

**David Gardner:** And welcome back to *Rule Breaker Investing*. I'm delighted to be joined this week by two of my favorite guests. Kara and Lee, I believe that you've been invited back to the show for a third time. No one has been invited, until now, back to this show...

**Lee Burbage:** Oh, yes?

**Kara Chambers:** I feel so honored. Thank you.

**Gardner:** ...a third time.

**Burbage:** My jacket fits perfectly. Thank you for that.

**Gardner:** I think it's nice, Kara, that you said, "honored." I'm not sure it's even an honorable thing, but I appreciate that you would think that it is. I like to think in my better days that it is and thank you both for being with me this week.

We're here to talk about culture and what it's like to work in the place that you work. And at The Motley Fool, when we started 24 years ago, what we had right (and the good news is) we were trying from the get-go to create a place that people would want to come to work each day.

And why was that? Well, it's because there were two brothers and a friend of theirs. They started the company. And when it came time to hire really their first non-founder employee, we didn't have a budget to [do a] search. There was no LinkedIn. Actually, even the World Wide Web wasn't around quite yet.

So who did we hire? We hired our fun friend from college. Or high school. We hired people we knew. And if you're going to hire people that you know at the start of your business, you're probably going to want to make it kind of a fun place to work. You're [probably not] going to count hours on them, or start counting vacation days. Some of the things that were very countercultural back then still are, as you both know, better than I do. Still countercultural today. It just came to us naturally because of the circumstance by which we started. So that's what we had right.

What we didn't have right (not that it was wrong), but we didn't yet have the sense that Culture was a thing. That that would be how these days people think about their workplace. There wouldn't be workshops, or keynote speeches about culture. There wouldn't be culture Fools. There weren't back then, but there are now, and I'm joined by them today, Kara Chambers and Lee Burbage. Respectively, Kara, how long have you been at the Fool?

**Chambers:** Almost 12 years.

**Gardner:** Awesome. Lee?

**Burbage:** Almost 19 years.

**Gardner:** So that's 31, which is more than I've been at the Fool, and both of you are leaders and have helped steer The Motley Fool's culture to become one of the more acclaimed workplaces in America.

A little bit of bragging -- I'm not reading from any brag sheet, here -- but a couple of times in the last five years Glassdoor.com, the site that has employees rate their workplaces, has had The Motley Fool as the No. 1 place to work for small-to-medium-size companies in America, so there's a lot of competition. I'm imagining there's at least 10,000 other players out there.

And we've been number one a couple of times. We've always done quite well with that. And it is to your credit -- to your respective credit -- and I know you're the first to give it back out to all of our employees to create together a place that we want to do purposeful, meaningful, and fun work every single day at The Motley Fool. So Kara and Lee, we've talked before. We talk about once a year, but this time we have a theme that we're going to present here in early August on *Rule Breaker Investing*. A little bit of maybe a summertime theme. Kara, what are we going to go for this time?

**Chambers:** We're going to talk about well-being. Overall well-being. We have a very highly engaged wellness program at the Fool, but that's part of a larger team. We call ourselves *the thriving Fools*. We focus on the overall well-being of the individual and just thinking about growth and happiness at work. [There's] many facets to well-being at work, so we're going to talk a little bit today about the different things we do.

**Gardner:** Awesome. I was trying to establish a little bit of that humbly, because I'm trying to strike the right balance here. We put these ideas forward with humility, but I also want to say that we do put it forward with some authority, as well. The Motley Fool, in the Washington, D.C. area, recently got an acclaim, Lee.

**Burbage:** Yes, we're pretty regularly recognized in D.C. as the best place to work and are on the Best Place to Work lists. *Washingtonian* does a great list every two years. I've been here 19 years. I believe we've been on that list every time they've done it.

**Gardner:** Did we receive an accolade as number one for a certain thing in the last six weeks?

**Burbage:** Yes we did, David. The Healthiest Place to Work. The most fun. What were the exact words, Kara?

**Chambers:** I think we're the Most Athletic.

**Burbage:** The Most Athletic Place to Work in the D.C. area.

**Gardner:** And I think it was funny, Lee, that you didn't even exactly remember that.

**Burbage:** We win a lot of awards.

**Gardner:** There are those of us who aren't that athletic, like, for example, me. I take great pride. Like I put up the strong-arm emoji on Twitter and say, "We are the most athletic place to work in Washington, D.C. In the nation's capital.

**Burbage:** That's correct.

**Gardner:** So whether or not Lee actually knew that, Kara, I'm glad that you did, and you and I similarly, unathletically, take great pride in that. So that's one form of well-being, but I know we're going to talk about others. Without further ado, let's get started. You both have brought some points, as you have in previous appearances. I think you have eight today, so we're going to bounce it back and forth. Who's up first?

**Chambers:** I am. We're going to start with what we call our Bookie Monster program. We went through a very rigorous naming process for that program and just named it Bookie Monster. It's any business book you can request. We have a huge library here at the Fool just sitting there. That just opens up people to explore different topics.

