

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

Renata: Hello, welcome to The Job Hunting Podcast. As you listen to this podcast on the 31st of August, there is still time for you to join me on my final live podcast interview with Julian Doherty, which I am recording on the 3rd of September 12:00 PM, AEST, it's the Melbourne time here in Melbourne, as part of the Digital Innovation Festival. It's a festival that happens in Victoria every year. And this year, as it says on the tin, it's completely digital. So it is a very big event for Victoria. It's organised by the Vic government. And I have participated by having four of my episodes recorded live. The first three were recorded this week. It was so, so good to have a few people involved and asking questions. And I received a lot of great feedback about how good it was for those that are really involved with the podcast and listen to it regularly, to be a fly on the wall and be able to participate.

Renata: And we had three great guests. You will be hearing from them in a few weeks. We will be releasing those episodes here on the podcast of course, and also for those who had no idea about us and found us because of DIF, because of the festival. And now hopefully they will be listening to this and will start following us from now on. So Julian Doherty our last guest on the 3rd of September, he's the managing director of Yellow Folder. Yellow Folder is a research firm specialised in the job market. We will be talking about, of course, the job market, especially everything to do with his research in skills and capabilities and talent during 2020. I am so excited to talk about Julian. I'm assuming that if you're in between jobs, you are looking for work, that it's one of the great podcasts to participate live and ask your questions.

Renata: You know, I don't sometimes ask questions that you may think, you know, I should ask. Now is your chance. So join me on the 3rd of September and you can ask your questions. To register to attend the final DIF 2020 live recording of The Job Hunting Podcast with Julian Doherty, please go to the episode show notes. There will be a link there. Follow that link, register, and join me. It will be wonderful to have you. Now today we have a very special guest and I've been trying to get her on the podcast for a few weeks. Her name is Su Lim. I interviewed her a few weeks ago just as we were starting stage four of lockdown here in Melbourne. Su Lim and I have worked together, I hired her as a consultant. I was her client a couple of times when we were setting up very important workspaces in my previous employment. And her expertise is in coming together in building a bridge between the users of workspaces and architects and builders and managers like myself and my managers to make sure that everybody's as happy as they can be.

Renata: Using the space as efficiently as it can be used and making sure that the space also fulfil what we wanted at the time, which was bringing people together to innovate, to co-create, to work together and make very special projects come to fruition. We had very specific requirements for Su Lim and she was excellent, really excellent at dealing with very specific requests. Some of them really, really tricky to deal with, things to do with moving people to open plan offices that required a certain level of confidentiality in the work that they did, people that dealt with IP issues. You know, this was a commercialization team, people dealing with business development, industry partnerships. So, and people that were not really used to working in open plan areas before. And that can be really tricky, but also creating different spaces

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

that were not their usual desks so that they could come together that were not like the old fashion, traditional boardroom.

Renata: They could come together and really co-create and participate in interesting projects. What we call war rooms, you know, when you all of a sudden receive important grants or projects, or when you all of a sudden receive important funding that you need to start delivering immediately for the implementation of the research. You know, I was in higher education, and higher education is all about applying for grants that you may or may not receive. And when you do receive, it's wonderful, but then you need to be ready for it. So the war rooms were really important, not only so that we could make those grant applications successfully, but if we did get grant applications that we could immediately start delivering on those KPIs and you know, this is just a very small example of what you can do with good architecture, good design, good workspaces. Space is my rabbit hole. Anything to do with interior design, workspace, urban living, everything to do with urban planning. I love it. So I tend to spend a lot of time. This is my, it's a sidekick. It's a hobby. It's something that I enjoy reading about and it takes away time that I don't have.

Renata: And I enjoy just knowing more about it. I'm curious. So I wanted to talk to Su Lim and get her feelings, and her ideas about why is it so good to work from home for certain things, on the other hand, why is it so hard for me to get other projects going? And I had some eureka moments when I was talking to her, because right at the beginning, I was so grateful to be working from home and not having to go and see clients or do different things. And then all of a sudden, a few weeks into lockdown, and I'm talking about six months, basically in Melbourne we've been in and out of lockdown since March, right? So it's been quite a long time. And I got to a stage where the dynamic interaction with other human beings is really making some of my projects just not go as fast as they should.

