

The Job Hunting Podcast

[51. Job hunting and career progression for the trans, gender diverse, and nonbinary professionals - with Jacob Thomas.](#)

Renata: Jacob Thomas is a human rights activist, and one of Australia's most prominent leaders in sexual orientation and gender identity. I invited Jacob to be a guest on the podcast so that they could help me unpack some of the many questions that I have about how employers, recruiters and coaches can better support trans, gender diverse, and non-binary professionals. And Jacob did not disappoint. This is a much needed discussion that I hope all my listeners will be interested in for their personal and professional development. Some of the topics of our conversation include choosing pronouns, employers and organisations looking for quick wins on pink dollar, the recruitment of queer employees to reach diversity markers, issues of dress codes, conscious and unconscious bias, and Jacob's personal experience in changing the gender marker with their employer, and much, much more. Jacob and I are friends so for the first 10 minutes or so there's a bit of banter where at least twice I cried with laughter.

Renata: So if you want to see us having fun and then discussing some serious issues, you can go to our YouTube channel where most of my podcast interviews are filmed and recorded and they're there. So you can join us in video format if you prefer. I will have a link in the show notes and on the podcast website for you. They have this effect on me, and I assume on many people as well. When I'm with Jacob, it makes me feel happy, energized, young, and I really enjoy spending time with them. Jacob's very impressive and complete bio is in the episode show notes, or on the podcast website, but here's a little bit about them that you should know. Jacob is one of the most talented, hardworking, and influential people that I know considering it was my job at one stage to help select the most talented Australians for a very prestigious programme for which I was the CEO.

Renata: You can bet your bottom dollar that I know what I'm talking about. What impresses me about them is that every bit of their brain, their intellect and their creativity, is used for the betterment of society and the betterment of their community. There's a quote that I live by, which I think describes Jacob very well, "adopt as your fundamental creed, that you will equip yourself for life, not solely for your own benefit, but for the benefit of the whole community". This is John Monash, by the way, an Australian senior leader and hero. With that sentiment, they have been advising leaders around the world and in Australia from royalty to CEOs, prime ministers and presidents. Jacob is the recipient of the Queen's young leader award recognising their work suicide prevention here in Australia. Jacob was previously the coordinator of the Commonwealth youth gender and equality network and has represented the network at international levels, such as the UN women's commission on status of women and the ECOSOC youth forum in New York. Jacob is close to the Duke and Duchess of Sussex and they support many of their causes.

Renata: It's a lot, you should read the bio on the episode show notes. But here's an example of Jacob's work, you know, that really impresses me, in 2018, they were the program leader for the youth programme of the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in London. This means that Jacob helped put together the agenda and programme for discussion representing over 1 billion people around the world, such an amazing responsibility, not only they are talented speaker and facilitator of

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meetings and discussions, but they're also a great writer and I'm going to link below Jacob's recent publication, which is a chapter in the encyclopaedia for the United Nations, sustainable development goals. Then there's Jacob, you know, day job as part of the Monash work Alliance, it's an important Alliance between two universities in two different continents coming together to collaborate on research and education. And they're also super creative, making the most gorgeous outfits for their friends and for themselves and finding time to produce and perform in shows here in Melbourne. A warning before we begin, we use our adult language at times, not a lot, but if you have little ones around you, you may want to put your headphones on now. Enjoy the chat. I hope it inspires you. It marks this podcasts one year anniversary, and it's a really exciting time for us. There's a lot more great interviews to come. So remember to subscribe, to follow, sign up for the newsletter and keep in touch bye for now. Enjoy the chat.

Jacob: Hello!

Renata: Hello! Big hug. I want to hug you.

Jacob: So much, just so much. I miss human touch so much.

Renata: I know. I'm so sorry. When will we be able to hug again? Soon.

Jacob: Soon.

Renata: You reckon?

Jacob: I'm hopeful. I'm always hopeful.

Renata: Yes. Let's do this. How are you?

Jacob: I'm good, actually. Yeah, it's nice. And I'm like, I've moved house.