Someone just asked me if they could learn Japanese. Yes. Any kind of nonfiction business type book. I was going to do a plug, because it's thematically what we're talking about today. A book I recently read is called *How to Have a Good Day* by Caroline Webb.

We'll talk about this more, but she focuses a lot on [your mind] -- that when your mind is in *discover* mode -- when you're feeling good and you're happy, you're going to outperform. And the opposite. When you're stressed, when you're tired, when you're physically or emotionally drained, that's called *defensive mode* and you're less able to learn. Less able to solve complex problems. That book really helped, at least me and my team, on this type of work.

**Gardner:** So Kara, the theme again is overall well-being; so while we did lead with the strong-arm emoji and the word *athletic*, you went right to books and reading and the life of the mind. The overall well-being of the Fool. How does the program work? Do people get books for free, here?

**Chambers:** They do. They just send an email to Bookie Monster and Bookie Monster will reply back and say, "I have your book at the front desk." It's magic.

**Gardner:** Does that mean if I'm kind of a country wit -- I don't work at the Fool but I'm listening to this podcast -- I can just drop an email to [BookieMonster@Fool.com](mailto:BookieMonster@Fool.com)?

**Chambers:** Oh, no, no! I'm going to check with our CFO first.

**Burbage:** [crosstalk 00:07:07]

**Gardner:** Ah! I thought I found a loophole.

**Chambers:** You could try!

**Gardner:** So is this a program that is well used?

**Chambers:** It's very popular. And it's fun to walk past the front desk. You see the books waiting to be picked up by somebody. You can chat with them in the hallway and say, "Hey, I just saw you pick that up. How is that one?" It brings a culture of reading and learning to this office.

**Gardner:** Out of curiosity, because I'm going to be playing the role of, occasionally this week, the small business entrepreneur. Maybe I have five to 10 employees. Maybe I'm a realtor and I have my team. We're not The Motley Fool with 300 employees and the kinds of resources that you might be talking about. What is the rough expense I should expect if I were to open up my own Bookie Monster? Per employee, let's say.

**Chambers:** That's a good question. I want to say an Amazon book is maybe \$15 and maybe the average person can read a book a month...

**Gardner:** That's way beyond the average American. Did you know that the average American has not read a book this year?

**Chambers:** Oh, no!

**Gardner:** And I'm not here to dump on my fellow Americans, because there are a lot of great ones, but studies that I've seen suggest that [most adults] don't actually read a full book in a year.

**Chambers:** That's possible.

**Gardner:** So it's possible that I, with my small business, might have a less active Bookie Monster, so it's even cheaper than what you're suggesting; but if I'm doing the math right, 12 x 15ish is \$180 a year...

**Chambers:** Yes.

**Gardner:** ...per employee.

**Chambers:** One option is (we don't do this) but in other companies I have not seen a Bookie Monster program, but you could put in a public spreadsheet so you could share them across a library. If someone's picked up *Deep Work*, which is another book we like that we've read, maybe the next person passes it along. So you can have a library set up internally, as well.

**Burbage:** Before I order a book, I go to our internal library and look on the shelf, first, to see if it's there. And I'm going to say that fairly frequently I can find a book, already. So

we encourage people. When you order a book, after you read it to put it in the library and then others can use it and that helps defer costs.

**Gardner:** Awesome. And the last question before we move to Point No. 2. Kara, it's for business books, right?

**Chambers:** Correct. It is broadly.

**Gardner:** What is not a business book? How about that?

**Chambers:** *A Song of Ice and Fire.*

**Gardner:** George R. R. Martin has not yet written, although he probably should. Maybe has a business book.

**Chambers:** Business lessons in there that are terrifying.

**Gardner:** OK, good. Lee? Point No. 2.

**Burbage:** It's along the lines of reading in terms of opening up your mind. I think it's easy to get trapped in your day-to-day work and inside the walls of your company and so we're encouraging people to think outside. One way to do that is to bring outside speakers in. We encourage Fools at any level... Let's say you've read a book and you're interested in the author. We will reach out to that author and say, "Hey, would you stop by and visit us?"

What we find is that people will often say yes. They're happy to come in and share their ideas and thoughts, and [are] proud to talk. We had a recent example. I was out in our local community and I heard a woman from a local school speaking about raising culturally conscious kids. I actually hadn't thought about that concept before.

I thoroughly enjoyed hearing her speak, and afterwards said, "Hey, would you mind stopping by my office and speaking to anyone in the office who has kids that I think would also enjoy your talk?" And she said, "Absolutely." So we had Kiki come in. She spoke to our Fool parents. It was a chance to take a break from your normal day, think about something that normally you don't have mind space for, and just open up and learn.

So we have a number of different speakers in. I'm going to say we have a speaker in at least every couple or few weeks. Again, it could be an author. It could be a business leader. It could be someone that you see in the community.

