



WALK IN THE CLOUD

S3E6 DONATION GENIE

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Title:

Walk in the Cloud

Host:

Ellen Bencard, Accenture, UKI Local Eminence Lead, Walk in the Cloud Host

Speaker:

Paul McMurray, Accenture, Managing Director, HR Consulting Lead, UKI

Paul McMurray Bio:

Paul lives in Tynemouth, a seaside resort east of Newcastle, where the River Tyne meets the sea. Paul has a son, Harry, who he has been personal assistant to since his birth 4 years ago, and Harry's pet whippet, Betty. During the day, Paul is a software engineer working in the ATC in Newcastle. His responsibilities are to support building and supporting software, but at night, and during side of desk, Paul is passionate about Tech4Good where he supports the technical pillar, helping our volunteers create software to support their great work.

Intro: Walk in the Cloud.

Ellen: Welcome back to another Walk in the Cloud. I'm Ellen Bencard, your host. The theme of this podcast is change and today we are going big. We're talking about changing the world for the better. Every big company ticks the community relations box as it's simply a part of doing business in the 21st century. But what happens when everyone embraces the opportunity for real change, rather than just doing the basics? Today I have an example that stretches employee skill and creativity, and most importantly makes a real difference to people in need. Walk along with me as we chat with Paul McMurray.

Hello, Paul.

Paul: Hello, how are you?

Ellen: I am great. Thanks for joining us today. Paul, we're walking along a beach in your native Northumberland, and it is spectacularly beautiful up here, but not all is perfect in this world. While volunteering, you spotted a problem that you thought you could fix. Can you tell me a little bit about that?



Paul: Yeah, so I suppose it started with a problem I didn't think I could fix. I used to volunteer at a place in Newcastle, its tagline was kind of 'food and friendship'. It was a place where you could go and have a three-course meal, it was really a community thing. People could get signposted if they had housing or money issues or other health-related things. Occasionally people would come in and say, "Can I have some shopping. I have nothing in the cupboards," which obviously is really sad. I would hear them, they would get a bag of shopping and I would say, "What did you give them? How did you know they needed that?" And often it was a case of, "Oh, I just got them some stuff from out the back". We used to take turns doing various things and when it was my go, I would say, "What do you fancy? What do you need? What do you eat? What are you short of?" It was from that point "How do you know the need that?" where I spotted that there was a thing I could possibly influence.

Ellen: Yeah, and that sounds like a problem that is repeated across the country in any sort of food bank or when you are donating stuff. We donate without knowing what people need. So, before we get to how you solved that, I want to step to one side. We should probably explain how things work at Accenture. We have this thing called 'side-of-desk' projects that are absolutely embedded into our company culture. Can you explain how those work?

Paul: It's fascinating that you mentioned culture as it absolutely is embedded into Accenture culture. Everyone is afforded at least three days a year to help with a charitable thing that they find. Everyone is enabled to do something good, to build something or help out.

Maybe something to do with a community project within the business, something in your area, school or anything in the community. We can do this 'side-of-desk' away from our day jobs. If you find a quiet afternoon, or you have a spare hour, we are enabled to learn, build or support anything in the community. It can help you build your skills, help a community, or get a group of people together with a common interest. It's so broad.

Ellen: So, you spotted this challenge? And you have a corporate culture that lets you work on it. What did you do? Tell me about the solution you built and how you used the skills and technology from your day job to fix something in the outside world.

Paul: I'm a software engineer at heart. I write code and all of my projects have been based around that. There is an internal competition called the Global Technology Innovation Competition and I enter relentlessly, with lots of weird and wonderful ideas. I came up with this concept - how cool would it be if when you shop and you put something in your basket, that technology could tell you that your local community also needs one of those? I came up with the concept of Donation Genie. The dream is that it is embedded into society. The thing that you know of today, is just a tiny little piece of the puzzle. It is a website where you enter your postcode, and it tells you what your local food bank needs using 'off-the-shelf' technology. They are skills that our clients consider in demand, technologies in high demand and are used across the business. It was built using some of our junior staff members and the skills that they build are immense. They are repeating these skills that enable them to be put on projects using cutting-edge technology.



Ellen: What does that do for you? And for those people you were working with, that you get to work on something like this?

Paul: For me and my path within the business, considering how vast it is? I never really look forward, and I might get told off for saying that, but I'm interested in who's behind me and who I'm bringing along for the ride. And who they are bringing along for the ride. If I teach you a skill, so what? It's when you teach someone that skill, that's where the magic is, and that's where I feel my responsibility is within the business. I need to bring people along for the ride because that's how I learned.