Jacob: Because I moved, um, like a month ago or so now even a little bit longer, maybe five weeks. Um, and like living by myself for the first time, which is glorious. And it's just like, like you're in my sewing room at the moment, which is why I've got a flag to colour this, all the drag wigs and everything. That's just out behind me.

Renata: But we want to see the drag wigs.

Jacob: No the lighting's not good. That's the only issue. And most of them, like, they're not styled. They're just like, I've done the show and I've just gone. I'm done with this.

Renata: Not like Moira Rose.

Jacob: That they're definitely not on the wall, they're not hung up, but just, they don't care if they take on smoke. That's where the, we're the absolute opposite of Moira Rose like always. It's what it is. But, um, yeah, except for my attitude towards life. So, you know, it's just, it's glorious. Like it's this beautiful, like little warehouse kind of apartment, like exposed pipes and everything like floor boards. Um, like I've built a kitchen Island that can now move around. So I've got like my past machines, like all of my beautiful pastel bowls and everything. It's just the

Renata: Is it on Instagram? Should I be, should I be stalking you on Instagram?

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- Jacob: I'm surprised you don't stalk me more on Instagram, how dare you. If you'd like to stroke me on Instagram, Jacob James Thomas, great recorded.
- Renata: I shall add the handle so we can see your kitchen island.
- Jacob: But, I mean, it's mostly just like, it's mostly just in the stories, so that's it. So you have to like get through all the political crap, and then maybe you'll see some cute decor. How are you though? How were things?
- Renata: I'm okay. I'm in my pink office as you can see.
- Jacob: We love.
- Renata: I, you know, we are both, I suppose one of the, the lucky ones, you know, we have jobs. We have a place to stay. We are doing okay. We haven't been sick. Um, I'm going to the doctor's today. I have been meaning to go for a while, but because I have something in my eye, ah, it's uh, it's been bothering me. I have this every spring, you know, my, I have blepharitis, which is something that old women and newborns have in common. I don't know if you know this it's too much information.
- Jacob: No, I've heard of it. I've heard of it. My mum used to work in aged care. I've heard of this one.
- Renata: I'm at that age.
- Jacob: That wasn't the implication. But if you choose to take that on and personalise it, you're welcome to do so Renata. You do you.
- Renata: It's so sad. Oh gosh. But it's bothering me too much. Usually I can manage it, but now it's just like, I have sand in my left eye and I'm like, Oh, I need to see someone. But other than that, I am so good here. I'm near the beach. So, you know, I can at least walk and see ocean and water, but I'm starting, I'm starting now. It's been awhile. Now. I miss people that I even don't like, that's how...
- Jacob: I miss drama. Like, that's kind of what I'm missing.
- Renata: I miss people, I miss drama. I miss, um, interaction. And there are parts of my brain. I had, um, a podcast episode conversation with a lady who I met at Monash, by the way. And she was saying, there are some things that you can do at work really well, you know? And it's better done at work. We should have been doing them at work. Sorry at home, you do them at home. You can do them really well. There are other things that it's really hard to get done at home. Yeah. You know, ideation, collaboration, anything that uses your creativity and it's teamwork and it's implementation work. It's really hard. So there are parts of my business. They're just, you know, struggling to go forward.
- Jacob: I feel that I felt quite validated when, um, that New York times article came out weeks ago now, but it was talking about emotional muscular atrophy. So, um, as someone who actually has muscular atrophy, which I only found out earlier this year, which makes more sense, um, which is why I've gotten new exercise where

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you tend to focus on my core is that's cute. So I'm in constant physical pain now, not just emotional PTSD, but they made a blooper reel. This is what we need.

Renata: I knew this would be fun.

Jacob: You're welcome. You're so welcome. I will flag, I do have a meeting at 1:45, but fuck it. It's fine. But it was interesting. It's just to like in the same way that if you don't use your physical muscles, you know, consistently, then similarly with like your emotional and brain-based kind of, interactions, you know, so things like empathy and compassion, for example, like meaningful connection with people, you know, vulnerabilities all these, all these really.