Renata: I have stalled some things that I really want to push forward. I just can't get them to move. Today I was interviewing Catherine Ball for one of the DIF live events. Catherine Ball, being an emerging tech expert, futurist. And she knows all of the amazing things that are to come. And she has all of this energy and enthusiasm to progress with her businesses and her ideas. But again, because she is on a, you know, sort of in lockdown as well, she can't progress with the ideas as fast as she wants to. And not only because she can't fly and she can't move about as she often does, but because she doesn't have the right mindset, and that's impacting on her ability to be productive for some things and not others. So, you know, it's really an interesting conversation that you are about to listen to with Su Lim.

Renata: And basically the lesson that I learned from hearing from her, and I guess, you know, watch out for those opportunities, as you listened to us talking is, just make the most out of this opportunity. If you are in lockdown as I am, you know, some people are, some people are not, but if you are, just use this time wisely, don't try to swim against the current, swim with it. That's what I decided to do after talking to Su Lim. And then once I start having the opportunity to interact with others again, I might be able to progress with the other projects that really does require different parts of my brains to come together. I will now let you listen to the interview. You will see

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

that I start by talking a lot about myself and that's because I haven't seen Sue in a while and she wanted to know what I've been up to. And I told her, okay, let's not talk until we are recording. And then I can tell you, and then other people might be interested as well. And then you tell me what you're doing. So sorry for being sort of the one that talking too much at the beginning. I don't usually do this, but yeah, it was needed for this podcast. Enjoy the interview. And I'll talk to you afterwards.

Renata: Let's start by giving ourselves an update.

Su: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Renata: So I left Monash. I was made redundant from my role at Monash, the role at the end of 2018. So I left and took some time out over Christmas to think about what I wanted to do next. And what happened was very quickly, the phone rang with an opportunity to come in for a discussion about a CEO role. And I said, no, you know, sometimes you don't know what you want until an opportunity knocks at your door. I'm like, Oh, I can't, I really can't go back to that. I don't want, I want to have my own business. And then I knew, and once I knew, because it was that sliding door moment, I could have gone on conversation. And I think it would have been a good conversation, you know, don't know what would have happened, but I could either get pumped for that or find a different path.

Renata: And I just didn't feel it. I had no energy to go into an interview for that role. I didn't want it. And that's when I knew for sure that I wanted to have my own business. Consulting business, early 2019 called Pantala. And that was really to capture the sort of opportunities that were falling on my lap almost, because when people know you're available and you have a large network, you know, and the economy is good. It's not covid times, people say, 'Oh, can you help me with this? And can you come in and do that?' And that's what happened very early on. And that was really wonderful. I'm so grateful for those connections that brought me. But I started then doing the side project of developing, what I think is career coaching at scale. Career coaching is usually done one on one with senior executives that can afford to pay what is quite an expensive investment to have a career coach or leadership coach.

Renata: And I decided I wanted to scale it up and have a framework which I've been using. So I've been coaching people for many years now, and I developed the framework. And I said, this framework lends itself well, to be taught, not just using my personal time, but on like an online course format. So I created an online course and decided to create a podcast to promote myself outside of Melbourne. You know work here, but, and even sort of Sydney, Australia in general, but I want it... And I think that online career coaching can be done wherever you are. And the other day I did a LinkedIn Audit. So I have a service that I do where I go through someone's LinkedIn profile top to bottom, and I do an audit for them. And I did one for a lady in Zimbabwe.

Su: Oh, fantastic.

Renata: And I have clients in Hong Kong. I have clients in Southeast Asia. I've had clients in America. The podcast, which you're on now, is in over 50 countries.

