Tanguy Dulac:

The Future of Work

in an Age of Disruption

The Worthy Interview

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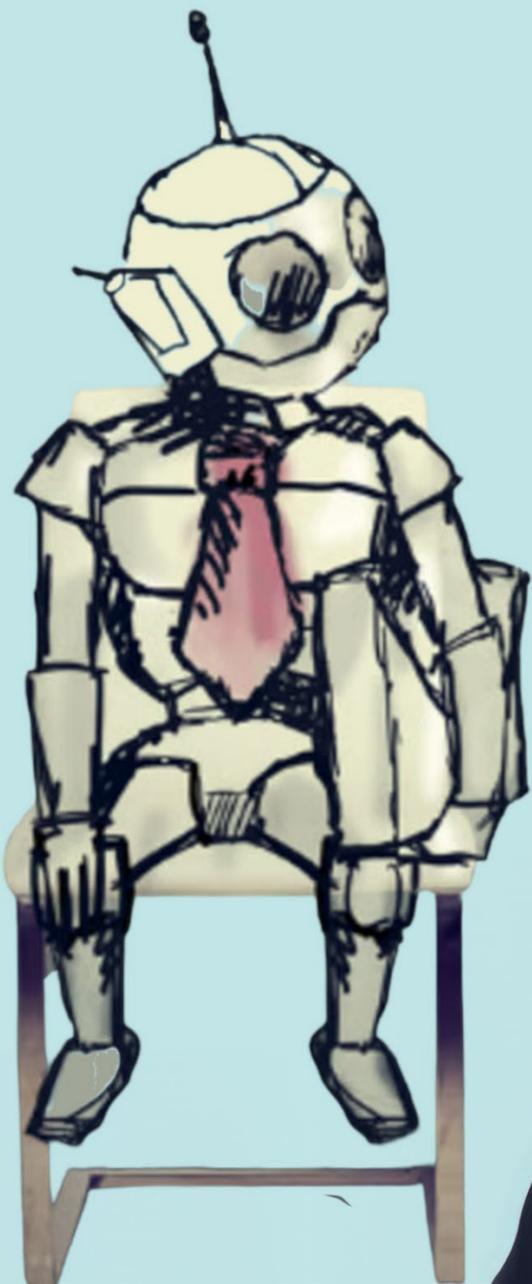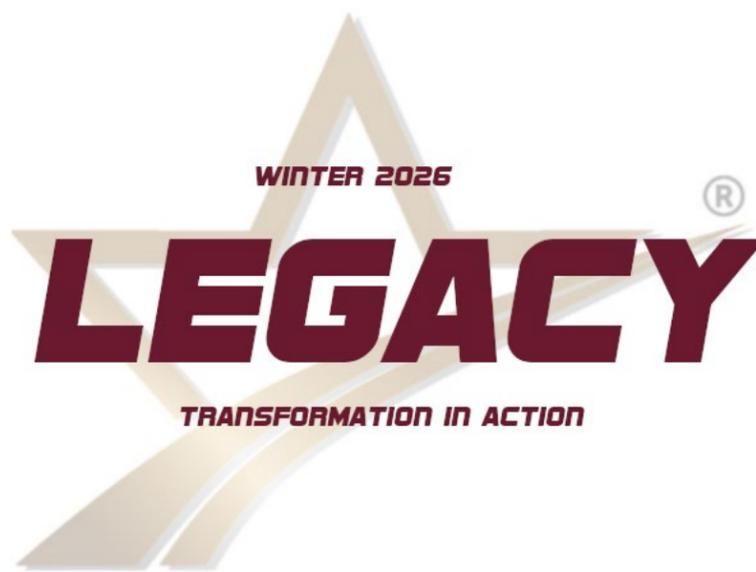
The Worthy Interview:
The Future of Work in An Age of Disruption

Tanguy Dulac
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On June 16th, The Worthy Educator (**TWE**) had the pleasure of meeting online with Tanguy Dulac (**TD**), the Editor-in-Chief of the We Are Human At Work newsletter, Chief Executive Officer of PeopleCentrix, and a strong voice asking important questions about what the future holds for all of us in the not-too-distant future as society and technology continue to morph in new ways, both in his realm of human resources and our field of education. This transcript of the original discussion reveals that, while he offers the caveat that he does not to have an education background, Tanguy offers thoughtful insights into the future of our profession!

