Jeffrey:
They know they've got a problem, but they're afraid to do anything about it, right? They want a systematic logical approach to how to fix their problem and that's great, but we all know that we are human beings, we're irrational and we make decisions based upon fast emotional instinctual type stuff.

James:
Greetings and hello. I am James Robert lay and welcome to the 114th episode of the Banking on Digital Growth podcast. Today's episode is part of the exponential insight series and I'm excited to welcome back Jeffrey Ward to the podcast. Jeff is an Enterprise Executive at Decisions who is empowering financial brands and their people to automate everything and once and for all break free from the inefficient revenue draining manual processes that I hear so many complain about. And this is a personal passion topic for me. When we talk about automation, when it comes to experiences, experiences being nothing more than well-defined systems and processes that have been strategically thought out, applied and then the secret is to optimize them over a period of time because we want these experiences to result in a positive emotion. Welcome back to the show Jeff.

Jeffrey:
Thank you very much James Robert Lay. It's an honor and privilege.

James:
I want to start the conversation. What is one thing that you are excited about right now, personally or professionally? Your pick.

Jeffrey:
Professional is that I joined Decisions in March 22 of this year and was able to leverage relationships that I'm very protective of and value in my business each and every day. And in the very near future, we'll have some brand new revenue for Decisions that I will tee up before the end of July.

James:
Well, congratulations. That is really, really good news. I'm excited for you with that and just to see your continued progress, your continued growth as you're working with and guiding financial brands. And as a digital anthropologist, I study the intersection of marketing, sales, technology, human behavior. And one of the biggest lessons that I have gained through working with financial brands is not found in the industry, but it's actually found from the teachings of Issy Sharp who's the founder of the Four Seasons Hotel. And Issy once spoke on the idea of experience, sharing the need to systemize the predictable so that we can humanize the exceptional.

James:
And Matthew Upchurch took this thinking even further, particularly for a digital world where he noted that the opportunity is to automate the predictable so we can humanize the exceptional. And when it comes to automation in the world of financial services, it can feel like there is so much opportunity to either create or to capture. And because there's an abundance of opportunity, automation can and in essence, feel like an exercise in complexity and an exercise in frustration. So let's start off the conversation to help the dear listener gain some clarity. Where can we begin this thinking about automation to begin with in the first place? What are the opportunities here?

Jeffrey:
Great question. So what I find myself doing just like yourself is talking to large financial institutions that realize that they have a problem and don't really know what path to take, right? Do they go to the

traditional route and employ a consulting firm that offers them 12 to 24 months to look at their operations, to look at their back office, to look at where their inefficiencies are or the other strategy is to internally have the business user tell the development team, the IT team, hey, we need this built, we need this done, we need it done yesterday. And in both scenarios, you're talking about time, energy, resources and a lot of complexity. So when I talk to these organizations, I'm always amazed that two things happen. They know they've got a problem, but they're afraid to do anything about it, right?

Jeffrey:
They want a systematic logical approach to how to fix their problem and that's great, but we all know that we are human beings, we're irrational and we make decisions based upon fast, emotional, instinctual type stuff. Fight or flight. Right? So when I'm talking to these organizations, I don't necessarily want to say, okay, deer in the headlights, it's going to be figuring out how to survive and thrive or way of the dinosaurs, but really think about, and we talked about this before we started, think about what Zoom has done to the market, right? There was a situation, there was COVID, everything sat down and all of a sudden Zoom is giving you and I the ability to communicate outside of face-to-face experience. Zoom gave us the ability to move at the speed of business, right? So if you're talking to an organization, what happens if Amazon shows up in your backyard? What happens to the taxi cab industry when Uber shows up, right? All of a sudden it's evolve and survive and thrive or it's the way of the dinosaurs, right?

James:
Technology is a capability multiplier.

Jeffrey:
It is.

James:
And when we think about technology as a capability multiplier, let's actually remove the word capability. Let's just call technology is a multiplier. Technology will multiply either complexity and confusion on one side of the spectrum if that's built into the business model or technology will multiply clarity and confidence and commitment on the other side. And I think that's what we're all striving for. It's at least what I hope that we're all striving for when it comes to financial services because money has a very high inherent cognitive load. For many people, money is complex, money is frustrating, money is overwhelming. And so anything that we can do to reduce the complexity through systems, through process, through automation, the better experience that we will bring to bear on the other end of the spectrum. Now, one of the things that you noted is when you're talking with financial brands, you mentioned they realize they have a problem. I want to dive deeper into this. What are these problems that they're addressing in these conversations you're having?