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

- Su: That's fantastic. Fun, very exciting.
- Renata: I know. It is super exciting, and then covid happened. Covid is, you know, kind of threw me out a bit, to put my confidence to support right at the beginning. And then we did a series of podcasts about covid early on, how to prepare yourself for this disaster. What kind of disaster is this? And, what, you know, how to operate in a world where complexity and volatility and ambiguity and uncertainty is the new norm and then how it is for jobs of the future and how to have personal agility. And, you know, we did a whole series with different guests on a bunch of topics. And now we're looking into the future and I thought of you so many times. And I thought, Oh, you know, I wonder because we are working remotely.
- Renata: Many of us, I have friends and colleagues and clients that are going in while they were, and now with Melbourne is in lock down completely, but they were coming into a big firm, a big consulting firm, let's say once a week. And they would, things are kind of being spread out. My husband's office has always been hot desks, now it's not, and they're kind of re-doing the office space and the CBD. So they have a location, they have a Docklands location and I thought who better to talk to than you.
- Su: Thank you for thinking of me.
- Renata: Yes. Now tell me, and everybody else about what you do.
- Su: Okay. So I help organisations think about the future of their work, and also how their workplace environment might support them to drive that future. So that entails working with organisations to think about what they're trying to achieve from a business perspective or an organisational perspective, and then starting to look at well, where are they now, aligning their aspirations with a strategy that takes them forward into the future?
- Renata: Now let me do a follow up question. So because when I was your client, we worked together to create something new in an organisation. It was a new department, and it required people to, well be convinced of the need of that department and to exist, and also to be convinced to physically move into a new space that was going to be branded as that new department. And they were going to start working together. And I hired you to help me create that environment, that new office space, but also facilitate discussions that we then use to develop a better understanding of what they were feeling and how we could then steer towards a better culture as we developed the department further. Right.
- Su: The thing about physical space is that it's a really powerful way to think about organizational change if you like. So we talk about it as a catalyst for change in behaviour at work. And the reason why I think it's powerful is that it's very physical and tangible and sort of symbolic of behaviour. So, you know, when you kind of do the two things together, if you like people understand how to make those shifts, because you've got a kind of physical environment telling you the kinds of messages that, or, you know, kind of reinforcing the messages of change in terms of work behaviours. I think the other thing about workplace is, you know, often people build

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

up their new work. So if they think about, I've got to have, I need to create a new workplace, often the way that might be built up is to actually think about what their old workplace was like and correct, you know, kind of issues of the past, if you like.

Su: So for example, you know, very simple example is an organisation might say, I need to create a new workplace. Our old one didn't have enough meeting rooms. So therefore we're going to build more meeting rooms in the new one. You know, what the opportunity is, is to actually think forward, as opposed to think about what do you know what happened in the past? So looking back is always a useful view to evaluate what has gone before. But I think if you start to look forward, given they're so many things shifting, you can start to think, all right, well, what are we actually trying to achieve? How do we need to behave in order to achieve it? And then what are the enablers to actually prompt that behaviour? And that can be a combination of physical or virtual spaces as well as kind of protocols and other kind of overlays.

Renata: And Su I think now more than ever looking forward is really important. Isn't it having the foresight and the vision to imagine how workplaces will be like and how people are going to be managed and how they are going to work together in projects and teams, even if they're remotely located, but also, you know, the new physical locations of offices, how they're going to be designed. It's not like you can look back. I mean, you can use, as you said, look back, but ideally you want to use the information that we've just accumulated in the past few months and have the foresight of looking at, you know, workplaces of the future. That's why I wanted to talk to you. What are the trends? And what can we expect to see when we go back to the office let's say 12 months from now?

Su: Well perhaps if we start in the kind of past and then go forward from there, if you think about the evolution of the workplace, it has been kind of moving through a progression, if you like, towards, I guess in some ways where we are now, you know, to this sort of extreme mobility and the ability to work remotely. So, you know, if you think about, you know, kind of the 1980s where offices were still very much a kind of symbol of status and the big headquarters that were very caught up in prestige, and then into the nineties where you had the kind of rise of the open plan and, you know, kind of team sort of cost saving and efficiency, and then, you know, kind of moving forward in the nineties where technology started to really, you know, enable a certain level of mobility, you know, the rise of the laptops, et cetera, you know, from a sort of previously a desktop environment. And then, you know, in the last sort of five years, the rise of co-working and, you know, a real focus on wellbeing and communities.

