

Flying Solo podcast ep 392 Nina Mapson Bone

Cec Busby [00:00:02]:

Hi, everybody. I'm Cec Busby editor of Flying Solo. Welcome to our weekly podcast where we step inside the minds and lives of soloists and small business owners. Now, ever since the pandemic, Meaningful work has become a hot topic of conversation as more and more of us look to live a life where work and purpose align. And today's guest knows this better than most. Nina Mapson Bone is the Managing Director of Beaumont People and she spent the last couple of decades helping individuals find their unique path to career fulfillment. She's also the author of the new book Meaningful Work, which shares the inspirational stories of how others have applied the theory into their career and working lives. She joins us today to give us the lowdown on meaningful work and how you can apply it to your business, the recruitment process, culture and life. Hi Nina, thanks so much for joining me on the show. Welcome.

Nina Mapson Bone [00:00:58]:

Thank you so much for having me excited to be here.

Cec Busby [00:01:01]:

Excellent, I'm glad you are always like an excited guest. So could you tell us a little bit about your journey to becoming a career expert? Were you always interested in people and culture?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:01:14]:

Yeah, I was always interested in people but I didn't think of recruitment as a career for quite some time. When I was younger, I wanted to be a teacher for a long part of my youth and even through into my twenty s, I always thought I might go back to university to study teaching, but I couldn't afford to do it once I did my initial degree and then life took over and I kind of found my interest in people and helping develop other people through career and people and recruitment world.

Cec Busby [00:01:40]:

So what was the first foray then?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:01:42]:

For you into that first? When I was working at university I actually did, believe it or not, a door to door, commission only sales job in America and I used to spend my summer holidays in America doing that. But through the year we would do recruiting of other students across the university. I grew up in England, as you can probably tell from the accent and we would spend the year traveling around the universities recruiting other students to come and join us. And I didn't realize at the time, but that was like doing a graduate recruitment job. Nine months of the year we'd be recruiting and then three months of the year we'd go to America to run this sales program. So it was great training and a great experience and it was that experience that led me to have an interest into that sort of talent attraction space.

Cec Busby [00:02:23]:

And so when did you decide to go out on your own and make this your?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:02:29]:

It was, I won't lie, it was when I came to Australia in 2002. Whilst I had an interest when I was in the UK, it came together with the need for a visa I won't lie. And it is a role that, at the time, you could get a visa for. So I knew I had the right skills, I had the interest, and I wanted the visa. So I started my sort of official career when I moved to Australia as a recruitment consultant. My initial job was recruiting temporary workers into the New South Wales government.

Cec Busby [00:02:54]:

So that's like 20 years or so now.

Nina Mapson Bone [00:02:57]:

Yes. Scary.

Cec Busby [00:03:03]:

So I imagine you've gathered a lot of expertise over that time. What made you decide to put all of that expertise into a book? Like, why were you inspired to write Meaningful Work?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:03:14]:

It's interesting. Through my career in recruitment, I mean, I've interviewed I think I worked out something like nearly 10,000 people in total over the span of my career. And I see time and time again that people are often they often know that they're unhappy, but they don't know why they're unhappy. And we feel that frustration when we're interviewing people. They feel it. They're not sure. And sometimes we see people making the mistake of jumping from job to job and still not sort of solving what it is that's unhappy for them. So we did some at Beaumont people. We did some research back in 2009 into what actually is Meaningful Work because we talk about trying to create opportunities for meaningful work. And we were astounded to discover that the research had never been done at all in Australia for Australians, and there had never been any research into what we call the integrated approach that looks at both the psychological and the sociological factors of meaningful work. So we did that research, and off the back of that, I was just so fascinated by what we found that we really continued the journey. And that's kind of what inspired me then to write the book, to try and get the message out there to help everyone find more meaningful work.