Jeffrey:
Sure. So the problems that they're addressing or the problems that they're having is that traditionally what they've done is acquired an application, acquired a solution and have some type of IT development support team that helps them maintain that system. Right? The challenges that they have is that as a business user, let's say, if I'm going to move at the speed of business, and I'll probably repeat this throughout the day, but if I'm going to move at the speed of business, let's say that we go back to the financial crisis, Lehman Brothers phase, right? Let's say that we have a credit policy that we have been administering in a market that is an up market, right? And that, our talents, our risk levels are set to acquire debt, right? And to acquire these credit facilities. Market turns on an instant, right?

Jeffrey:

All of a sudden that there is risk in the world and a business user calls up their IT department and says, hey James, hey Jeff, I want to reduce our risk policy by X. Development team says, okay, great. They say, what are your specifications? The business unit gives them the specifications. The dev team then goes through into their development instance, starts the work. They build it out to the requirements that they've known presented by the business user. They then push it to QA, right? QA does all of their testing. Then they get back on the business users calendar, and they say, Mr. business user, did we get it right or did we get it wrong? And so if we're talking about the speed of business, best case scenario, that took a day and a half, right?

Jeffrey:
If you're a consumer lending organization, how many loans could you do in a day and a half? You're in a CNI lending institution, how many loans could you approve in a day and a half? So the exposure is rather large, right? What I'm talking... So that is the problem that they're facing today is being able to position themselves to stay ahead of business.

James:
It's the bottleneck, it sounds like. So business users, because there could be multiple business users in the organization, it all comes down, it all bottlenecks around IT and the dev team. And so we're losing time, we're losing efficiency. And what's the opportunity now to break free from this?

Jeffrey:
The opportunity now is that with a visual programming language, I can increase that dev time by five to 10 times and give the business user the ability to make those edits, from the dashboard, from email, from a perspective where they're not logging into the situation even communicating with the dev team, but having the ability to change a policy, to change an LTV in real time.

James:
And so this is in essence the next stage and we're seeing this with a lot of other areas of opportunities within a financial brand, from marketing to sales to service, this idea of low code, no code visualization. And that's why I've been saying this for at least three to four years, if not five. The future of growth is not going to be found in the quote unquote doing. The future of growth is going to be found in the thinking, because the doing will be augmented by the technology. It will be multiplied by the technology. And so the opportunity, and I want to get your take on this. And it's funny because now we can start to connect some patterns of what's going on outside that are really impacting financial. The idea of DeFi, decentralized finance.

James:
Now we're not necessarily decentralized finances, but we're decentralizing and democratizing control by empowering others in the organization who might not have a quote unquote development coding background to optimize these experiences. Coming back to my definition, experiences being strategically thought out, applied and then continuously optimized over a period of time. Optimization happening at a business unit level.

Jeffrey:
Exactly

James:
So the other thing that that you've shared is not only the problems, you mentioned there's something, holding them back, something keeping them stuck. What are the fears that you hear when it comes to automation?

Jeffrey:
Well, all of our financial services, all of our financial institutions are in that business because they're very cognizant of risk, right? They understand how to apply a figure to that risk and get paid for their knowledge of that.

James:
Yes.

Jeffrey:
And I think that traditionally what those institutions have done is gone to the consulting firms and said, hey, Mr. consulting firm tell us where we need to spend our time, energy and resources. Or going back to internal, let's go to the dev team and, and, and work it out. So what I'm hearing a lot when I'm having these conversations is that there's a tendency to fall back to old behaviors on how to deal with this thing that we're calling digital transformation. And so I really think that these organizations should consider ways to test FinTech, test technologies, stick their toe in the water and muddy land and or expand situation, right?

Jeffrey:
Where, if I'm talking to an FI that's 10 billion in assets, their technology or their digital transformation strategy typically today is merged with another organization. And by combining efforts and energies, they'll be able to overcome that digital transformation. What I want them to be able to have the ability to do is pick out some of that pain. Some of that pain that's built up in a backlog of use cases and presenting that to myself or to other providers that are low code or some type of one-off technology and saying, okay, here you go. Instead of spending seven figures on a 12 to 24 month engagement, right? We want to go and for six figures, try this on.

