

## Peter Quigley GT&BSC Keynote

**Title:** The Evolution of Work: How Smart Machines Are Actually Making Us More Human

**Summary:** We're at a critical juncture in the evolution of work. We live in an age where smart machines make work more human than ever before. Today's businesses must recognize this trend and evolve with it, or risk losing the talent battle for good.

### Script:

Thank you, Barry, and hello, everyone. It's my pleasure to be with you today.

There's an old Danish proverb that says: "It's difficult to make predictions, especially about the future." So why, when it comes to work, do so many of us, me included, obsess with trying to foretell its future? If we're honest with ourselves, I think we can all agree that we'll be wrong.

In the 1930s, none other than John Maynard Keynes predicted that technological advances would allow people to work just two days a week, and their biggest challenge would be how to handle all their leisure time. Work just two days? I consider it a good week if I have two days I don't work!

In 1967, Harvard sociologist David Riesman said about the future of work that "if anything remains more or less unchanged, it will be the role of women." This is the same year my mother, until then a stay-at-home mom, entered the workforce after my father abruptly left. She was a successful part of the workforce and worked for the next 40 years.

In 2017, The Wall Street Journal ran an article forecasting the end of remote work. It argued that managers thought on-site presence was necessary for both control and collaboration. How's that theory holding up?

I think one of the primary reasons we'll be wrong about the future of work is that no one can foresee the impact of technology.

For example, what will the world of work be like when simultaneous translation of spoken languages is ubiquitous?

Or, what will the world of work look like when humans live routinely into their 90s or even 100s, and work for 50 to 60 years or more?

My point is that it's futile to try to answer what will be the future of work. Perhaps a more instructive and useful question is what should we, as humankind, as leaders in the world of work, do to enable a more humane, rewarding, even joyful, work of the future.

One way to frame this question is by looking through the eyes of workers. For the purpose of my thoughts today we'll focus on so-called "open talent" – a category that includes freelancers, independent contractors, contingent or temporary employees, hundreds of thousands of which work for Kelly, the global talent company I have the privilege of leading.

First, there's Ishan, an automation controls and systems engineer on assignment with a multinational automaker. Ishan is developing technology for semi-autonomous vehicles. Every morning while driving to work, Ishan watches how other people drive their cars. He takes note and applies what he sees to the technology that will make driving safer for everybody.

Next, there's Jaquan, who works on an assembly line that produces contact lenses. A military veteran with experience as a radio operator, he now works with sophisticated, robotic molding machines. His position requires him to troubleshoot issues that come up along the fully robotic production line. Jaquan loves the technical role and is proud about quickly picking up the skills needed for the job.

And then there's Sudeep who, after earning a degree in analytical chemistry, found her first job as a chemist through Kelly. More than 20 years later, she reconnected with us for a chemical research technician role with a global oil and gas company. Sudeep took the opportunity because she wanted to make materials that are safer for the environment — like biodegradable plastics — to create a more sustainable way of life.

Many of you rely on – actually many of you probably are – contingent or "open talent" like Ishan, Jaquan and Sudeep. Trends indicate the share of open talent in our global workforce will only increase. Prior to the pandemic, contingent talent usage had increased, reaching record rates in the U.S., Kelly's home country, and similar trends exist in the other 25+ countries in which we operate. It is projected to rise nearly 30% over the next decade.

Therefore, it's imperative for organizations to understand the mindset of open talent if they want to attract and retain them, and help them succeed in the future of work.

So, who are they?

At Kelly, we've conducted extensive research into worker attitudes. Of course, there's no one single type of worker – in fact we identified 9 different talent tribes – but we tried to identify a common mindset that cuts across generations and demographics.

We zeroed in on three talent tribes that we collectively call “Momentum Seekers.” I believe understanding Momentum Seekers, who represent about a third of the total workforce and are an excellent proxy for open talent, will help us understand what *they want* work to look like in the future.

In general, Momentum Seekers want progression and meaning in their work lives. They are open to new opportunities and often look for a new job because they feel bored or unfulfilled.

For Momentum Seekers, work is about meeting financial needs as well as their passions and desires to grow. In other words, Momentum Seekers want to “learn while they earn.”

Momentum Seekers bring non-work expectations to their jobs. They see their personal and professional lives intertwined, and they want to make experiences in both.

Interestingly, but maybe not surprisingly, Momentum Seekers are comfortable with new technologies and tend to embrace AI and robotics.

In a recent survey of our professional and industrial workers, only 1 in 10 said they were concerned automation would directly affect their employment opportunities. Nearly all of them, 92%, said they were confident in their abilities and willing to learn new skills. And while these are workers employed on a contingent or temporary basis, it's likely that they reflect perceptions of Momentum Seekers in all categories.

And, more than half of Momentum Seekers are millennials. They are the present and the future.

With that profile in mind, what do we know about the experience that Momentum Seekers and other workers today are looking for?