Cec Busby [00:04:20]:

So what exactly do you mean when you talk about meaningful work?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:04:25]:

So, Meaningful Work is the importance an individual places on their work, meeting their personal beliefs, their values, their goals, their motivations in the context of the social and cultural environment. And often we think about it either for ourselves, individually, we think of it as, what am I good at? What do I enjoy? But we forget that actually how much the society and the culture we're in, how much value they assign to the work we do, and also our access and means to be able to do the kind of work we want to do that also influences how meaningful work is

for us. So it's a combination of actually four factors that we boiled it down to, to really help you understand what makes work meaningful.

Cec Busby [00:05:06]:

And do you think that's really changed over the years? Do you think what someone might have thought of as a meaningful work? And I guess there was that whole notion of a job for life and I don't think we see that these days. So is that also because of the way people consider meaningful work and purpose in their roles?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:05:28]:

Yeah, I can see that. So I can give you the data from how it changed through the pandemic specifically. And we definitely saw a shift from that because from the research we did in 2019, the top factors of meaningful work, the first one was actually the most popular, was having the trust of your manager, followed by work that has a higher purpose, that contributes to society, followed by culture. And that shifted as a result of the pandemic. The number one factor after the pandemic, as a result of probably the pandemic, was that was the safety piece, that emotional, psychological, physical safety became the most important factor for people, maybe not surprising given what we all went through. And number two was more about team connection rather than contribution more generally. Number three was still culture. So definitely we saw that shift. But the other thing I think is we're seeing, and this bore out in the research I did for the book, we're seeing a shift generationally in what people want in meaningful work. So what Gen Z want for work is very different to what the boomers want. And we are about to approach, I think it's 4 million boomers leaving the workforce in the next five to ten years. So the nature of what people want from work is fundamentally shifting.

Cec Busby [00:06:37]:

So what are some of those differences that you saw?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:06:40]:

So I think the key thing is that for the Generation Z, they are going to be or they are obsessed with meaningful work. I'm Gen X and we talk

about Gen X as being obsessed with body image. That's something that we kind of have to deal with. But generation Z coming through this comes from a demographer called Simon Kristenmacher and he talks about them being obsessed with meaningful work in the way that it will drive everything they do and they won't settle for work that is not meaningful to them. They will vote with their feet if they're not engaged in meaningful work. And the difference is, when you look at the boomer generations, the kind of attitude then was very much work is something you do. You're lucky if you like it, but if you don't like it, you don't really have much choice in the matter. There is a lot more emphasis now on talent attraction and talent retention. And because there is going to be an ongoing talent shortage, there might be economic fluctuations that will kind of change that sort of within shorter cycles. But the next five to ten years, particularly in Australia, we're going to see a really key talent shortage in the key areas. So people have choice. If they're skilled and they're qualified and they're capable, they have the choice around what they want to do and so they will vote them with their feet. And it will be things like collaboration, connection, career pathways, the ability to contribute to something bigger than them themselves. They're the factors we're seeing come through as really popular factors of meaningful work.

Cec Busby [00:08:07]:

So a lot of our listeners are obviously soloists and small business owners. How can they adopt that idea of meaningful work into their businesses? How do they move their careers and businesses in a meaningful direction?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:08:22]:

So I think the key thing for them is to understand what the factors are for themselves because if they are engaged in meaningful work, even in a solo venture, they will be more successful. It's shown that when you're engaged in meaningful work you have higher performance, you have less burnout, less stress, greater engagement, greater creativity. So it will help with their ventures if they are engaged. And there's four factors that they need to think about. One is the individual, which is how their work and whatever their venture is, how that aligns to their strengths, to their motivations, to the personal narrative, the story they tell themselves about work. The second is the job is how have they

actually designed the job themselves to really try and make it meaningful? The volume of work, the pressure involved, the kind of day to day of what they're actually doing. The third, which when you're a soloist is kind of the same thing, is the organization. Things like practices, procedures, leadership, culture. But it's important that they set that up from the beginning because as they grow and they might bring on people to join them that will fundamentally kind of be something they're laying the foundations for. And then the fourth is how much, as I touched on earlier, how much the society and the culture influences how they feel about their work and whether they're kind of in line with that or if they're not, whether they've made peace with the fact that there might be outside influences sort of judging or contradicting their individual values.