Su: So if you kind of think about technology enabling all of those sorts of shifts from the office, being a real core space to much more flexibility in more recent years, if you think about that in context of COVID, COVID has really accelerated the uptake of those sorts of trends. So, you know, in the last, whatever, six months, I guess, where we've absolutely had this kind of forced on mass remote working experiment, if you like, you know, where everyone's been forced to work from home in the main, and in some ways, because of that four stage, you've got the ability to collect some data and, you know, understand, well, what does that actually looking like for people? So

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

we conducted a survey and we got about 8,000 over data points from Australia, from commercial government and non for profit organisations. So that's been really revealing.

Su: And I suppose in terms of the experience of the work from home, I think it's, you know, resoundingly been positive, not withstanding, obviously there's a level of stress around the pandemic and, you know, there's other individual stresses that have occurred for people working at home, such as home schooling, or, you know, perhaps more difficult home environments if you like. But generally, you know, productivity from a perception perspective has remained and either the same or improved, you know, people have found the experience to be reasonably positive. And what we're seeing is absolutely an increased desire and expectation for homeworking or remote working into the future. Now that's not to say the office is going to disappear. So we've seen a few of those headlines about, you know, are offices dead and all of those sorts of things. We absolutely don't believe they are because at the end of the day, people are really missing that kind of community and interaction and social side of work.

Su: Not everybody can work from home and not everybody wants to work from home as well. We do see that when things do open up in a more, going into the future that you will get a different sort of balance, same with, we're probably entering anticipating that interstate travel and international travel as a result will decrease, you know, platforms like zoom and other sort of video conferencing have sort of come into their own, I suppose. And people are starting to understand that, you know, they can be a useful perhaps not to replace every kind of interaction for sure. But certainly for some, you know, so we're thinking that perhaps the frequency of face to face interactions might decrease, but not certainly not disappear, you know, people even, you know, they need that human contact as well.

Renata: I keep thinking about the new office space, or I don't even say office space anymore, the new corporate space and what it would look like. You know, when I have nothing else to do, I've always been a very visual person. I don't know if you know this, I tried to do architecture. I wanted to do architecture, but I didn't have, I couldn't afford it. Can you believe it? That's how poor I was back in the day, it was an expensive degree and I got in more blah, blah, blah, ended up not doing it, did civil engineering instead. That was a big mistake, big mistake. It's not the same people. If you're curious, don't do civil engineering thinking it's similar to architecture. But I have this idea where you would go into a corporate office for special events and occasions for fortnightly or monthly powows, where it would be important to see people face to face still and have that physicality of not only meeting people, but possibly also seeing a sketch or a document or a blueprint or something of a physical nature.

Renata: You know, if you're, you know, let's say in construction and you need to see, how a building will turn out and you have that group, the group interaction, and the ideation that comes from being in the same room is still important. But I imagine as I have seen, it's not new, I've seen in some corporations, a big screen on the side, you know, where people from countries, usually this was done for country or different

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

subsidiary. So if you were in San Francisco, but you had an office in Houston and in an office in Beijing, you know, people could join that Powow. And it was a very big screen so that lots of different people in different countries could join and observe or interact. So I imagined that that could be a possibility as well. And ironically, and I won't say the name of this organisation that had this amazing big screen, even though it had all this high tech screen and an opportunity of interacting with colleagues from all over the world, the presentations that they did had to be paper presentations with something very much like this. No PowerPoints were allowed.

Renata: And I thought that that was really interesting and that it was, there was all of this research behind it, you know, to kind of slow down your brain to make you think, to make you do succinct presentations probably know, are aware of this rather than do you know, 20 slides and so on. So it was kind of that combination of old school, new school, right.

Su: There's something about that tactileness of, you know, drawing or writing or, you know, kind of thinking aloud on paper. I think that's interesting.