**Gardner:** I really appreciate that example, and particularly because you made it sound so low-key and, indeed, it was. Now one thing -- occasionally my entrepreneurial co-founder pride will pop up during this particular weekly podcast. We've had Michael Lewis, the author of *Moneyball*, *The Big Short*, etc. come and speak. We've had Elon Musk, which I think is somebody many people may have heard of. And some others, so we've had some real bright lights at the Fool over the years, and we remember and treasure those times.

And if you are a bright light and you're listening right now, we encourage you to drop a note to:

**Burbage:** LeeB@Fool.com.

**Gardner:** LeeB@Fool.com. We want to hear from you, and when you're coming through the Washington, D.C. area, if you'd like to come by and speak to our employees, we would treasure that. However, back to my small business. My team of 10 people. Maybe I can't get Elon Musk to come this fall, but it turns out I can get somebody that I met through school as a parent. Or somebody through a professional association that can come in and have your people [listen to and learn from].

And if you do have a larger company, it doesn't have to be everybody. Maybe somebody like Elon Musk can fill the house [00:12:11 pick it up there] but I like the recent evolution, Lee, which is it feels like we have more speakers with smaller groups [and] with more diverse possibilities as a consequence.

**Burbage:** Yes, and I think that actually feeds the program. You're going from someone like Elon Musk, who's incredible; but then also someone from your local community talking about a completely different topic. Just allowing your mind to stretch in those different ways is fun and exciting and, to your point exactly, Kiki just lives up the street, so it was great to have her in. I know I appreciated it and so did other Fool parents.

I think also what you're identifying is there are different groups and types of people in any company, and so the idea that you're going to bring in one speaker every time that's going to appeal to every person at your company is probably unrealistic. I think what we find is anybody that you can bring in that 10 or more people are interested in, then you've hit a pocket of people (in my case Fool parents), people with small children who are thinking about how do I [00:13:08].

Kara probably didn't come to that talk [because] she probably wasn't that interested. But she probably came to the talk on *keepers*. We had a speaker come in about... Was it a Netflix series?

**Chambers:** A documentary...

**Burbage:** ...that was super popular.

**Gardner:** Ah, yes.

**Burbage:** I didn't go to that one because that's not particularly interesting to me. I don't consider either one of those a failure.

**Gardner:** And before we move to Point No. 3, have other [maybe local] businesses started to play the same game with us? Inviting either of you to come speak? Do you go out and speak, sometimes, to others?

**Burbage:** Yes, I've been asked several times to come in and talk either to associations, groups, that sort of thing, or to local companies. I was speaking to MITRE, a consulting company here in D.C., on a panel that they had. It's a funny thing. When they asked me, I was like, "Absolutely," because it makes you feel good. You're proud to go out and talk about yourself and the cool things we're doing. So people say yes.

**Gardner:** Kara, I know that Lee really likes to speak. I don't know if either one of us likes to speak as much as Lee does. Do you like to speak?

**Chambers:** It's not my favorite, but I keep trying.

**Burbage:** She's super good at it.

**Chambers:** No. I would say also just paying visits. A couple of years ago one of my colleagues and I went to San Francisco to a conference and then we had a day free, so we asked our colleagues for some networking. Zooming around. Visited a couple of companies and met with our counterparts there.

**Gardner:** Great idea.

**Chambers:** So it doesn't have to be a presentation. It can just be, "Hey, can I talk to you about what you do, here, and meet your counterpart?" It's just, again, broadening the network. It doesn't necessarily have to be a talk. That's one way we connect, as well.

**Gardner:** Connecting. So Point No. 1 is reading. Point No. 2 is connecting. Kara, what's Point No. 3?

**Chambers:** I have this as *listening*. This is a project Lee and I work a lot on. We love our peer-coaching program. I put this in as listening because I read somewhere that one of the best gifts you can give somebody that's free is to just give them your undivided attention. What we do is have a peer-coaching program. You can pick and choose. There are different levels of leadership. Different departments.

It's not as heavy-handed as a mentorship. It's kind of lightweight. It's maybe one or two meetings a year. They're the person who's delivering your 360 feedback. They're checking with you at least twice a year to talk about just how you are doing. Are you happy? Are you feeling good? What can we do to support you better?

It just gives you another outlet with a slightly different agenda than your manager might have, or HR might have. I like doing a lot of coaching. I actually enjoy it. So I think for us, one aspect of well-being is just having someone to listen to you, and that's free. We've worked on it just to build out the logistics, but we find that source valuable internally.

**Gardner:** Kara, you led with the phrase *peer coach*, and then you mentioned *feedback*. Is that the way feedback happens at this company?

**Chambers:** Yes. In a typical company when you would get your 360 feedback, it would get emailed to your manager, and they would have to deliver it to you.