Listen to the full interview here.

TWE: Welcome Tanguy, it's good to have you with us

TD: Thank you. I'm looking forward to the to the conversation.

TWE: The information that you're synthesizing is coming out of Deloitte's 2025 global human capital trends report.

TD: Yes, I've been working for them almost 15 years.

TWE: Amazing, and you made the statement recently that the average worker faces 10 major changes a year up from just two 10 years ago. What's facilitating that?

TD: We all feel the pressure and the fast pace in everything happening.

TWE: But is it technologically driven? What is it that's making everything change so quickly?

TD: Well according to me, it's not only technological, It's the world we live in really being disrupted. I don't know if you know the PESTEL framework which is political, environmental, sociological, technological and legal, and we have all of these components in the world today that are evolving quite fast. When I started to work in consulting you had like one big major transformation within Human Resources every 3 to 5 years. Now it is an ongoing change. My biggest concern is change fatigue and the readiness by recipients of change.

TWE: Yes, absolutely, We're seeing a lot of burnout in our profession. There's no time left to reflect and be deliberate and thoughtful about the changes that are happening.

None of this seems coincidental; these things are happening for a reason. We've come to a time in human history where disruption is imminent. Is that a fair way to understand this?

TD: Yes, it's quite concerning, especially if you look at the statistics on health and wellness and the well-being of newer generations entering the workforce. They are evolving in a very insecure environment. We've been hearing a lot from the younger generations talking about anxiety and depression due to environmental changes. It's a lot that we put on them and it's clear that when you see that the highest proportion of the workforce that is being touched by health and wellbeing issues it is the new generation entering the workforce that is most effected. It's quite concerning.

On the other hand, when I look at the at the research on the skills for the future, it's about agility and resilience. For me, the key question is ultimately how we accompany people in building resilience and agility. We cannot just throw them into this new reality and ask them just be resilient and agile. I think employer has a responsibility in helping the workforce to succeed where the new rules are not necessarily that clear.

TWE: It's so true. When I realize that these younger generations are being defined by disruption and the resulting anxiety. In education there's a lot of focus now on wellness because we need to take care of people. We cannot assume they come in whole and ready to fit into a system.

You talk a lot about value as you continue to build out this case for the future of work; that nearly half of workers time is spent on tasks that don't create value. We refer to this as busy work, where we need to file things and follow through on things and be accountable for certain routines, but they're not adding value in ways that create this kind of resilience. How do how do we get past this being seen as cogs and not actually doing meaningful work?

TD: It's a good question One thing would be to review and remove all non-value-added tasks and activities. That's where I believe AI can really help. But when it comes to having a sense of value, do you have the feeling that you have a meaning job and do you feel that you are contributing to a broader purpose?

Secondly, it's a problem if I feel that my time is not valued or I don't have focus time. You mentioned the fact that the average employee experiences up to ten organizational changes a year, which means an employee may experience up to one-hundred distractions a day. You absolutely need to put in your calendar space and time for focus work. If I'm doing one task at a time and I finish my day totally drained, that's not a fulfilling day. But if I'm blocking two hours of time for things that really matter to me, I will want to do well and I'll have a greater sense of fulfillment. Having that greater sense of doing valued work with meaning and fulfillment is connected to well-being. It isn't necessarily the rigor of the job It's that we feel like we're contributing in meaningful ways and making a difference.

TWE: It's fascinating. And when you factor in the arrival of artificial intelligence (AI), you make this wonderful statement where you ask, "Would you stay in a job where your value is shrinking while your machine coworker is thriving?" That is the crux of what so many of us are feeling. We understand artificial intelligence can create efficiency and it is here to stay, but it feels like it's pushing up against our sense of our work being meaningful and creating value, and undermining our well-being as humans.

"DO YOU WANT TO BE THE ONE DISRUPTING OR BEING DISRUPTED?"

TD: For me, ultimately, do you want to be the one disrupting or being disrupted? AI is a given and it will likely impact your job. The extent to which it impacts your job really depends on the nature of the of the tasks. But I believe you either wait and see how technology will impact you and you will be very concerned and anxious, or you're actually thinking about the ways AI can potentially be embedded in your work so that you help determine where and how it happens. Let's be curious. Ultimately the question of AI is a question of mindset. Are you considering AI as an opportunity or as a threat? I do understand the point of view that there's a very high potential of becoming obsolete, but I'm a big fan of the concept of learning agility through curiosity. We need to understand that the world is evolving and we need to grasp what's happening. You don't need to be an expert, but you do need to play with the new technologies to really understand what they do what they don't do.