Renata: Yes. I visited Wharton business school many years ago. I'm not sure if it's still the same, but they had blackboards like, blackboards. The dean at the time, and these were brand new classrooms with absolutely super high tech technology wired in built in, and blackboards that would go up and down. They're really traditional. And it was to give that sense that you are in an Ivy League business school. This is tradition, but we have all the high tech, we need to talk to our colleagues in other, you know, Wharton have some other areas. I think it has a San Francisco Bay's and some, Asia schools as well. And they were all recorded and all of that. So they had all of that, but they would still do the Blackboard. And I thought that was brilliant. But one of the things that I wanted to ask you, well, let's start with that. Do you see that those new office spaces having that transition to more of a collaborative work environment rather than hot desking?

Su: So if we stopped and kind of think about work activities. You know, you can kind of think about sort of routine or static activities versus more unplanned or dynamic activities if you like. And you know, what we're seeing is that the routine and static kinds of activities, whether they are independent or collaborative can be performed anywhere, you know, so it's established routines, it's kind of individual focus, it's regular coordination group checking, sort of general planned, you know, regular types of things. And in fact, you know, with our survey where we've kind of discovered that a lot of people are surprised at how productive they were able to be at home, but you know, when they're thinking about productivity, they're also thinking about their tasks, if you like, but the other sorts of activities in the dynamics space, both independent and collaborative can be better enabled by kind of physical space.

Su: So it's that thing around serendipity or kind of bump factor or it's learning opportunities, you know, over hearing someone do something or say something, you know, and that's particularly important for graduates I think, you know, their ability to get that sort of tacit knowledge, get the instant mentoring from, just, you

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

know, observing or participating in ad hoc activities. But then, you know, to your point before that the kind of creative and complex collaborations, the cross fertilisation required, you know, to solve the kind of big wicked problems of the world, that kind of fast, you know, speed of decision making those kinds of activities. Also, I think, you know, that physical coming together has a, an enormous part of play. And I think, you know, they're the sorts of activities that are going to be absolutely needed in our future. You know, you were talking about volatile and certain ambiguous before, and it's those kinds of challenges that we're going to need, you know, they can't be solved on your own, you know, in your bedroom, they're challenges that require lots of diverse people coming together to really kind of, you know, think bigger around how to solve those things.

Renata: Have you already been engaged by clients to consider new workspaces or redesign, readjust what is already there?

Su: Were certainly talking to a number of clients or, you know, clients that we've had around these topics. I think it's really the beginning of those conversations. There's still an enormous amount of uncertainty around, you know, the timeframe for COVID, you know, how long are we going to be in this sort of lockdown period? How deep is the recession going to be? And certainly I think a lot of property teams are very focused on the here and now. And so getting people back to the workplace, being concerned about, you know, the confidence to return, hygiene, safety, you know, all of those kinds of, you know, kind of more short term things, but, you know, critically important to ensure the safety of staff. So I think there's probably a bit of a time lag perhaps in all of that. I mean, I think the majority of our projects on at the moment are a kind of projects in train where, you know, where we're helping people move into new space and adjust it as they go, if you like. So it's a very interesting time where you've got to be very agile in terms of the external stuff that's happening and the response to that.

Renata: Su thinking about the spaces that we work together, which are very sort of standard open plan office spaces, you know, done under very standard by the book sort of best practises, would they be workplaces that people could go to right now? Or are they, are those desks that would be too close together too, for people to work? I don't know, because I don't know how new South Wales is operating compared to Melbourne completely shut down. And I don't know how other offices are actually operating.

Su: Yeah, I think most, I mean, most workplaces in Australia are not so dense in terms of the, safe work guidelines, there may be some instances where you might need to close off spaces or certainly have less people in meeting rooms and things like that in order to meet those guidelines. So I think that's absolutely a case by case basis. And, you know, there is a lot of work on assessing existing floor plans for that, for that kind of return. But I think the rate of returning employees too is fairly low. I think one of the things that's certainly happening from contact tracing perspective is that people are being allocated desks for a certain period of time, either on a booking system or, you know, just so that people know where they are. And there's not a huge amount of mobility, obviously within an office at the moment because of

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

the protocols, hygiene protocols. So I think that we're in a sort of a bit of a false situation at the moment, but you know, again, don't know how long that might last.