Cec Busby [00:09:40]:

Interesting. And what about if they're micro business? How can they make sure that they're providing meaningful work for their staff? Is it a lot about that culture piece?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:09:51]:

Well, the thing that's actually really important for people to remember is that it is unique for every individual. So for some people it is culture, but others it doesn't matter so much. And so the key is for very small businesses and the great advantage of being in a micro business is you can have this conversation. You're not having to kind of make generic systems and processes that suit the vast majority. You can try and tailor it more individually to the number of staff you have. So the best thing you can do is actually ask people. Now, some people may not know for themselves. As I say, they struggle to articulate what it is. We actually built a profile tool to help people measure it for themselves which we've made free and available for anyone to use so they can go on and measure themselves against the researched metrics of meaningful work. That's just@meaningfulwork.com.au. So that kind of tool can help people see what's important to them and maybe use that for a discussion internally. But if you understand what makes the work meaningful for your let's say you've only got two or three people, is it the leadership, is it the relationships, is it the systems? Is it your job, is it actually just that you get to work to your strengths and you're not worried about the rest of it? What is important to them each

individually? And can you try and tailor and reorganize the work accordingly so they get to do it in the way that's meaningful for them?

Cec Busby [00:11:09]:

So when you were writing the book, did you face any kind of challenges when you were putting it all together?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:11:15]:

I think the thing that was interesting was so there are six stories in the book, six quite different people, all of whom have had very successful careers but quite different pathways. And what was interesting was talking to them and trying to understand how their journeys have kind of matched the theory. And one of the things that was interesting, and I guess is one of the challenges that we face, and I saw it through the book, is that meaningful work changes over time and sometimes we don't realize when it has changed. And interestingly enough, even as I was writing the book, I experienced that myself. Because in terms of my enjoyment and my engagement in writing the book, one of the challenges is around kind of like any project as you go through it, it's exciting at the beginning, and then you're kind of in the weeds of it, and then you're coming out the other end. So trying to keep that level of engagement and meaning as you're going through anything. And we saw that consistently in each of the stories in the book. So that was quite an interesting observation, was almost to see the theory in myself while I was writing about it for other people. So that was quite an interesting and challenging thing to kind of go through.

Cec Busby [00:12:20]:

Did anything surprise you from the stories that people were telling you?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:12:24]:

Yeah, there were a couple of key things that jumped out at me. One of the people in the book, Mimi Naylor, she's the founder and clinical director of a private speech pathology business. And one of the things that fascinated me about her story was that she's neurodiverse, she has ADHD and she's very proud of that fact. She talks about that very openly, but she's worked in large hospital systems, university systems,

and she then went out on her own and has her own private sort of speech pathology business. But one of the things that fascinated me in her story that really surprised me, you kind of assume that you only go out on your own if you have that kind of financial security to do. So she's actually the daughter of refugees and she comes from a refugee background. So really hearing how she got through that and set up on her own, that was just blew me away. In terms of the things that drive out, I won't give too much away, but the things that kept her going when it was tough for her and.

Cec Busby [00:13:22]:

You said there was a couple who was the other person.

Nina Mapson Bone [00:13:26]:

Yeah. So the other one that's really interesting is Hamish Young. So he's a director at the United Nations and has had a phenomenal career. If you saw his profile and you could go on and look him up, you'd be blown away by the things he's achieved. But he failed high school. He came in the bottom 5% of his year in high school. And the story of how he went first into a kind of job that suited him in terms of the organization, it suited his hobbies. It was in a company aligned to some of his hobbies, I don't want to give too much away, but how he then went, that's great. But he couldn't see himself doing that for the next 2030 years. That's what motivated him to go back to TAFE and retake his HSC and then go on to do a double degree. And he ended up finishing in the top 10% of his year at university. And that kind of story of how he went through that shift and then ended up in the career that he ultimately landed in is a really great example of when things work and then don't work on work and don't work.