**Gardner:** So that's not The Motley Fool. This is Acme, Inc.

**Chambers:** Yes.

**Gardner:** Acme, Inc. has your manager giving you the feedback.

**Chambers:** Yes. That's typical and as a manager you want to know what's going on with your employee; but we turned it around and it took away the pressure. There's zero consequences to someone giving you constructive feedback, because no one else is going to see it but you and your coach and you just talk about it.

And it's mine, so if it comes to me as feedback, I figure out what to do with it with the help of my coach. It doesn't get passed along. It's not part of my record. It doesn't affect my compensation. That frees up my colleagues, who are my friends, who don't want to negatively impact my career, to give constructive feedback with zero consequence. What we found is that creates a much more open environment for that conversation.

**Gardner:** I hope this is fair. I'm going to eavesdrop, briefly, with your help, on The Motley Fool's feedback system. We're conducting that this month at the Fool. I'm going to ask you a couple of things about it really quickly. First of all, does everybody get feedback?

**Chambers:** You can opt in. Everything we do here is optional, so you can choose.

**Gardner:** So you decide if you want feedback. And I have to admit. I'm a little bit of a slacker because it's August and I'm doing enough, so I didn't request it this time.

**Chambers:** That's okay.

**Gardner:** And that's okay, too. So feedback is not compulsory. It is earned by being asked for.

**Chambers:** Yes.

**Gardner:** That's odd. I think that's cool, though.

**Chambers:** Again, if you are driving your own career, and you want to develop, you're the best person to know where you want to develop and how to figure that out. We also leave it open all year, so you can choose any time. It's kind of confusing, but there's a deadline because one of my colleagues calls it *social permission* to ask everybody at the company, or ask a bunch of people to fill something out about you because it's work. It's still work. But we try to make it easy. We keep the questions really simple.

**Gardner:** And that's where I want to keep eavesdropping, because when I used the form and typed in some feedback for one of my peers, there were just three questions.

**Chambers:** Yes.

**Gardner:** Do you remember what they are right off the top, because again, I'm listening to this podcast this week maybe because I am in business or an organization. I'm curious what you ask.

**Burbage:** We do keep it simple and we also keep it positive. So what we found is we want a situation that you're going to look forward to. Related to the manager, people don't normally look forward to a meeting with their boss where they're going to hear a bunch of negative things.

**Gardner:** *It's time for your annual review, Lee! Have a seat, please.*

**Burbage:** That sounds horrible, and there's been plenty of study in this area. So instead you're having this meeting with this third-party sounding board coach. Our questions change a little bit over time, but they tend to be around where are you awesome, and where can you be even more awesome. We're looking for places to double down where you're doing a really good job. And then we've added in a feature where you can ask for feedback in a specific area, so maybe you just completed a project, or there's a particular zone (listening or something that you think you're bad at).

**Gardner:** Lee wants to know what you thought of his lemon meringue pie this month. And his new lemon meringue pie club.

**Burbage:** Yes. So you may want something specific and, again, we try to keep it positive. We're building systems here, I think, for all of these that we want people to want to use. Like the worst part of an HR job is running around trying to make people do things. We want to build programs that people are like, "Oh, I can't wait for feedback to start. I'm looking forward to that, and I'm choosing to opt in." As opposed to Kara and I having to run around telling you, you have to do this thing that you don't want to.

**Gardner:** So it sounds to me as if part of the culture is you've subverted yourself to the employee who is your customer, and you're trying to engage and please that person. Without compelling them or forcing them, you're working extra hard to figure out what they're going to like and want to use.

But let me flip this back at you before we move to Point No. 4 because I can imagine some people are listening right now saying, "You know what? There's a person on my team or at our company. They are not doing a good job and it's very hard for me to be positive about them." How do you be effective and negative or, I would say, corrective within such a (to be unfair to you both), happy-go-lucky, free love, lemon meringue pie environment?

**Burbage:** I think it's actually a fairly straightforward answer, which is I think if you're waiting for some program to start, or a system to be kicked in for you to be able to give that person that negative feedback, you've probably waited too long, and it's probably not appropriate. I think, David, if you're having some problems with my performance...

**Gardner:** I'm a little uncomfortable with my performance Lee. That's about me.

**Burbage:** I'm uncomfortable here on the podcast.

**Gardner:** I've picked some bad stocks in the last year.

**Burbage:** Those are the situations where you shouldn't be relying on a program or system like this. You should be pulling that person aside and talk to them, giving them that kind of feedback. A system like this, or any feedback system, isn't designed to handle that super heavy load.

**Chambers:** It's about development. And we have one other thing we liked. It's another learning we've had and that's in terms of language. We offer the option to say, "I would like your advice on this." We've heard this. Someone else had this concept. But instead of saying, "I would like your feedback," saying, "I would like your advice." That's your take-away tip. It's just easier. People will always want to give you advice. They don't want to give you feedback. They don't give you a grade, but they're like, "Oh, you want my advice? OK." And people will open right up.