Ellen: That whole idea of paying it forward, but on a massive corporate scale.

Paul: Yeah, exactly. I can start writing a list of people who I know I've brought on and who've benefited from learning how to code. Don't just learn how to code, learn to look around you and find things that you could have an impact on.

Ellen: It's that great combination of people learning and growing and getting better at their job, but also feeling a sense of accomplishment and self-worth.

Paul: Absolutely! Sometimes it's a bit of a surprise when they realise how far they've come. For example, the team who worked on Donation Genie were doing it because they were making a difference. Then a few days ago, I said to one of the team, "Look at how far you've come, you've not spoken to me for three months because you've been doing it on your own. That's incredible!"

Ellen: Fantastic! Donation Genie right now exists as a website. Tell us where we can find it.

Paul: It's donation-genie.co.uk.

Ellen: If I go in today, what do I do? How does it work?

Paul: It works for the whole of the United Kingdom. You enter a postcode or a place, so I could enter North Shields. It will tell you your local food bank and the list of things that they need, and sometimes a list of things that they have an excess of.

Ellen: And then I can make my decisions based on that?

Paul: Yeah, and more importantly, you can decide before you go through the checkout. Because as you'll notice, if you go into a lot of supermarkets, the donation area is after. The things that they're suggesting that they want you to donate is after. This puts the power in your hands to know in advance what to donate, so you know your local areas benefiting from that thing you've got in your hand.

Ellen: I check it before I walk into Morrisons, Tesco, or other grocery stores and then shop accordingly?

Paul: Yeah, you just do your normal shop, but just have the power to know that what you're donating is needed. It doesn't matter where you shop because it's about the food bank, not the shop.



Ellen: Tell me more about your further vision because you said this is just the starting point. What's the potential here?

Paul: My vision is if you picture your favourite supermarket, let's just say it's paulssupermarket.co.uk. If you add a pint of milk to your basket. Well, picture when you put that milk in your basket, in the background it knows where you live, it's got your postcode and it does a background look-up and finds out your local food bank needs milk. It's going to tell you that your local food bank is also asking for this item. Would you like to pay for another one? The beauty of that is if you said yes, it stays in the fridge. It doesn't go on a cage. It could be pasta, it could be anything because every food bank needs different things. The true power of that donation is that it stays on the shelf and the food bank gets notified. Then they can hook into services that you and I use all the time. 'Click and collect' or home delivery, they can go "Oh, I've received these things from Supermarket A and these things from Supermarket B". They can then build a basket of the things that they need and have them brought to them or made available to pick up at a time suitable to that food bank. Think how much less waste there would be and how much less warehouse space would be needed by these fantastic organisations that stop people from going hungry.

Ellen: How technically difficult is that to deploy?

Paul: Easy when you know how, but figuring out how to do that is part of the excitement for me. I think the technologies that I've learnt are amazing. The things that I never thought I would have been able to do 10/15 years ago when I started on the technology journey, as someone not technical. I am so confident now that I could turn you into a software engineer in 10 weeks. What you think is difficult today, is not difficult in that space of time.

Ellen: You told me when we talked earlier that it's not about the technology. You need storytelling and imagination to come up with a solution, right?

Paul: Yeah, and one resource that was made available to me is a gentleman called Ken Deeks. I'm great in a pub. I can talk the hind legs off a donkey, but this chap really helped me understand how to tell a story. I've taken that framework, and I've used it for a few different things and a few different people. Have you ever been in a room, and someone will say, "We really need to understand the audience? I want to know who is in the room." I go, "Absolutely not! We need to throw a wet fish at everyone, and they need to listen to this one point." I generally don't tell someone what I'm actually talking to them about until I'm on about Slide 10 or 15, because I know that those first few slides have really got them in the room. When I did this story for Donation Genie, Slide number 1 was, "Have you eaten today? 1.26 billion people on this planet haven't!" And that just gets people in the room.

Ellen: That is such a powerful combination of storytelling and then marshalling the technology to do something about it. Paul, thank you. We have come to the end of our walk today. It's been an absolute joy talking to you.

Paul: Thank you so much. Thank you for this opportunity. It's been great.



Ellen: As we end, I want to call out to our listeners. Food bank usage is rising across the UK. While we all wish there was no need for such things, as long as there is, here is a chance to change the way those food banks work so they're going to be even better. If you've been inspired to let your employees get involved in broader projects to help them and the world at the same time, all the better. Thanks for joining us and I hope you'll come back for another walk in the cloud.

Outro: Walk in the Cloud.

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