At the same time, reviewing new AI apps coming out on a daily basis is totally overwhelming So the challenge is to really try to find the right balance between keeping on trends and keeping perspective. I was facilitating a conference last week with Human Resources (HR) leaders about the forthcoming human capital trends in the field and we asked, "Are you following trends on a daily or weekly or monthly basis"? A couple of people said, "I'm actually following the trends on a daily basis on LinkedIn." I responded that I'm following trends on a yearly basis, like global human capital trends, and even then I need to cut through the noise because I believe those trends are overhyped. As an individual I need to apply critical thinking to ask, "Okay that's what the analysts are seeing externally, but I need to understand the relevancy to my actual world." Are they relevant trends? I want to tackle those trends that makes perfect sense to me.

TWE: The organizations that exist now that were successful in the twentieth century that built and grew and are now fully mature sustainable organizations that need to start looking at how to change work in order to create value and allow employees to contribute. For those organizations, creating value is it almost antithetical as it goes against how they became successful in the industrial age. Before we say to them they need to start removing tasks that no longer add value, do we first need to define what adding value looks like in the 21st century?

TD: I think you just need to be open to redefine your overall products and services and how you are actually delivering them. We see that the most successful companies are the ones that are actually able to reinvent themselves. The pace of replacement of the Fortune 500 companies over the past ten or fifteen years is going faster. For me one of the keys is their ability to redefine success. We've been very successful but it's time for us to evolve. For me, that's why it's very important to challenge the statue quo and be open to taking risks and making mistakes. I'm a big fan of design thinking, which is about creating prototypes which may not be perfect, but it is with the understanding that sometimes you will fail, but you will learn and you will improve. In most companies this mindset is not there yet. We see a lot of studies around psychological safety saying workers don't feel they have a voice. Today we need cultures where it's safe to speak up and to challenge and actually disrupt the way organizations think and behave. so it clearly requires a change in the way we lead organizations.

TWE: It's true, and workers in their 20s or 30s are shopping around for employers that give them that safe space to take risks and create value and grow. They're not going to stick around if you're doing things in a way that make you out of date and unable to adapt and be agile. When you think about this in an HR sense, how do young workers build their personal brand and how long do we expect them to stay at any one company - even a forward-looking company that is adapting and trying to evolve? Is it just not realistic that young people are going to invest in a company brand when they're cultivating their own personal brand?

TD: Well I would say it's still possible for the new generation of workers to enter and stay with an organization, but the challenge is for the organization to adapt to employees' needs and preferences and to acknowledge that the people they hired two years ago may now have different needs and preferences.

When I started to work or when you started to work, the company culture was very top-down and we needed to adapt because it's a great brand and I'm making an investment in it. It's my career and I play the game of the corporate culture. Now young workers are clearer on what they value, so if they start seeing incongruency between their values and the daily life of the company, that's when they start reassessing the organizational integrity, innovation and teamwork. They ask, "Is this really why and how I want to work?"

If I see that my organization is not necessarily playing by the rules I was promised during the recruitment process, I'm going to realize there's a conflict between my values and the values of the organization and I'll start looking for the next opportunity. Today this is more present, and young workers are more likely to make a bold move and change employers. In our past lives, you and I would just remain silent and learn to accept company values and say, "That's the way it is." We thought of ourselves as good soldiers, but probably in the wrong sense because it was more of a moral loyalty towards the employer.

TWE: Yes, exactly. What is the process for orgs to start to personalize the work experience so that they're more aware of employees different needs and interests so it's different from the top down model you talked about?

TD: Most companies are not there yet. I have the feeling they're still struggling to not even individualize but to prioritize their services. As an employer I have a very demanding workforce that expects having meaningful work, having compensation and benefits, having job security, and valuing diversity, equity and inclusion.