That might seem a logical question, but the reality is that while almost every company conducts extensive research to understand their customers, far fewer are doing the same to better understand their talent.

Our research found that today's workers are bringing their heightened consumer expectations to work, which is likely to create unnecessary blind spots for organizations that ignore this. As much as consumers don't tolerate bad experiences with products and services, talent won't tolerate a bad work experience. I want to highlight a few gaps between the expectations of today's talent and how organizations may be missing the mark.

Talent expects organizations to have purpose. About three in four consumers believe brands can increase profits while also improving their communities. Workers demand the same from organizations they work with. Yet, according to our research, most talent feels that their work is only half as meaningful as it could be.

Consumers utilize brands for self-expression, and brands that embrace individuality, diversity and inclusion are winning. We expect the same of the workplace – that what makes us who we are is welcomed and supported. Today's talent expects some consideration of flexible hours, remote work, and job sharing to balance their "Multiple Me's." Yet, 80% of employers in the U.S. did not have a remote-work program before the onset of the pandemic.

Consumers pursue brands to balance wellness, mental health and happiness; and wellbeing programs are important to workers. While these programs are on the rise, just slightly more than half of employers offer them to their global employees, a recent survey showed. And we believe only a fraction offer them to the open talent with which they work.

Algorithms allow for consumer experiences to be personalized, yet companies struggle to understand what motivates their own workers. Talent wonders, "If Netflix can recommend the perfect show, why can't the organization I work for recommend a personalized development or upskilling path, including project or assignment work?"

So, if we consider who they are and what they expect, how can we think about the future of work in a way that allows open talent to thrive and the businesses they work with to succeed?

You'll recall my descriptions of Ishan, Jaquan, and Sudeep. They embody what my friend Jamie Merisotis calls "human work in the age of smart machines." Jamie is the president and CEO of Lumina Foundation and a thought leader on how to evolve work in the age of AI and robotics. Jamie makes the case for a new perspective and it's an approach that aligns with what Kelly is seeing in the global talent market.

Jamie argues – and I agree – that instead of talking about “the future of work” we should be talking about “work of the future.” You might ask, isn’t that just semantics? I don’t think so. I think it represents a complete shift in perspective.

It is a shift from dooms-day thinking about how AI and robotics will destroy jobs to how workers can thrive alongside those technologies, and our organizations will benefit as a result. This new paradigm focuses on how we can use technology to enable workers to become more human, to participate in a shared prosperity that runs headlong to solve today’s global challenges.

It’s beyond the scope of this talk to get into the research, but there are now countless studies that show the dystopian future of robots destroying jobs – that seemed so common just a few years ago – is unlikely to become reality. Yes, certain jobs are disappearing and not coming back. But new jobs are appearing in their place.

What’s more important is how businesses AND workers can thrive in the age of smart machines.

Jamie’s core argument is that in the age of smart machines, repetitive tasks, no matter how complex, will be automated. At the same time, human work – work that requires creativity, ethical decision making, intuition, and critical thinking – will become indispensable.

Reflecting on Jamie’s work and others who see things through a similar lens, I would point to three characteristics of Ishan, Jaquan, and Sudeep’s stories:

1. Workers crave meaningful work. They want to know that what they do every day matters, and they expect employers to have a clearly defined purpose.
2. Workers crave stimulating work. They expect the organizations they work with to understand their unique talents and provide opportunities to nurture them.
3. Workers crave learning while working. They want to grow professionally and personally, and are looking for training and upskilling opportunities.

That’s exactly what Ishan, Jaquan, and Sudeep are experiencing, and what so many other workers who fall into the “open talent” category are looking for.

Ask Ishan, Jaquan, and Sudeep why they are passionate about their work and they'll tell you it's because they have an opportunity to make a difference. They help make our roads safer, improve lives, and care for our planet. Their work is meaningful and a service to their communities.

Their work is about more than earning a paycheck. It's about learning through experience. Their work requires them to learn while they earn. In order to innovate and find solutions, they need to educate themselves constantly. Sudeep, for example, is learning how to work with materials that didn't even exist when she first entered the workforce 20 years ago.

Ishan, Jaquan, and Sudeep are experts in their fields, but their jobs require more than their specialized expertise. They not only need to understand AI, robotics, and chemistry, they need a deep understanding of how humans commute, collaborate, and consume. They are part technical expert and part sociologist.

If you accept this perspective, what are some of the component parts that organizations should consider to actually "reach" open talent and create an environment that will foster a focus on human work of the future?

At Kelly, we're in the business of building better futures by connecting people to work that enriches their lives, and by connecting companies to the right talent that drives innovation and growth. Here are three foundational considerations:

First, training and upskilling are key in developing a human workforce in the age of smart machines.

As Jamie points out in his book, continuous learning that takes place on the job is critical to developing talent that drives innovation and business growth. He points out that the most successful companies clearly define the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need in their workforce, and they build on-the-job learning into their attraction and retention strategies. They look at things through a skills lens rather than a job lens.