Jacob: Um, I think what we're trying to sort of understand a little bit more now is so like your core human behaviours. Um, and now, and it's almost essential, human behaviours are kind of people quite worried about those because we're not quite sure what's going to go on. The big focus, I think this is in the article as well, was a concern around, just that happening to children because they're not in school, but we are seeing this for adults who are missing their workplaces, who are missing their families, their communities, their meaningful connections, whoever it is that those are built for those people assumably across multiple platforms, but it is. Yeah. It kind of, I can appreciate that now.

Renata: I know why you love that article so much.

Jacob: Because it validates me?

Renata: Those are the muscles you've been working on all your life, right? Absolutely. Yeah. That gym my friend you have the, you know, platinum membership to that gym.

Jacob: Yeah. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Renata: I don't know about the other gym.

Jacob: Darling, we're not even at a gym. Like I'm literally just in my lounge room and playing like Ring Fit on the Nintendo switch, which I can say like, and this is not a paid promotion, but if anyone hates exercising, but wants like, fuck, I'm just trying to focus on my flexibility and getting that back because they miss it. Because I can't dance and I can't do dragon. And when you're as much except for on a zoom screen, but, um, it's just good to just sort of like it's light, it's easy. It's not body shaming, which is sign on. Like, it doesn't tell you that like, Oh, you're fat. So, you know, fuck you and stuff. Just kind of nice and easy and it's gamified and I'm very competitive. So it's great.

Renata: So what is it again? Repeat?

Jacob: It's called the Ring Fit on the Nintendo switch.

Renata: I don't have a Nintendo.

Jacob: Oh go on and get a Nintendo switch Renata. I love them.

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- Renata: Is it going to be my COVID big purchase, you reckon? Because I bought a calming blanket early on.
- Jacob: Oh good choice.
- Renata: I had to return it. My husband absolutely hated it. And I bought the King size. I'm like, I'm not going to be under this thing by all by myself, you have to join me. It was like 60 kilos worth of calming. Like it was so huge. And I live in a three story town house. So we had to get this huge box of a King size blanket all the way up. Got it out of the box. I bought it baby pink. And he already said, what the hell? And then we both got under it and it, a second later he said, absolutely not. And I was hooked. I loved it. And I slept like a baby for 12 hours and it literally crushed my bones. I could not walk the next day. It was too heavy for just one person.
- Jacob: Yes it is. That is that's. Um, that's not the kind of strength training we're after.
- Renata: No you're suppose, I read the instructions later. You're supposed to take it easy. You're supposed to like do 10 minutes, but once I was down, like I had taken like a warm shower. I was in there, you know, with all my COVID anxiety back in April. And then the next day I was soar. I couldn't move.
- Jacob: Yeah. So, you know, yeah. Um, get a switch. Go play some pokemon or some super Mario.
- Renata: Let me finish telling the story. I have to return the bloody thing and pay. And it was so expensive. Anyway...
- Jacob: Who is she? Who's Renata Bernarde that's the question. This is it, just who is she?
- Renata: This podcast is supposed to get me clients not scare them away.
- Jacob: It's fine. It shows that you're, you know, just as vulnerable as the rest of us. And you know, we're just, we're all just working through things, you know, everybody's got their own imperfections. Everyone's learning. It's just what it is.
- Renata: And I love to dance. I shall get my Nintendo. That will be my COVID purchase.
- Jacob: Hmm, good. There we go. We stand good choice.
- Renata: We are here to talk about serious matters of job hunting, and career advancement for queer people.
- Jacob: Yeah. It's a journey.
- Renata: It is a journey, job hunting whilst queer. I'm assuming not easy. I want to learn everything from you because as a straight woman, I have not experienced anything like it, but you know, I love to learn. I'm a terrible learner. I learn very slowly as you know with my pronouns.
- Jacob: It's okay. That's all good. There you go.
- Renata: But I'm getting there. I get there in the end. Yeah.