James:
I want to address this because I hear this. I think it's a fallacy that just because we merge and we increase our asset size does not guarantee future success. In fact, while we might increase asset, we have this thought that, oh, well, we're going to be able to adopt more technology. Well, now you're talking about merging two cultures together and that's an exercise in complexity right there. And the number two, digital transformation does not fail because of technology. Digital transformation fails because of the people who are having to deploy that technology. It is a people problem, but it's also a people opportunity. And it's what I'm writing about in my next book, Banking on Change, because there are four transformations that have to happen for digital transformation, for digital growth, to be a success.

James:
Number one, we must transform the self, the individual because individuals make up teams, teams make up organizations and organizations are made up of teams, which are made up of individuals. And so when we try to bring technology and it's typically at an organizational level, and this is what I want to come back to, if we're talking about individual here, individual transformation, that's really about belief structures and what we know to be true. I can't help but think when it comes to technology and even

automation, I'm hearing, maybe I'm on the frontline or somewhere in the middle, rumblings that they're talking with an advisor or consulting firm.

Jeffrey:
Yep.

James:
We're going to bring in some type of automation. What does that mean to my job? Am I safe? Do I have psychological safety? Because then I'm going to start throwing up walls and barriers, whether consciously or subconsciously. How can we address these fears with others of who this technology is going to impact one way or another? Because once again, I don't view it necessarily as a threat. I view it as an augmentation, a capability upgrade coming back to Issy Sharp, systematize the predictable so that we can humanize the exceptionable and spend more time doing people things.

Jeffrey:
So I would go back to our Zoom example, right? When COVID first hit, I had been in a board room, a board meeting in Utah talking to a credit union member organization on like a Thursday. Then I had been at ICBA event in Florida walking around in the trade show, meeting people, shaking hands. And within a week's time, all of that's gone. Right? And I'm going to use this thing called Zoom. What the heck is Zoom? I've done WebEx, I've done GoTo, I've done all of this. And now there's this new thing. And at first I was scared, right? I was like, well, what am I going to do? How am I going to prepare for this? What if I say something wrong and it's recorded? Right? And so dealing with that fear, I had to just bring myself to the reality that this is going to make things better and to the reality that this is where business is today, whether I like it or not. Right?

Jeffrey:
And so I think many times when these people are afraid of change and or that technology could replace their job, I think that's just something to be afraid of. Right? I think reality is we have more and more technology in our life today and we just really need to embrace the fact, leverage that fact and move forward.

James:
A great analogy of this would be once again, and as you and I were talking about before hitting the cord, the importance to study history and start connecting dots from all different areas of life, from philosophy, from behavioral economics, from technology. Let's go back. It's the late 1800s, maybe early 1900s. I'm a farmer. And I've been used to farming with a hand plow and then I hook it up to my horse and now my horse is helping. That's an augmentation right there. Right? I've gone from the hand plow of me having to do it myself to my horse is an augmentation.

James:
Flash forward, the tractor. The tractor comes online. Now I have a massive capability upgrade, but I fear the tractor because I've never seen something like it before. I'm going to stick with the horse because it's what I know. It's what I trust because I just don't have that perception of, well, how could this tractor help me? So I'm going to keep plowing my field with the horse and plow where my friend across the way, well, he's got the tractor and he's got way more efficiency than me. And well, guess what? He's going to get my land in five years.

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Jeffrey:
So to that, what I would say is, if you're afraid of that track, right? If I went from a push plow to a horse and plow, I would say, go back and think about what that meant at the end of the day, right? No longer is my back in a situation or a state where I can't walk at night. Now I've offloaded that oomph, that horsepower to the actual horse. The horse has kind of built more for doing that than I am built. Right? So I would say just think about that experience for a seconds. And then I would say, okay, if you don't want the tractor, right, get a smaller tool. Get a smaller piece of equipment that could do the same thing and just try it, right? Wholeheartedly jump in, stick your toes in the water. See what the temperature is. I think that you will find, just like going from a push plow to a horse, there is success there.