Right now a lot of companies are a struggling to redefine their employee value proposition: what do we offer and what do we stand for? It's clear that an organization cannot be successful and be a pioneer in all of these areas, but given they're having challenges attracting, engaging and retaining workers you can feel that they're trying to think, "Okay how do we redefine our employee value proposition?" and then they need to *deliver* what it promises. At some point they may want to individualize the work experience or the work expectations, but that requires a much higher level of maturity. I would rather they take a step back and instead of trying to immediately individualize, first redefine who they are as an employer. What do they offer? What do they stand for? And try to deliver a matching work experience.

TWE: That's fascinating. So does the HR office need to reorganize and look differently in order to help its organization reach that maturity and understand what their value proposition is?

TD: My immediate response is that it's not HR, it's about equipping the line managers and the people managers to have those types of conversations, moving beyond discussion around past performance and ratings and having the real conversation with their employees looking at the next twenty-four to thirty-six months. What are you valuing? Are you looking for a promotion? Are you looking to decelerate and take a little bit more time? Are you valuing work-life balance?

When I read the research and talk to clients, it's always the same: we need to upskill our people managers to actually manage our people. But that's becoming more and more difficult because we are facing a multicultural and multigenerational workforce. Employers need to be more people-oriented and to feel comfortable having this conversation with their people, not just talking about the past and the present but also talking about their future. If you are not having this kind of conversation, workers will start forming their own expectations about what the future should be. And if the employer cannot meet those expectations, workers will say, "Okay, you're not even willing to have a conversation with me. When I'm voicing my opinion I have the feeling that it doesn't change anything, so it's time for me to find my next experience with a new organization."

So it's a question of really fostering a dialogue, but we're in a very strange time because a lot of companies are economically struggling and they are focused on present employee performance rather than the long-term sustainable future of the individual and the company. So we are not in a in a situation that is really optimal to have the kinds of conversation we're describing.

TWE: Understood. And this is why this is such powerful work you're doing. You're right there on the edge of it as it's playing out, It's by no means in focus. It's right on the edge of starting to happen, and it must be exciting work for you to see all this and be learning as you're watching it play out.

TD: Yes, but at the same time I'm talking to companies about long-term investment in human capital so that they are securing the workforce for the next decade, even though organizations are focused on cost efficiency and profit margin, so it's there is a disconnect between running the machine as it currently works and making a long-term investment in the future. And when you're experiencing a cost containment, where do they cut? They cut diversity, equity, inclusion, health and well-being, and learning and development – the things that are the actual long-term investment in the workforce. And they won't see the negative consequences over the next 12 months, but within the next five years they will definitely feel them. These long-term consequences are much more abstract, and so most leaders don't care about making these cuts because they don't have a direct impact on their immediate efforts.

TWE: So very true And in speaking to educators you're speaking to our heart. This is what we believe. This is what we see. And yet we understand that business is driven by the bottom line; that if they can get immediate results for the bottom line that's what they're going to look at. You make a fascinating point that everyone wants great leaders but we're eliminating the roles that create them. Can you talk a little about that?

TD: I think the middle manager role is one of the most difficult because, on the one hand you need to manage the workforce and its specific needs and expectations, while at the same time you need to manage the leadership, which is extremely difficult because they're really squeezed between the two. During COVID, studies demonstrated that the middle manager was the layer in the workforce that experienced the highest levels of burnout. I'm not surprised because I was in that specific situation where I had my top management my employees and there were times I had to manage very opposite messaging to each group, and it can be quite a difficult job. Ultimately, in the end it's your performance that's being measured rather than the way you manage people. So it's a huge workload for which you are not necessarily recognized nor rewarded.

More and more studies are also showing that people don't want to become managers. They say. "It's not for me. I've seen others suffering in that role." I've also read studies that up to fifty percent of newly promoted people managers are actually failing within their role, so it's becoming less and less attractive. It is, however, a role that is extremely critical in organizations.

TWE: It really is. You go on to talk about how performance management systems are broken, so why fix them? What if we just forget about them? Okay, so what if we do that; what replaces them and how does that free us up for what you're describing managers should be doing?

TD: Well there is a very important choice around performance management. Are you using performance management to assess and recognize and reward the past, or are you using performance management to develop the future? If the leadership clearly sets a developmental focus, then you can remove the traditional ranking protocols. I'm not saying disregard high and low performers, but if it's ultimately about developing the workforce why use a ranking based system that manages to the extremes (the top 10% and my bottom 2% of performers)? You're imposing a very frustrating system just to manage the top and bottom of a normal bell curve just to manage the outliers.