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- Jacob: Exactly. I mean it's like learning is... learning should be a journey. It's just like...
- Renata: Yeah. I'm not ashamed of it.
- Jacob: Exactly good. And nor should you be. I think it's like, you know, we, this is the thing, right? It's like something on, um, we use pronouns as an example is you're, you're, you're, there's so much going on, uh, you know, in our brains. Right. You know, our brains are brilliant organs, their phenomenal. I think my favourite sort of an assessment of a brain is either it's the smartest organ in the human body or it's the least smart because either it's just so like, this is how the world works. This is how we're going to interpret it. And that's great. Or it's just so like, I have no idea what I'm doing. So do you know what? Let's just back pain. Just got to throw that in there. You need me.
- Jacob: That's what it is. But I think it's like your ego processing, literally millions of pieces of stimuli every second and your brain is trying to make sense of things. And yeah, it's essentially, it's tried to already...I shouldn't use 'essential', but you know, essentially your brain's already worked out, you know, English, it's already worked out pronouns. It's already worked out associations between people and objects and, you know, nouns and verbs and adjectives and you know, pronouns in this case as well. And so when you have to change the association, it takes time. That's what it is. And I think, you know, to be accountable, you have to put the effort in, that's a big thing about being an active ally to any community is you have to constantly put the effort in.
- Renata: And I also think you need to listen to it a lot. And what I love about what's happening these days is that it's, you can watch TV shows where people are talking with the right pronouns and you're listening to it over and over again. And it's wonderful to have that because then it's easier for me to learn and assimilate.
- Jacob: Absolutely, absolutely so because that means it's not just on you. It's nice. It's like, I, I take it as, like I learned French at the start of my university journey. Um, and I decided to take it up literally like a week and a half ago again. And so re-instil it. And I was just like, Oh, I'm kind of struggling with this, you know, I'm using Duo-lingo. But then I was like, why did it work so well the first time? And I was like, Oh, because I was watching a lot of French movies, I was watching a lot of French cinema. Um, I was understanding, you know, the casualized approach to language, not just, you know, a supermodel and everything as well. So it was kind of, it was better. And so I'm just like, I'm going to watch Emily this weekend. Cause it's easy. It's a gorgeous film. Um, I'm just like, Oh, I can actually watch it and appreciate it again. And so...
- Renata: Oh I'm going to send you a bunch of stuff to see like the Shahad budget early movies are so wonderful. And do you like La Bureau?
- Jacob: I do yeah.
- Renata: How wonderful is La Bureau? And there's one that I love, uh, I don't know that I can pronounce it properly because my French isn't good. It's 10%. These days percent, that 10% there are a bunch of, um, there are a bunch of agents for very famous

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actors and singers and creatives in Paris and they get 10%. So they're agents and you have all these cameos of real superstars that come into the show. Yeah, it's awesome. It's I think it's on Netflix. I watched it on SBS of course, but I think pretty sure it was on SBS and now it's on Netflix. You can see it on Netflix.

Jacob: Okay, great. There we go. I'll probably watch it on SBS, but that's phenomenal. That's great. Thank you. Appreciate the recommendation. See were all learning.

Renata: Yes. Um, so coming back, if we're going to go round about coming back to, uh, pronouns are important. Um, as you know, I've had a transgender client, a client going through a transition. I think that client was instrumental in me kind of being hyper aware of opportunities for people to be who they want to be. That client was very lucky that they were very successful, and very confident, and had their own business, whereas others who are employed have to play by all the games and rule books and go through selection panels and recruitment processes and, checks, you know, checks, referrals. And I was reading, I don't know if you had a chance to look at my research that I've been doing, you know, just things like doing referral checks, if somebody has had a main change. Yeah. All of those things that can be so confusing and uh, for the person coming in and for the employers as well. So I'm always, I know that you, you have that empathy as well and you've counselled people on both sides. And I want to start by asking you, what are the most common issues that job hunters would face?

Jacob: Yeah. It's...

Renata: It's such a diverse community. I don't even know that you have common issues, but you know, tell me.

Jacob: Yeah. I mean, and thank you for acknowledging that. I think it's like, you know I can speak from my experience and the experiences that have been documented. Um, but I want to make sure that anyone listening to this, which I hope is everyone. Don't take this as like a definitive list either. I think it's without, with no particular order, there are definitely issues as you've highlighted there about, your, anything from like the recruitment process, you know, do you have like an equity stance as an organisation, for example, that I look at and just sort of go, okay, cool. I'm welcomed there. Um, you know, do you actively promote to your organisation, for example, through, I'm using queer as an umbrella term here, but you know, queer circles, for example, you know, do they, are you on the job hunt for us because we're good at the job or you opt for us because we look like a diversity marker.