James:
Yes. Because people fear what they don't know, people fear what they don't understand. And that's where the role of continuous ongoing and training and education comes back into play to make the future, literally bring the future into the present moment so it doesn't feel so scary. And if we're thinking about automation right here in this conversation and low code, no code, what is a commonly held belief when it comes to automation that others in this industry might have that you would just disagree with?

Jeffrey:
What is a common automation, right?

James:
A common belief that others have about automation that you disagree with?

Jeffrey:
It's going to my job. It's going to take my job. Right? Technology's going to take my job. If I'm a credit analyst, I'm going to have some technology that's got AI capabilities behind it and no longer am I going to have to be spreading financials. Right? I think that's the most common fear that what I would argue and to what you shared earlier is that let the technology automate the norm, right, and let you leverage your human aspect of that relationship. Right?

James:
Right.

Jeffrey:
That's the importance, right? I need to be able to communicate with my borrower. I've got the information. This is what the information is telling me. This is the credit facility that we can do. Not looking line by line at the financial information and putting you on hold for an indefinite period of time. Right?

James:
Yes. I think too, as I'm hearing you talk through this, I can't help but think about a deeper, really a deeper conversation that we probably have to address and be aware of specifically as leaders. The emotional attachment that people might have with their role. Credit analysts. Right? I attach my self worth to this specific role here and if I'm in being threatened by being replaced by a machine than myself, I know it's a deep, deep conversation, but I think it's one that we probably need to be aware of. Because in Banking on Digital Growth, I wrote about two experiences. I wrote about HX plus DX or DX plus HX equals growth. The digital experience plus the human experience will lead to growth. It was through the COVID experience that I missed the mark.

James:
There was one massive experience that I left out of that equation, which is EX. That's employee experience. And so if you want to retake that formula, I would say it's EX plus HX plus DX equals growth. Meaning a positive employee experience will lead to a positive human experience that can be delivered through a positive digital experience. And so when we think about automation bringing this almost full circle now, what are the opportunities for automation to provide a positive employee experience that's going to trickle all the way down to a positive digital experience or a human experience. I mean, think through that, what are those opportunities coming back to the employee?

Jeffrey:
Yeah, I think from an employee perspective, right, I think that that's a very interesting dynamic, right? I put a lot of work on my success as a sales individual. From having a great month, man I'm up on top of the world. I'm as valuable as the day as long. If I'm having a bad month, well, then I'm starting to question a whole, whole lot. Right? And that can play in all different types of facets. Right? So as a sales individual, where I use automation, I use it to be able to spread my content out better. I use it to be able to have a broader reach. I use it to be able to better understand my prospect so that when I do have the ability to having meaningful conversation with them, I'm not out in left field. Right? I'm really I'm spot on with them.

Jeffrey:
So if I was a credit analyst, right? And I was worried that my spreading capabilities would no longer be what I spent my day doing, the meat and potatoes of my day, I could be worried about that. Or I could be thinking about, there is the opportunity for me to, instead of looking at one credit package in an eight hour period of time, maybe I look at five or six. And then I look at the anomalies within those credit packages that speaks directly to my experience. And I can have a meaningful conversation with the lenders that I support, or I can have a very meaningful conversation to our clients that our lender support. Now that's the human aspect of being able to go right at what makes me unique, what makes me valuable and what makes me love my job. Right? So I would say that's kind of the... That would be the perspective I would spin at it. You tell me if I'm right or wrong.

James:
Well, I like that thinking because now the value creation through the role you have in the organization, that value creation is exponentially multiplied and that's going to trickle out. And that's why I love the work that we're all doing in financial services, because coming back to the point, money is complex, money is frustrating, money is overwhelming. And it impacts everyone on so many different levels from a relationship level, from a physical wellbeing, from a mental wellbeing. Now, if we're able to go from one to five that then gets multiplied out through my lenders, we're able to make a positive impact in so many more people's lives to help them get beyond their financial stress towards a bigger, better brighter future. I think that's a really good analogy, both for yourself personally and how you're using technology as a multiplying capability and then also in this particular case as a credit analyst.

James:
This has been a fantastic, a fantastic discussion. I want to get really, really practical here at the very end with two... Giving the dear listener two simple recommendations, two recommendations that they can take action on to begin to move forward, to begin to make progress. What's one thing that you would recommend financial brands start doing when it comes to automation going forward?