Cec Busby [00:14:27]:

It is interesting as well that quite often academic experience doesn't necessarily equate to the job experience that you're expecting.

Nina Mapson Bone [00:14:36]:

Yeah. And it's interesting you say that, because actually, one of the other people in the book, Pamela Bishop, she's the chief operating

officer of Bloom's the Chemist. I'm sure everybody has heard of Bloom's the Chemist, and she passed up the opportunity to go to university when she was young, 17 or whatever she was, because she was working part time in a chemist. She's from Ireland originally, in a pharmacy back in Ireland. And she loved it. She loved the retail work, she loved the interaction, and she decided she didn't want to go away and study. And so she's ended up having this incredibly successful career based on what was actually really important to her individually. And she's only ever worked for two organizations, the company in Ireland, and then Blooms the Chemist when she came here. So a great example of the fact that you don't necessarily need the degree to go on to have a great career.

Cec Busby [00:15:25]:

So what are your thoughts on the importance of making meaningful work an absolute priority in our lives? Do we all need to do that?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:15:34]:

Yes. I mean, I'm obviously very passionate about this, but I believe that it is the fundamental thing that will make you make a significant difference in your life. One of the things we discovered in the research was that meaning that work sorry, not just meaningful work, but work itself has a much bigger impact on us than in previous generations. It's where traditional sources of meaning have been in decline. Things like church attendance, things like community centers, knowing your neighbors, those kind of things. Work has actually become our primary source of identity and meaning and that's borne out through the research. And most of us spend more time at work than doing anything else. And what we know is the outcomes from being engaged in meaningful Work improve absolutely every metric going even on an organizational level. It improves your organizational performance during times of downturn or downsizing, for example. But individually you will be less stressed, you'll have less burnout, you'll be happier, you'll be more engaged. And I believe that has a massive ripple effect to your friends, to your family and to the economy. You're less likely to leave jobs as often if you are a solo venturist or if you're a micro business, you're more likely to be successful. But the trick is understanding how it's meaningful to you because it is unique for every individual. And if you're not in Meaningful Work, the thing is about taking the time to learn

the lessons from that. So instead of sort of rushing and hopping from one thing to the next, why is it not working? What is it about it that's not working? There's some great questions and exercises I put in the book to really get people thinking about those things. Because when we're not in meaningful work that can actually be as instructive as when we are. If we choose to listen to the lessons that it's giving us, how can.

Cec Busby [00:17:21]:

We measure the meaningfulness of our work? Because it's very sort of esoteric thing in some ways.

Nina Mapson Bone [00:17:28]:

Well, that's why we built the profile tool. So the meaningful work profile tool. It looks like a will if you like. It's like a colored will and it takes the so there are the four factors that I mentioned earlier and there's subsets within those factors. And what it does is it's built behavioral based statements against the research to help you measure where you sit in terms of which one of those subsets within the factors are more important to you. And by doing that, you can see for yourself which aspects are really kind of the most important. And they're all lovely. Don't get me wrong. I mean, every factor of meaningful work is nice in an ideal world. In Utopia, we'd have every factor of meaningful work all of the time. But the trick is understanding the ones that are important to you and just turning the dial on those ones, not spending too much time on the ones that aren't. And a great example I talk about this in the book is relationships. So relationships is one of the subsets of the organizational factor. There's a lot of evidence that says if we have a best friend at work or close friends at work, that really helps us be engaged in meaningful work. But for me, as an individual at this point in my life, it's not so important. It was very important when I was younger, but it's not so important now because I struggle with all the responsibilities I have to stay in touch with the people that I am already really close friends with. And I don't want the extra kind of responsibility of having to try and keep up with more people because I don't want to let people down. So just because it's a common and popular factor of meaningful work doesn't mean it's true for everybody. So it's kind of not falling into the trap of popularity and really taking the time to use that tool to measure it for yourself or understand it for yourself so that you can tailor what you're trying to do to you as an individual.