Renata: Yeah. And if you are an employee and you were, what are the things you should be looking at if you're concerned about your workplace? So people don't want to be, you know, overly critical, but they also need to protect their own health and safety. Right. So what would be warning signs for a worker, a corporate, you know, white collar worker working in an office if they are concerned about their workplace?

Su: Well, you know, hopefully the organizations that they work for are sticking to the safe work guidelines and that they do have, you know, the health and wellbeing of their employees' front of mind. I think the things to watch out for perhaps is just, it's probably less about the workplace itself, because I think most workplaces, you know, as long as you're not moving a lot around and you're keeping to all of the various protocols, like physical distancing, et cetera. So if you're doing that in the workplace I think you're probably fine, I think the tricky things are about getting to the workplace. So, you know, it's all of the kind of public transport concerns perhaps, and then getting people in lifts up to buildings. So it's kind of public area of peace, but that's all about the, you know, there are already protocols in place for physical distancing or, you know, clear regulations around the number of people you can have in a space, all of those things. And then of course, you know, the other overlays, the washing hands, sanitizer, that sort of stuff, which I think, you know, it's, it's fairly, it's been fairly established now from a community perspective. So I think, you know, all of those things, you know, in play, which we've been doing for some time now.

Renata: Su, if people are at home and they're struggling to find the energy motivation to do, not the static activities that you mentioned before, I'm with you there, that it's easy to get, just, you know, be very productive, doing your laundry list of little things to do, but when it comes to starting a new project or getting the creativity and innovation that you need to kick start, you know, something quite new, it's hard to do it when you're alone in the house, isn't it? What do you have you thought of that? And can you give some tips and ideas for those of us who are stuck at home and finding it hard to get that productivity going?

Su: Yeah, I think, I mean, certainly collaborative technology has come a long way, so there are absolutely productive ways to work with people, you know, digitally or virtually if you like. And we think, you know, that's going to improve exponentially over the next, you know, while. So I think, you know, when we began the lockdown journey, you know, even the, the fact that zoom is now a household name, you know, so it's zoom is a verb, is exactly correct. So, you know, once upon a time you still, you know, you have lots of people using zoom, but you know, the whole nature of automatic video, as opposed to just voice the fact that, you know, zoom has become a verb, tells you about the acceleration of the uptake of all of these sorts of technologies, but, you know, when it comes to kind of brainstorming or creating things together where you're missing your white board. I mean, again, there are lots of great tools that you can use, you know, in the last week I've used mural, I've used Miro, but there are plenty of those kinds of tools as well. And I think, you know,

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

organisations that develop those kinds of tools, are accelerating that development as well. So, you know, you can just think about, you know, the continuous upgrades in teams and zoom, you know, just in the last kind of three months, I think that's obviously great opportunity for technology development.

Renata: So is that part of your consulting work as well to support companies with that physical space, but also consider remote work and other leading and managing remotely?

Su: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, we think the future is going to absolutely be that blended workplace. So not just thinking about, you know, your office is in building, you know, or not thinking about your workplaces, that building with your organisation sign on the top of it. But I think the, the other thing that's going to come out of this is organisations demanding flexibility in their property leases because, you know, signing up for a 10 year lease in this kind of climate is very difficult. You know, you don't know whether you're going to grow or shrink or, you know, what your workforce might look like, or even what your product offering might look like at this point in time. So I think the nature of flexibility and all that entails is going to be really important. We think that there's going to be a demand for a real mix of, you know, obviously a component of that sort of headquartered office, you know, which really deals with that expression of culture and brand reinforcement and all those kinds of things, you know, the centre of activity for that organisation, but also you might get, you know, kind of flexible satellite offices that are a little bit more short term, you might have on demand space that you can, you can just kind of jump into if you need a quick space, I suppose, you know, co-working type spaces or, you know, Texas has a product called Dex this place, for example, that can, you know, fulfil those kinds of on demand needs.