Jeffrey:
That's perfect to hear. I'd say call me. No, I would say wholeheartedly or humbly, really think about what you're trying to do. Think about what you're trying to do outside of the way you normally thought of what you're trying to do. Right? Challenge the status quo in your thinking.

James:
So if I was to expand upon that, I would basically come back to those four digital growth or those exponential growth operating environments. You can be learning, you could be thinking, you could be doing, you could be reviewing what you could only be in one environment at a time. So create the space and time to break free from the doing to review what you've done to learn from those experiences to then think about what you can do from those learnings so that you can apply that thinking in the next iteration of doing. Do it even that much better going forward. Go ahead.

Jeffrey:
The other thing that I would add to that is then do, then do something, right? If I am strategic in my ways or if I am falling back on the norm, right? This is how we've always done it. Think about what you could do with automation, with digital transformation in 12 to 24 months. If I decided to do something today, where would I be in 12 to 24 months?

James:
Yeah. And I think for that to become a reality, one of the tough conversations that I have with so many financial brand marketing, sales leadership teams, it doesn't matter. It's to create the space and time to do something new, to do something different, we have to clear our plates because when we add something to our plates, we're going to probably have to let something go whether that's even if it's as simple as a belief. What is one thing that financial brands should stop doing to create the space and time to do something even better, to automate the predictable so that they can humanize the exceptional?

Jeffrey:
Great question. What is one thing that they should stop doing? It's doing business as they've done it always. Right? So I mean, does that mean that they throw their credit policy out the door? No. Does that mean that they throw their credit products out the door? No. Their customers? No. What that means is it's okay to fail, but if you're going to fail, fail fast, but at least try to do something, right? I mean, we've been talking. You and I met a year ago. We met kind of early COVID, right? All of these banks have had this opportunity, this period of time to do something in response to COVID. Right? We've talked about that we'll probably forget the lessons that we've learned. We may be traveling in the near future, but what happens if Delta takes off, right? [crosstalk 00:33:32] Delta [inaudible 00:33:32] thing takes off.

Jeffrey:
So if those banks are thinking about, well, I'm going to hire a consulting firm and it's going to take us 12 to 24 months to come up with an idea, you're losing clients, right? If the taxi industry knew that Uber was on the way, what could they have done to save themselves a little bit more time? Right. They could have done something and they didn't. And look what happened. Think about if Amazon showed up in your backyard, what would you do? Would you hire a consultant and say they're going to save me in 12 to 24 months? Or would you roll up your sleeves and say let's go to battle. Right? So I would challenge them to think about the way they are doing things today in order to get to [inaudible 00:34:25] do an activity, if you will.

James:
Yes. Because it all boils down to one word, just one word, and it's an acronym. And that word is this: have the courage to ACT. The A of ACT is to ascend to the apex of awareness, to look behind at where you've been, to look down at where you're at, to look ahead at where you could go next on this journey of growth. Because as you look ahead, you will see the territory of transformation that you'll have to transcend, but to bridge the gap between the apex of awareness, what we'll call knowing, to get to the territory of transformation, what we'll call growing, it's just one thing. It's the C. It's commitment. It's the commitment to begin to apply the thinking, to apply the knowledge that you're gaining, even through this conversation. And Jeff, I appreciate all of the perspectives that we've shared together in this experience, in this discussion. I'm curious, if someone wants to continue this conversation with you to continue learning, to continue to increase their knowledge, to optimize their doing, what's the best way for them to reach out and say hello?

Jeffrey:
You can find me on LinkedIn. You can find me on my email. You can find me on my cell phone. And all of that is on my LinkedIn profile.

James:
Fantastic.

Jeffrey:
What I would offer is that I'm labeled as the relationship guy. I want to see success. And so therefore it's not just the cheesy, transactional type relationship. It's an understanding of your intention. It's an understanding of your transformation and it's an understanding of your commitment. So thank you very much.

James:
Jeff, this has been fantastic. I really appreciate you for joining me today on another episode of Banking on Digital Growth. It's been a lot of fun.

Jeffrey:
Thank you James Robert Lay. It's always an honor and privilege.

James:
As always and until next time, be well, do good and make your bed.

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