Jacob: And we're all very aware of that these days, you know, we can smell the pink dollar from a mile away. And for anyone who doesn't know what the pink dollar is that refers to, you know, a profiteering, financial and commercial profiteering off of the queer gays, if you will. So it's basically, if it looks like queer people, predominantly gay white men will buy your product, then, you know, it's a pink dollar. It just sells in that particular way. And generally having, you know, queer people as queer, as faces of businesses and products and everything as well indicates that, you know, we're queer friendly, but it's, then the question for us is like, but what do you do to

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support our community? Because all we're doing is that most of us are quite poor underemployed.

Jacob: So why are we trying to buy your product? What's the point? So there's some interesting things with that. I think when it comes to you know, interview processes or anything like that, it's like, what do I wear? You know, it's just like for me is like, I'm a, like I'm a non-binary person, but you know, I have facial hair, this is my voice. So some people would probably call it masculine. I wouldn't, but yeah, some people might, but it's like, you're I always think about of just like, do I dress, you know, do I dress you know fancy? Do I dress you know a bit what I would say queer, I find buoyant or, you know, do I wear my heels, do I check my nails on? Yeah. Do I go and drag? No, that's generally my big no, but you know,

Renata: That's where you draw the line?

Jacob: These brows are very hard to put down Renata, very hard to cover it and they take a good 30mins at least, but it is, you know, these questions of, you know, when I go in to an interview, which I haven't done for a while now, thankfully I would say.

Renata: Very well employed by the way.

Jacob: Very well employed, thankfully very, very much going to acknowledge that privilege, especially in this current times.

Jacob: Um, you know, it's just sort of like, am I going to get judged? You know, what is someone's unconscious bias towards me? What is the very conscious bias towards me? You know, what's going to be the go with that. Um, and then it's like, when you're in the workforce, it's like, I know for me, I do, um, I didn't have to, but I chose to change my gender marker with work. So I had an M gender marker for male. I wanted to change it to an X. But at that time, my employer didn't have a process in place. It was very arduous. It was, and because so many employees were dependent on state legislation or sometimes federal legislation as well here in Australia, in Victoria, more specifically. And so there was no like good process, if you will, there is no opportunity for what we refer to as self-determination, or self-affirmation, I know who I am.

Jacob: I just want to recognise that on a document instead. Only until last year did Trans people and gender diverse people have to be, you know, diagnosed with being gender dysphoric. Um, we had to have referral letters from GPs, from you know, social workers or endocrinologists. We had to have been medically transitioning for like six months minimum. I think it was don't quote me on that, but it was so expensive and so long a process, under the assumption that you were a permanent worker and not just on like a 12 week casual contract or like a 12 month exchange contract, you know, it's a lot of effort to go through to then take all that take, go through all of that, then go to birth certs and marriages, get a document changed over to then hand to your employer. So it was a really arduous process.

Jacob: I refuse to do any of it. Because for me, I have what we would call socially transitioned. I don't want to, or need to, for that matter, all trans people and gender

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diverse people have very different experiences. Um, you know, I'm very comfortable in my body. Not all of us hate our bodies. We're not born into the wrong bodies, so that's a good myth to kind of bust. Um, but for me it was just like, I just, these are my pronouns. This is how I'm going to, I'll dress like this every now and again, you know, I'm going to dress how I'm comfortable, whatever. Um, but I'm here to do the work. You know, we live in a capitalist society, so I need to work. So I love my job. So here's how it's going to roll. And we worked together. We were, I worked directly with our HR teams and worked on a new process that was not dependent on legislation, but can still refer to it comfortably. Um, it didn't supersede anything and it was, but it was just to make our lives a lot easier.

Renata: And that's available to other employees as well?

Jacob: All employees now. Yes.

Renata: Is that something that, you know, other organisations have also adopted?