This idea is supported by research from McKinsey that indicates that organizations that equip workers with the meta-skill of "learning how to learn" will significantly improve their chance of success. According to this research, the best companies are using the pandemic and post-pandemic planning to reimagine every single aspect of how their workers learn.

At Kelly we found that 8 in 10 contingent workers are considering job training and career advancement opportunities when evaluating a new position.

And while about half of employers offer skills training or development programs, according to a SHRM survey, our research suggests that open talent is often largely excluded from these training opportunities. Only 30% of organizations say they offer such opportunities to contingent talent.

Employers have the opportunity to address the current skills gap by tapping into their open talent pools and expanding their upskilling offers to all workers who contribute to their business.

Kelly recently worked with a logistics client to do just that. We developed a program that trained material handlers so that they could graduate into higher-paying roles that addressed a critical need for the client.

Second, to support the “learn while you earn” approach and to enable both workers and companies to benefit from it, we need more transparent, accessible approaches to credentials and certifications.

Ryan Craig, managing director of University Ventures, suggests that we live in a world of macro credentials – degrees that have high *social* signal-strength but lower *skill* signal-strength. We need a shift to micro credentials, which currently have lower social signal-strength but can deliver much higher skill signal-strength.

Take biopharma, for example. Success in that industry requires getting products to market quickly, safely, and cost effectively; and science professionals working on a project basis without proper certification can make things slower, less safe, and more expensive.

The problem is, ensuring compliance can be difficult when you’re quickly cobbling together the best possible teams. It’s even harder in the gig economy, which life sciences companies rely on, to say nothing of creating project teams during a pandemic. And staying up to date can be tough for science professionals, too. In fact, only 15% of qualified candidates typically have the latest requirements.

That’s why we launched the Kelly Certification Institute. It provides virtual training that leads to certifications in Good Manufacturing Practices, GxP, data integrity, and clean room knowledge.

We have a similar “earn while you learn” program in partnership with Kenzie Academy. Through the partnership, Kenzie students have access to flexible, part-time, at-home jobs with Kelly, while learning skills needed to land high-demand, high-paying tech jobs in fields like software engineering, UX, and digital marketing.

Third, a key characteristic of human work is that it thrives on diversity of thought, which, unsurprisingly, directly correlates to the diversity of your workforce.

There’s research that supports that diversity is not only the right thing to do, but good for your bottom line. 85% of CEOs who have invested in diversity and inclusion programs said they have seen enhanced business performance; and 78% said they have seen greater capacity for innovation within their organizations.

The sad truth, however, is that in many places around the world – and particularly troubling in Kelly’s home country, the United States – the employment system is unfairly rigged against certain underrepresented segments of the workforce.

Too many barriers exist across society that make it hard – or even impossible – for people to attain enriching work, reach their full potential, and, ultimately, thrive. Rarely challenged, these obstacles—such as biases toward extensive degree requirements, exclusion of candidates with a criminal history, and discrimination of neurodiverse talent — leave capable people behind, exacerbating the talent crisis.

I acknowledge that some of these issues are more acute in the U.S., and I admire many policies and approaches adopted by organizations and governments in Europe. That said, I think there’s still more work to be done by all of us.

Kelly has been connecting millions of people to work for 75 years. Employment for all has been part of our business from day one. But recently we decided we had to do more. That’s why we launched Equity@Work, an initiative that aims to knock down barriers and provide more inclusive access to work.

As part of that effort, we launched a program to increase the number of neurodiverse workers, including those on the autism spectrum; a partnership to rebuild a diverse teaching workforce; and an effort to bring the topic of workplace inclusion and criminal history barriers to the forefront of HR.

We're looking to partner with likeminded organizations on these efforts, and I encourage all of you to join us in this truly global effort by visiting [EquityAtWork.com](http://EquityAtWork.com).

"It's difficult to make predictions, especially about the future." One prediction I'd be willing to make is that work will always be an important part of life and that honoring the dignity of work is worthwhile.

At a more practical level, it's important to listen to the needs of today's workforce, to embrace the expectations of the world's Momentum Seekers, and to think about the work of the future through their eyes.

Their expectations can be met by organizations who are committed to enabling and supporting human work. They'll do this:

1. By viewing human work with all its implications as an opportunity rather than a challenge,
2. by embracing and reflecting diversity in our workforce,
3. by better defining the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed,
4. by making continuous learning part of work,
5. and by making work meaningful and providing opportunities for service.

We live in a time when technology allows us to collaborate and produce in ways that were unimaginable not that long ago. Advances in AI and robotics allow us to tap into the truly human aspects of work.

Ishan, Jaquan and Sudeep's stories show that when we get this right, work is more meaningful and enjoyable.

Their stories show that when we get this right, employers can focus talent strategies on those skills that truly propel their businesses forward.

And their stories show that when we get this right, work is not just be about making a living, it is about making a life.

Thank you.