That having been said, if your performance management framework is really there to reward performance, then yes you absolutely need to maintain the system and somehow discern the high, medium and low performers because that's the way your system is structured. But, again, we know that the new generations of workers are entering the workforce wanting developmental feedback about what they can do better in the future, and if you tell them to spend a couple of hours discussing their ranking when their bonus is less than 1% of their overall pay, they won't see the value of spending time on the conversation since there's very little return for the effort.

TWE: Education is going through the same kind of disruption We've been guilty of the same kind of bell curve mentality and letting people subsist in the middle and not really giving everyone that kind of customized education based on their needs, interests and abilities. What would you say to us are the opportunities? We're very excited about the chance to improve our profession after spending our careers being told, "This is the way it's done. This is the way it's always been done." There may be real opportunities here to improve how we do things. In light of this conversation where the workforce is looking at disruption and opportunities to do things differently, what would you say to teachers about how we should be thinking of changing education to prepare young people to go into the workforce to be successful and fulfilled with well-being?

TD: I'm not sure I'm well-positioned to answer this, but an article from McKinsey about the skills of the citizen of the future and the top competencies are empathy, analytical thinking, critical thinking and cultural awareness. So these are the skills that will definitely not become obsolete even if AI becomes ten times more powerful. So if these are the skills a young child or a teenager need to acquire to become successful in this very complex world that's taking shape, these are the skills that should be education's focus. Perhaps work backwards and see how the existing curriculum aligns with these competencies and work from there. I have two kids and I love to see what they're learning in terms of knowledge but I'm not concerned about them not knowing. They can super easily acquire knowledge. I'm more concerned about them acquiring these competencies and being put in situations where they practice and learn how to use them. Learning to write ten paragraphs about the Roman Empire, for example, is very good to train the memory, but how does it prepare the next generation of citizens? And what is the role education plays?

More and more organizations are realizing that traditional high school and university programs are not necessarily providing the next generation the knowledge and competencies they need, and organizations are going to create their own programs to develop their own talent, if education isn't regulating itself. Other stakeholders will take action so that we can compensate the gaps. That's the disruption right there, that there are other interests that are going to step in if we if we're not prepared to do it ourselves.

TWE: Yes, we are seeing this happening here in the states. In all of this, should we be thinking beyond the traditional school with brick and mortar building and bringing everybody into one facility? Should we be thinking more about apprenticeships and mentorships out in the community where students are learning instead of sitting with one teacher for a year at a time, allowing them to be more mobile and flexible, *and* does that help us customize learning in a different non-industrial way?

TD: It's not easy because when I moved to Switzerland I came from a very traditional background and mindset, and I very quickly realized that university is not necessarily the top of the game. Since Switzerland is a country where they equally value the banker and the plumber, there isn't a sense of hierarchy in the levels of sophistication of studies.

There's also the fact that the Swiss have industries with very specialized craftsmanship, like watchmaking, and so the country is already fairly advanced in terms of mentorship and apprenticeship. People don't necessarily need to go to the best universities to get the best salary and the most rewarding and fulfilling careers. Switzerland is country where they realize that you can be fulfilled in a lot of different jobs and not all jobs require that kind of conceptual background. So, yes I think we need to redefine the skills and competencies, curricula and delivery methods, whether it's a webinar, a book, an apprenticeship or a combination of all of these kinds of things. Ultimately, it's about challenging the status quo to address the cracks in the current system so we can adapt.

I'm profoundly convinced that there are two areas where we need to invest: education and health That's the two areas where we cannot make any compromise. I know unfortunately right now this is being challenged, but I'm convinced that putting the emphasis on these two areas is critical for our individual and collective success.

Tanguy Dulac founded *PeopleCentrix* so leaders can deliver transformative work experiences that inspire individuals to be their best and do their best; helping them gain a deep understanding of people's expectations, openly articulate their value proposition, and deliver on those expectations and promises through fulfilling work experiences. Prior to this, he worked for fifteen years in management at Deloitte and PricewaterhouseCoopers, advising clients on effectively addressing people strategies, challenges, and priorities. You can follow his most recent work in the *We Are Human at Work Newsletter*, sharing his work at the La Silla Observatory in the Chile, as well as bringing together thirty H.R. leaders from Geneva's most influential international organizations to ask, "What happens when human potential is unleashed?"!