. It has been a real pleasure talking to you today.

Host 19:36

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