Su: And then of course the at home or remote types of spaces that I think people will want to work in some of the time. We thought about that as a, a kind of ecosystem of different kinds of spaces, all underpinned by a consistency of experience and the technology that connects all of those, then the outcome is this sort of blended workplace environment. And we think that, that, you know, that's going to meet the objectives from a sort of organisation, agility and resilience perspective. It's going to meet the needs of employees around their own preferences and wellbeing

Renata: That I love that. Do you think that that allows employees to be based in rural areas overseas, interstate, do you see that as a possibility? Yesterday, I spoke to a potential client and she's in regional New South Wales and previously she worked with a very high profile organisation, in, you know, based in a major metropolitan area. And she moved to regional New South Wales before covid. And I said, Oh, you're trend-setting. And, but she's having trouble finding work. That's why contacted me. But my advice to her was to stick to her plan. I think that there is a potential there for her to find opportunities locally, but possibly also locally as well.

Su: I hope so. I mean, I think for organisations, obviously that absolutely opens up your talent pool, you know, so if you're looking for the best talent, not just looking in the city that your, you know, that you're operating in. So, you know, ideally, I mean,

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

that's certainly a dream I have, you know, to operate in a predominantly remote way so that you can travel. You can, you know, move around and almost be nomadic and still be plugged into a, a sort of central community of people that you work with.

Renata: I'll be Frank. This is the reason why I decided to open my own business because at the time a year ago, a year and a bit ago, I didn't think it was possible to have a corporate job and work remotely. And I have family overseas and my parents are getting older and I thought I need to have my own business. Otherwise I won't be able to support them. And I opened my business so that I could work from their home or from my home or, and so on. But now that that I think about it, maybe I stepped out of the corporate world too soon because I, you know, there could be an opportunity for corporate professionals to remain in the corporate sector and have work flexibility as I want to have.

Su: Well I think, you know, more and more people do want that kind of flexibility, you know, perhaps it's also a lot related to life stage. So, you know, you definitely see a desire of graduates, you know, wanting to come together physically to learn, to connect, to absolutely immerse themselves with the community. But, you know, I think as people, you know, and I am generalising of course, but, you know, as people get older, you know, perhaps they've got other concerns, you know, children, all the parents, you, other things that they want to explore, then, you know, the nature of flexibility is certainly powerful. I think that's also very true of for women, you know, not that I necessarily want to get into the gender debate, but I think the nature of beginning a job and kind of climbing the corporate ladder and having a job for life, you know, is very rare these days.

Renata: That's right. Su I don't know if this is your area, so feel free to opt out of this question, but I have been thinking a lot about, because you know, my previous roles, like if I was head of governance right now, I would be freaking out, with all the risk management that took place as you have people working from home, right.

Su: Mm yeah. I think it is a risk, and one that is absolutely being addressed because if you know, your employer is responsible for you at work, wherever that is, you know, the way I think most organisations are addressing that risk is through a sort of ergonomic check, you know, for people to do around their work and their work environment at home. It's also, you know, the level of training around, you know, how to operate in an ergonomic manner, are organisations providing the correct technology and potentially furniture or some kind of allowance. So I think organisations are kind of doing everything they can to ensure that there's safety and the safety protocols are met. But, you know, I mean, I think there's sort of some grey areas there. You know, if you trip over the dog and it's 10 o'clock in the morning, you know what happens. So I think there's definitely a bit of a, you know, kind of casework perhaps that will arise out of all of this. Definitely an area to consider. Yeah.

Renata: Now final question, unless you want to address something else Su. But I was also thinking about, and this is a book I haven't read in two decades, but I remember loving this book and really, I think it was one of the best reads and probably one of

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

the books that really shaped me as a professional. And it's Richard Sennett. Are you familiar with Richard Sennett, the sociologist, but really interested in architecture. And he wrote a book in the seventies, I think it was. And I'm trying to remember the exact title cause I read it in Portuguese and it's, I think The Fall of the Private Man, the fall of the private man, are you trying to find out?

Su: Yeah, I am. The Fall of Public Man.