**Gardner:** Wow!

**Chambers:** That's a thing that we learned recently this year. So we've added that in this round to see how that goes.

**Gardner:** That's a great point. So that was No. 3, listening. Lee, No. 4.

**Burbage:** No. 4. We have a project culture, here, and I'm calling this one *exploring*. We have this theory that at The Motley Fool it takes about six months to figure out your job and then you start to have some bandwidth. You're starting to get more and more efficient in how you're able to do your job and then you have some extra time. And so we're super curious how you use that extra time and we encourage you (unlike maybe any company I've seen) to try new things. Go investigate a new area of the business.

For instance, over the last few weeks Kara and I have been super involved with a volunteer team of Fools that are investigating a potential new business line for our company, and we just need to do a little research work, so the call was put out. Hey, anybody interested in helping out. Maybe six Fools raised their hand and said they'd love to help out. So they're dedicating a few hours a week that they have free towards this new venture.

And what happens over time is we're actually learning as a business if they're good in that area. And if they're learning, as an individual, that might be an area that they'd like to do

even more. Sometimes people walk away and they'll be like, "Ooh, boy. That was awful. I don't want to do that again." Or we, as a business, might say, "Ooh, you're actually not very good at that." Or even better we're like, "Hey, you're great. You should do more of that," and it builds into more career development.

So just getting people to use their extra bandwidth to get out and about the business and reach beyond what their normal day-to-day work may be.

**Gardner:** I'm curious, Lee. You started that by saying we're a project culture. What does that mean, exactly?

**Burbage:** I don't believe that we have a traditional hierarchy, here. A traditional career ladder. People work here for many years and do lots of different things. Our favorite people are ones that are working on maybe six or seven different projects at one time. They may be diverse projects. Some may be leaders. Some might be followers. Some might be just playing all kinds of different roles on a team.

So you're getting your enjoyment, here, by working with people that you love on really challenging things that are driving towards our purpose and that's how you're managing your career. It's moving from project to project, trying new things, getting involved in things that you're passionate about.

**Gardner:** So it really is pretty subversive if you're thinking about a traditional org chart, and a title on your business card, and once I'm junior this, my next goal would be senior this and I'll get that in three years.

And there is a downside to not being that way, because sometimes we'll lose people here at the Fool who want that career path or a clearer sense of what's next, and sometimes they leave the Fool after a few years to go back to maybe a more traditional workplace where they can find that. So what we're describing here -- I don't know how idiosyncratic or not it is -- it's definitely how we roll and we bet we're probably not the only organization that rolls that way.

**Burbage:** Yes, I mean I was not the first to say this.

**Gardner:** The Greeks were. I don't even know what you're about to say, but it's very obvious, I think, that Socrates said this. Go ahead.

**Burbage:** Socrates once said every company has a culture, but not every culture is right for everyone. So we have a pretty defined and unique culture that fits and is cool for a lot of people, but not for everybody. We're not a great résumé builder or LinkedIn profile builder company, although when people leave here, they do find some pretty great jobs, but it's nontraditional, sure.

**Gardner:** We're at halftime. Thank you for those first four points. You have four glowing points to come. And I'm going to ask you to think about something in the last 12 months,

since you last came on this podcast that hasn't worked so well. It's natural for us to want to share out the things that have worked well, and I think best practice sharing is much more valuable, but I'm sure some of our listeners are curious about something we learned we needed to tweak or hasn't worked so well. What's something that hasn't worked?

**Burbage:** One thing that's pretty easy to do is look at your budget and circle those big items. It's probably healthy to circle those in question, and one thing we did last year was to circle our holiday party and say, "Wow, that's sort of an expensive event to take everyone and a guest." It's hard to get a venue during the holidays.

**Gardner:** That's part of what makes it expensive. Everybody else is trying to rent the same venues for the holidays, so the rents go up.

**Burbage:** Absolutely. And you know us. We like to do things different, better, special. So we [decided we'd] get them. We're going to do ours in April. We'll just combine it with some other event. We won't do the Plus One. Essentially we cancelled our holiday party.

And as it turns out people missed it. That wasn't such a great decision. And when we announced this year that we were bringing it back, we got a lot of notes and a lot of people that were super excited. So it turns out I think the money is worth it. To bring people together. To bring their spouse. We sometimes only see that person once a year. To break a little bread and celebrate the year, the timing, the spirit. It works, and I think we made a mistake by cancelling our holiday party and I'm pretty stoked out about it.

**Gardner:** And I was one of those people who wrote a note to you both thanking you. I thought I might be the only one who had written that note. Well, that's a good learning. Kara?

**Chambers:** As we just talked about learning, one thing we're working on is we realized over the years that learning and development in an office has a temptation to bring everyone in and teach a class in a classroom. What you find is sometimes you have to bribe them with sandwiches and maybe that's not in your budget, either, so you bring them in and you find your attendance starts dropping. So we said nothing is mandatory, here. And we're noticing this kind of drop off, and this is over years.