Cec Busby [00:19:12]:

So what about for our small business owners? What kind of challenges could they expect if they're trying to offer more meaningful work? I mean, you said there's advantages because they're smaller teams. There's more of that face to face relationship. They can ask questions about what people find meaningful, but what might be some things that might be challenging for them when they're trying to offer more meaningful work?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:19:37]:

Yeah, there's a couple of big ones. So one of the factors that increased significantly as a result of the pandemic was the desire for career growth and progression. And understandably, in a much smaller organization or a microorganization, you don't necessarily have those career pathways on offer unless you're growing kind of at a speed that somebody wants to grow their career. And the generation that are coming through, the Generation Y, the Generation Z, they expect very clear career pathways, and they expect to know, what can they do to get the next promotion? What does it entail? Where does it look like? And that's not necessarily something that the listeners can apply in a small organization. So there's two ways they could tackle that. They could either accept it and say, fair enough, I will just make sure I'm trying not to appeal to those types of people because everyone's path to meaningful work is unique. Let me instead realize what I can do and try and talk to a different audience. The other way is to say, okay, well, I may not be able to offer structured career pathways, but I can give them learning opportunities and development opportunities and involve them in projects that they may not get involved in in a larger organization which will give them more skills and experience.

Cec Busby [00:20:50]:

And what about AI? There's so many people that with the advent of AI are feeling very threatened about their job security. But is AI something that can also help businesses provide more meaningful work.

Nina Mapson Bone [00:21:03]:

Yeah, it's like anything, I see it as a tool. And a tool used well and for good can do great things. But obviously, often tools can be used for nefarious purposes too. So it's about how you use the tool. But I think one of the great things it can do is it can take some of the kind of bulk of the kind of repetitive database where AI is at, particularly at the moment. And this may change over time, but it can do large processing. It can look at repetitive tasks. There are certain things it could do that may not be so meaningful for your people. And one of the things that we know won't change is the need for human skills. By 2030, Deloitte tell us that two thirds of jobs will be soft skill intensive. So if you can get your people building those soft skills things like their collaboration, their creativity, their critical thinking, and actually get AI, almost use it as an intern to do the kind of bulk of the kind of repetitive tasks for you. It means that you can free your people up to do the stuff that they're going to enjoy more.

Cec Busby [00:22:11]:

And so how would you encourage those soft skills in your staff? What are some things that you could do to help develop those soft skills?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:22:20]:

So I think this is where you look at the and this ties into the job factor. You look at what are you asking your people to do and what are their individual strengths, and how can you try and give them work and tailor the job to allow them to use those strengths, to learn some of those skills? And I'll give you an example. We had two marketing coordinators that we hired, graduates that joined us or that year they were near graduates. And when they joined us at Beaumont People, we have two main cohorts that we market to. One is to clients and one is to candidates. So people that are looking to hire and people that are looking for a job. And we set their jobs up that way so that one would focus on each cohort. But what we realized over time was they had different strengths and they weren't enjoying the work set up like that. So we kind of sat them down together and we said, okay, this is what we need done. This is the output we need. What do you like doing? What are your skills? What do you want to develop? And off the back of that, we completely rejigged the role. So one does all of the kind of social media online stuff. One does all of the events in person stuff. And

what that means is for the person that's focusing on the social media side, they get to do more of the analysis, the critical thinking some of those soft skills that they really enjoy. And for the other person they get to do more of the collaboration and creativity, also soft skills, but they get to hone and develop the ones they already like and enjoy and get to get really good at them. Without that experience, they don't have the practice to get better and better at them.