Renata: The Fall of the Public Man, but it's really this idea that you don't have, you know, it's about public life and private life, but also this idea of the, disintegration of public space. And I remember little bits of the book, you know, how you would go to a new, new built, and it was a park and the communal areas were really not about building a community. So the big key facing away from each other around the tree. So you actually don't get to see and, you know, shopping malls, becoming places of shopping and sale and not really, and not community. It can hardly find a place to sit anywhere. I was at Southland yesterday because it was the day before locked down, sorry, Wednesday, day before locked down, trying to organise a few things with Telstra and they have to make you wait outside. You can't wait inside anymore. Guess what? No place to sit for 45 minutes. And guess what I did. And this is why I thought Richard Sennett, I went shopping because there was nothing else to do.

Renata: I needed money, lots of goodies and, because I just couldn't stay still and the shops were open and I'm like, Oh, I might as well just walk in and see things. And I ended up shopping because you can't sit down. And, I wonder what COVID will do to cities like Melbourne. I think the city of Melbourne is really a good example during this stage for lockdown of what can go wrong with a metropolitan area, because it has such a great atmosphere when everything's going well. Right. But now it is ghost town and my friends that have moved to city of Melbourne because they loved the cosmopolitan lifestyle. Now everything is shut down and it's not.

Su: I think that's the very tricky thing about a health pandemic is that, you know, the, the thing to, or the, the pull of public spaces or gathering spaces. So, you know, and I would include the office as part of that is all about bringing people together. So, you know, that's what physical space does and that's what community spaces, you know, the best kinds of community spaces should do. But you know, the trouble with the health pandemic is it's exactly not what, you know, we be doing because that's, you know, that's what viruses want us to do. So I think that's, that's where you get, an incredible sort of tricky dilemma because the thing we want to do most is, is actually the thing that's the most kind of dangerous, I suppose. So, you know, I guess it's fingers crossed for the medical research, you know, discipline with the amazing work that they're doing to, you know, to find a vaccine or to help us address this so that we can kind of get back to being human again, if you like.

Renata: Yeah. So basically not back to the old normal, but back to being human is what we should aim for because humanity requires socialisation and you will miss that if we don't have it, we need to find ways of having the technology blend with the face to face physical interaction, as you mentioned before, I like that word, the blended

The Job Hunting Podcast

[45. The future of offices and teamwork - with workplace strategist Su Lim](#)

interactions is important. What's keeping you awake at night that worries you about the workplace and the type of work that you do?

Su: I think, you know, the missed opportunity, perhaps, you know, so if I thought about that from a, you know, from a professional perspective, you know, one of the, risks perhaps is that people are so keen to, you know, to return that they don't use this as an opportunity to rethink. And then I guess the other sort of massive risk is the depth of an economic downturn. You know, the depth of a recession, resulting in a, you know, a spotlight on cost savings predominantly at the expense of people.

Renata: Yeah. Good one Su, anything else you'd like to share with the podcast listeners before we close shop?

Su: Only to say stay well and stay safe.

Renata: Thank you.

Renata: I hope you enjoyed the chat with Su Lim. I will have in the episode show notes, the Richard Sennett link to his book. I think it's a great read. If you're interested, there are several other books from Richard Sennett that you might enjoy reading as well, but this one in particular is a great one. And if you Google his name, you will find lots of, as I did after the podcast, you will find lots of articles of Sennett's recent conversations and thoughts and ideas about urban living and urban planning post COVID. So he's been quite active talking about it recently. Good for him. And it might give you some further ideas as well. I hope you've been well if you're in between jobs, I think that this is a great conversation that you've just listened to, to prepare yourself for your upcoming job. As you walk into an office space that looks potentially different from what it did, let's say end of last year, if you've been out of work for some time. I will also including my newsletter this week, some articles that I have been reading, as I said before, about how, you know, offices of the future will look like the potential changes to workplaces and arrangements, and opportunities for you to work remotely and negotiate as you are walking into new jobs negotiate so that you can continue to work from home if that's what you want.

Renata: And so if you have subscribed to my newsletter, check your inbox. If you haven't subscribed to my newsletter yet, what are you waiting for? Please do. There will be a link for you to subscribe on the episode show notes. Bye for now, and check again next week, we will have Alex Naoumidis who is the cofounder of mindset health, and we will be talking about wellbeing and about his start-up. So bye for now. And don't forget to subscribe wherever you found this so that you can watch the next episode coming up in a week's time.