**Gardner:** Because we have internal classes here at The Motley Fool. Now this is maybe not a normal thing for a lot of people. Kara, what would be a typical class that we might have taught over the years, here, at the Fool?

**Chambers:** It could be an introduction to how a different department does their work. It could be leadership development for team leaders. The how to.

**Gardner:** How to fill out your 401(k), I can imagine. These kinds of things.

**Chambers:** Yes, and again. Those individually went well, and I'm only thinking of the good ones, now. The memorable ones. I'm sure there were ones that were not memorable,

but we found that their attendance was dwindling, and so we are spending our time thinking about how to create experiential learning. And you have to walk a line because if you've got your best people working on your most valuable things, you have a hesitancy to take them off of those valuable things to learn.

So that constant push-pull is getting your best people and developing them even further, but it's a challenge. If you want something done, ask busy people [00:30:40]. So just thinking about your really busy people and then you're like, "Hey, can you teach this class? Can you do it?" And what you find is it's hard to get that group.

So we're trying to find ways. Maybe it's job swapping. We did a workshop with you not long ago on a project that was kind of fun. We're trying to think of other ways to bring people together to learn things without it being classroom focused. Because as we saw, the attendance was dropping until at one point I remember seeing, "This meeting is at noon and we don't get any food?" OK, that's not why we're here.

**Gardner:** Something can be fixed here.

**Chambers:** That's not why we're here. That's something I learned.

**Gardner:** Thank you both. Let's get back on our program, Point Nos. 5 to 8. Let's speed it up a little bit. I think my tendency to just enjoy this conversation too much has me asking too many questions. For our last four we're going to focus it a little bit more and No. 5, Kara, I think I'm back to you.

**Chambers:** I wouldn't be anywhere if I wasn't talking about an app you need to use. For those of you who are Slack users -- Slack is our internal instant messaging program -- we use an app in there called Donut, and what that does is it's an algorithm that pairs you with a random Fool for coffee every other Monday. It's optional. You can opt in. And you can drop out of the Slack channel if you don't want to have coffee the next Monday. They're using some kind of magic algorithm with people outside of your group.

What I like about it is I'm an introvert. Parties or big happy hours I'll be shy at, but one on one I like talking to people. So once we installed it, I went around and I recruited all of my introverts, one by one, and said, "Come on. It's so much easier to get to know people one on one with this."

**Gardner:** It's Donut. Donut.

**Chambers:** Come on! Come on! So we have fun. It's really a nice, low-pressure way to build connections at the Fool. I've been in the position of giving and getting feedback of building your network, and for your more introverted people that can be difficult. So one at a time. At random.

**Gardner:** So if I'm a Slack user (and I know we have many *Rule Breakers* listeners who probably are), you can install that app. Within Slack it's Donut.

**Chambers:** Donut.ar.

**Gardner:** And if you're not a Slack user; darn it, you probably can use pencil and paper and make a program like this, and pair random people who want to talk some.

**Burbage:** Maybe dice.

**Chambers:** Roll dice.

**Gardner:** No, don't get me started. The gamer in me wants to talk about games. We're going to go back to Point No 6. Lee.

**Burbage:** Point No. 6 is we talk about autonomy in our office as a pretty big deal. We look everywhere for places where we can provide you with autonomy. And a secret to that is also a lot of times autonomy comes with less work for administration and that sort of thing. One thing that we've done is just about everything in our office is on wheels, so it turns out it's a *caster culture*. I've heard that phrase used before.

So David, if you wanted to move your desk, which is just a table on wheels with two cords, you unplug your cords and you roll your desk over to wherever you want to go. You don't need to ask permission. You don't need to trade desks with somebody. There's no packing, or boxes, or anything. Literally just roll around.

Our office is literally different every day and it's because people are moving around and maybe like Kara, they need a few minutes to work by themselves, because they're more introverted, and they roll their desk over. Like, "Hey, I'm on a team now. Let me roll that over to my team." So just providing people that mobility and the autonomy to make their own decision about where and how they want to work has been a big thing for us, and I think people are happier and more productive.

**Gardner:** We didn't force rank these points, so we're not saying that that Point No. 6 is the sixth most important thing. But for a lot of offices -- whether you are in a small or a large office -- that's very doable. Now, for some offices maybe you have mahogany furniture or you have stuff built in. You have cubicles that are basically anchored to the wall. Maybe you can't do that, but at least your chair on wheels. At least being able to slide around and meet with people or hang out for four days in a workpod to get stuff done seems doable. It wasn't until year what of our company, Lee, that we finally figured out we could put stuff on wheels?

**Burbage:** I think it was about eight years ago.

**Gardner:** So year 16. It took us 16 years to figure that out.

**Burbage:** Well, you were asking before about major mistakes that we made. I will say that when [Bryan Dye] and Chad Wolfsheimer, two Fools that work here, came to me and

talked to me about this, my first reaction was, "That sounds crazy. No, no, no." And so it took them a [little to convince me]. It's really part of the Scrum and Agile push.