Cec Busby [00:23:43]:

And so again, it came down to those conversations as well and really listening to the people that you're working with.

Nina Mapson Bone [00:23:50]:

Yeah, we had the meaningful work profile we looked at and then we also use a strengths profile, which is a formal tool that looks at their strengths. But again, that can be done by discussion as well. The strengths profile is not our product and it does cost money. So obviously if you're in a micro business, you don't necessarily have a lot of money for these things when you're in startup phase and those kind of things. But you can also do that by discussion. And somebody's strength is and it's one of the individual factors or tied to the individual factors of meaningful work, but it's what they're good at. What do they enjoy? When are they in the flow? And what you're looking for is what are the human skills that can't be done by AI that show that strength? So it is things like what we're doing now, narrator chatting, talking, collaborating, building relationships, that's a very human strength. But it's also, as I mentioned earlier, critical thinking, analysis, some of those things. So it's really taking the time to get to know and understand what you can draw out of your people and get them to spend more time doing.

Cec Busby [00:24:47]:

What are some questions you think could help you uncover those skills? Because as you said, to use those tools costs the business a lot of money and they probably don't have the budget for it. So what kind of questions should they be asking their staff?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:25:03]:

So I would start by saying, what are the things that you do in work? Where you literally go, wow, where did the time go when you get into a flow state and you didn't realize you were loving so much of what you were doing that you kind of almost didn't realize where the time had gone? Because that will tell you what they're really passionate about. And once you understand and then that might be an activity. So that might be I was designing a website, let's say, okay, well, what is it about that activity? So that's the activity. What's the human skill behind that that you enjoyed? Is it the creativity or is it the actual kind of like the tetris game of fitting things together, which is kind of a spatial awareness thing. There might be a couple of different human skills at play there, but which bits of it do you really enjoy? What was it about that activity that really got you going then? Let's look at that human skill and see what other tasks you can do where we can apply that human skill. Because you can apply that creativity or that spatial awareness to other aspects that need doing in the organization, for example. And then that's where you'll get the best out of your people. They'll perform better and they'll be more engaged, so they'll be happier and stay with you longer.

Cec Busby [00:26:17]:

Can't believe it, Nina, but we're almost out of time. So clearly this is something I like doing.

Nina Mapson Bone [00:26:23]:

Me, too.

Cec Busby [00:26:25]:

Now, I guess, a final question. What tips would you have for our listeners about making a transition into meaningful work? If they're not that happy with what they're doing at the moment, how can they make that change?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:26:40]:

Yeah, my first tip is don't rush it. So I always say it's like a health or a habit or a journey. It's not an outcome. So meaningful work is not a

fixed date, it's not a destination. So don't sort of run away from something. Spend the time to try and understand what is it that's not working right now? What is it you don't like? Don't just assume it's the job or the organization. Really go deeper than that to understand what are the things that really make you tick and make you happy. And as I say, there's some tools and exercises in the book, or there's the free tool online that you can use as well. But spend the time to think about that so that you don't just jump from one thing to the next. Because getting it right and having good questions to ask yourself, and then to ask if you're going for an interview or where you currently work or of yourself in your own work. Even the right questions are what will form the right habits? And the right habits will help you improve your journey to meaningful work.

Cec Busby [00:27:35]:

Thank you so much, Nina. Great advice. Now, where can people get the book?

Nina Mapson Bone [00:27:40]:

Pretty much anywhere they want, online or in bookshop. So it's in kindle on Amazon. It's on Booktopia, it's in Dimmocks. My website, which is just ninamapsonbone.com Au has all of the links. It's on kindle real book. So, yeah, it should be everywhere.

Cec Busby [00:27:57]:

Everywhere. You won't be able to avoid it.

Nina Mapson Bone [00:28:00]:

That's my hope. Seth.

Cec Busby [00:28:03]:

Thank you so much for your time. I've really enjoyed chatting with you today.

Nina Mapson Bone [00:28:07]:

Thanks for having me.