In your mahogany desk scenario, I would say we've also found a lot of success finding little spaces in hallways. Any little gap in the office where you can shove a couch or roll a few chairs into to just give people options of other places to sit and interact has been pretty powerful, too. So not being tethered to a mahogany desk in the corner, and instead being able to get out and move around and move about the cabin we think is a pretty big deal. Again, my idea from the beginning.

**Gardner:** Kara, Point No. 7.

**Chambers:** Caring. I do our engagement surveys, and for at least nine years a very popular engagement survey question is, "My team leader, or someone at work, cares about me as a person." And I enjoy, every time I open up the survey and it goes up one more point. We're at 95%.

That's a humble brag there, but I think it's important. It's part of our culture. A very family-oriented culture. And all the things we do we want to help you feel like this is part of your family. People you see every day you spend a lot of time with, and so caring about each other is a part of your well-being, just knowing that people do.

It's a high driver. It's something that we take pride in that's always been part of our culture. Even when other engagement scores go up and down, I see this go up and I say that makes a resilient culture. That tells me that we are all in it because we care about each other, and I would be a sad person if I had to get up in front of a company and present a score like 50.

**Gardner:** And actually implicit in Point No. 7 -- caring, Kara -- is that we're measuring. And we're not really talking about that this time. I think we've talked about that in a prior podcast. By the way, I'm going to plug your two previous appearances at the end, shortly, so people can find more of such ideas.

And I bet some of you *Rule Breakers* listeners, right now, who are listening are saying, "I wish my boss would listen to a part of this." Maybe this podcast or maybe one of the other two I'll mention. But implicit in what you just said is that we have engagement scores. We ask people on a regular basis to score us. We gather the data. We care about it. We slice and dice the data. We get more data every single time. We have historic data so we can know norms, and so I just wanted to make sure I double underlined that.

**Chambers:** What we say is every company is a great place to work in its own way, and for us that's a big one, and if you have that at your company, just building on it. It comes from starting with your founders and hiring your friends, but building from there. Starting with people who care about each other.

**Gardner:** And to be maybe just a little bit soupy and sentimental, Kara and Lee are some of my good friends, here, at the Fool and I didn't know you when we started The Motley

Fool. So one of the things that happens, if you're in a good office, and you stay around for a while, and you've got a positive culture; regardless of what business you're in, is that some of your best friends end up being the people that you're working with every day and you didn't even know them when you graduated high school or college. Point No. 8, Lee.

**Burbage:** So No. 8 builds a little bit on my holiday party point. Just not forgetting the fun and building into the fun. It can be so easy and, again, to use your word sappy. We're like, "Hey, we should have another activity, or another fun event." So we do still try to have at least some sort of fun company event that's organized once a month.

And the one I wanted to highlight was one that we had from last month, because I'm particularly excited. We tried to think about how we could do something fun that also draws in our remote workforce. So we have a decent number of Fools that are working from around the United States and around the world. All different sorts of time zones and that can make having a fun event difficult to pull off and maybe even makes them sad. So here we're doing something fun at the headquarters and we've got someone in Singapore who's saddened because they can't participate.

So here's what we did -- a push-up challenge. We've come full circle to being the most athletic company here...

**Gardner:** Yeah. How could we not mention that in Washington, D.C. we are the reigning, most athletic company in the capital of maybe arguably the most powerful nation the world has ever known?

**Burbage:** I think our hope is they never give that award again, and then we're only the only one ever. But we did a push-up challenge and it was very simple. You can do this in your company. We had a Google doc where you go and put your name in. I know that you both participated. And just on a daily basis you marked down how many push-ups you're doing and you have a goal. And there's actually some banter talking inside the Google doc, and we had some prizes.

**Gardner:** And some teams challenged some other teams with that.

**Burbage:** Absolutely. So if you're in Singapore, you're in Australia, or you're here in Washington, D.C., you can get in that Google doc. You can participate. It happened all month long. We had a super fun time. We did, I think, 150,000 push-ups as a company. So we found a way for us to have fun as a company which I think is easy to forget, especially in the busy world that we live in, today. So adding some fun into your company and finding ways for everybody to participate is something I'm particularly excited about.

**Gardner:** OK, we're going to close this one up. I want to give a little bit of a plug to one or two resources that people who have enjoyed this podcast can access, but before I do that I want to ask you each one final question, and Kara, randomly I'll pick you for the first one and Lee, you for the second. Each of these comes from a different type of a listener. We're going to call them opposite listeners.

Kara, you're going to speak briefly to the person who has no budget. They're either at a smaller company than The Motley Fool (and there are many smaller companies than The Motley Fool), or they're a larger company but there's just no budget for things like wellness or fun. So I'm listening to you guys. You're talking about something that sounds great. I mean, I wish I had that kind of pie-in-the-sky, but I don't. What can I learn from this podcast? What can I do?

**Chambers:** Push-ups and Google docs. They're free, so I'll start with that. Talking about mistakes. Before we had a wellness person, we designed our own wellness challenge and it was really ridiculously complicated, but we did it.

**Gardner:** It's helpful to have senior people who understand what they're doing.

**Chambers:** It's better in the hands of a professional. That's all I'll say. But nobody got hurt. So try. Loaning books among each other is free. Sitting down and listening to your colleagues -- I'd say the No. 1 takeaway, too, is if you're just starting out in a business, it's really easy to think of now I'm in management and I have to be the police for my employees. And for us it's always come from a place of trust -- a place of positivity -- and it works. That's why I like to go out into the world and say you can have that with three people, and ideally I hope you do.

**Gardner:** So, so much of what we just covered in these 45 minutes, or so, is free. It's just about making decisions, having frameworks, and having some internal commitment, or willingness to get there. Willingness to experiment. All right, Lee, you're going to come at this from the other angle. "Hey, The Motley Fool is a cute company. I appreciate the podcast. I've followed some of your stock picks. You guys are just 300 employees. I work at a division that itself is 3,000 employees. We have tons of resources."

So Fools listening to this hour, I'm wondering if you had twice the budget that you have, because this hypothetical person that you're going to be, for a sec, Lee, does. This person has twice the budget that we have for employees to focus on wholeness and well-being. If you had more, how would you be spending it?

**Burbage:** I reject the question. The reason I say that is I don't think it's about money. I think what I would love in that scenario, if it were me, is I would have scale to do things that Cara and I can't do because we just don't have enough people. For instance, our coaching program, I think, would be even richer because I would be leveraging all those people that exist at that company.

So whether it's the coaching program or speakers, I don't necessarily need to go external to find speakers. I bet you with a large population inside my company, there are some pretty interesting people that could teach a class. Speak about something that they're doing. So just being able to leverage the human power of all the interesting folks in that scenario would be cool.

The second thing I would say is killing systems or processes that are unpopular and not very popular at scale is a big deal.

**Gardner:** Very powerful.

**Burbage:** Yes. To kill the performance appraisal at 300 was a big deal. To kill the performance appraisal at 3,000 or 6,000 -- they'll write a book about you.

**Gardner:** Well, Kara Chambers and Lee Burbage, two world-class thinkers and I'm going to say that again with my entrepreneurial pride on my sleeve because of The Motley Fool's renown as a place to work and a place that's constantly experimenting, sometimes with small budgets.

I love Lee's point that it's not about money. That's what Kara said, as well. So much of this is free. But willing to experiment and try and see what works, and try to make the workplace better for one of our key stakeholders that every organization, (for-profit and not-for-profit) has and that's your employees or, if you will, your human capital.

I mentioned earlier that I've done two previous podcasts with Kara and Lee, and if you'd like to hear either one of them I'm going to call them out right now. The very first one was their appearance on December 2, 2015: "10 Traits of a Great Company Culture." So if you're on iTunes you can just scroll down to 12/02/15. Listen to it yourself. Share it with your manager or the big boss at your organization -- whoever it is -- share it out.

And then they came back in 2016. The day was May 11. And we imaginatively named that one "10 More Traits of a Great Company Culture." Not quite sure what we're going to call this one because I don't make that call each week. More talented people, here, at the Fool name these, but maybe we'll have "10 Even More Great Traits," or maybe we'll be more focused on wellness, which was the purpose of this podcast. Kara and Lee sharing with you what they've learned about the overall well-being of your employees.

Now Lee, if you're comfortable, let's say I've really enjoyed this podcast, or one of these, and I want to get in touch with this team at the Fool. How do I reach you?

**Burbage:** I'm happy for people to email me. LeeB@Fool.com. It's pretty fun, because it's "Lee B A Fool."

**Gardner:** LeeB -- letter B...

**Burbage:** @Fool.com

**Gardner:** Lee B A Fool. I get it. OK. LeeB@Fool.com. And Kara, The Motley Fool has a culture blog.

**Chambers:** Yes. It's Culture.Fool.com and all of our content, our job postings, anything we do here. How to get in touch with us.

**Gardner:** We take pictures of ourselves on Halloween or silly, ridiculous stuff.

**Chambers:** You would think all we did was dress up in costumes.

**Gardner:** One would sometimes think. I do follow and I can follow it, by the way, on [Facebook] at Motley Fool Culture.

**Burbage:** Instagram.

**Gardner:** OK, good. So I do see some of those pictures.

**Chambers:** Yes. Instagram. Motley Fool Culture. I'm TMFKara on Twitter, so I post a lot of stuff I read on there.

**Gardner:** Awesome. Thank you both so much for your time. Thank you, Rule Breaker, whoever and wherever you are. And it's our hope, on behalf of Kara, Lee, and myself that you find ways to make the place around you, where you go to work every day, better for you and those around you in the year ahead. Fool on!

[End]