Jacob: It was interesting when we were going through this process. I hope haven't not speaking out of turn with my employer. Um, is, yeah, it was, it was such an unknown space for so many of us. Um, and I know for myself, I try and I've learned through my many, many, I think nearly over a decade now years of advocacy, is that, you know, I needed to make sure that I was bringing the institution on side with this, you know, because, as painful as it can be, sometimes you do when more flies with honey than you do with vinegar. I wanted to be nice. Um, because again, please still employ me. But you know, there is that moment of saying, yeah, we wanted a reference, you know, and was there someone else already doing this? And it was quite hard to find comparable documents or comparable processes that were specific to a comparable institution and industry that was within the state, let alone within the country, that we could refer to and build a herb and maybe improve for ourselves, contextualise it.

Jacob: But, you know, I ended up pulling stuff from, I think it was even like Chille, from the United States, from Canada, from the UK, some stuff from New Zealand. Um, and I think there is a fairly sure there was a Pacific country that I pulled from as well. And just, I went, look, here's how other people are doing this within their own, you know, legislation within their own allowances. This is what they've done. And I was really glad that my employer chose to be ambitious and chose to be really brave and just all went, yeah, cool. Like let's change it. Absolutely. And so we kind of just moved through it, made it really easy. Got it adopted. I think it took maybe the hard work probably took about three months, but it was years of instilling and changing and bringing people on board and you know, just getting an understanding of why does this matter?

Jacob: You know, where if the, you know, for our population, if you just want to look at demographic, we're a very small percentage of Australian population when we identify, that's always going to be a little bit off. So, you know, the case against would be so like, well, there's not that many of you, so why put in the effort? And so not that my employee put that forward, I just wanted to paint a picture. That's very

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clear, but, um, yeah, we hear that. It's just like, Oh, it's such a small population. Why bother? And it's a thing of just like, well, we might be a small population now, but are we any less significant? You know, I still deserve the respect and the autonomy over my body and my life, and also I think this is a big thing for employers to keep in mind that you're lucky to have us, you know, because we're not just, again, we're not just diversity markets, but we come from phenomenal backgrounds.

Jacob: You know, we, you know, not everyone, again, we're all individuals and we happen to be in a shared community, but I think this is the important part to disrupt. And another myth is that we're all struggling with. We're not, you know, some of us are doing incredibly well, not everyone is. Um, and especially in a time like COVID, we're definitely a community that has lost a lot of our connection and opportunity, like a lot of other comparable communities. And then the intersections that come with that too. But it is, you know, we we've got conversations going on now where we just saw this week in Australia that numerous sporting codes finally changed their rules around trans inclusion. It's great because I was just like, we want the best athletes. So that's great. You know, there at no competitive advantage because of, you know, body parts or anything like that.

Jacob: But, you know, they're good because they're trained, you know, like I'm good at my work because I'm trained in it and I happen to be non-binary. It can be both things. And so, you know, this is the kind of, there's so much systemic change, emotional change, personal change that we need to do as humans as well, you know, I think anything that's tough is worth doing at the end of the day. If I had a rule book for everyone to adopt, I would give it to you straight away, but I don't, but if you want help reach out.

Renata: Yes. I guess, you know, we're all I feel like, every day it seems, but every few months things go leaps and bounds. Don't you feel? Like it's our understanding, but it also the range of responses and levels of education that people have out there is very varied. You know, you might have, for example, an organisation or a broker, let's say a recruitment agency, that's very comfortable with non-binary people, with people going through transition because of their own personal experience, because they have friends that have, you know, they have vicariously learned through their social interactions with others or because of their own, whatever they know. And then you go through another experience it's traumatic because it's a very conservative organisation, or it's a very conservative recruitment agency. So it's almost like you really, as a candidate wouldn't know what you would get.

Jacob: Absolutely.

Renata: And also because, and this is just me sort of guessing, and I, you know, if you do this, I know I'm in the right track. When I was doing my research to help my client back then, that was last year. I did a lot of research with US stuff because in Australia there was none. And, I found that with us being more open, a lot of older guys were transitioning from very conservative professions, legal profession, in their forties and fifties that have now decided, 'okay, this has never been who I am, and I want to be who I am from now on'. And, that is something that I think is I'd love to help. And

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I'd love to understand how we can help, you know, as somebody who enjoys doing career change and career coaching and job hunting with clients. That's tough mate. That's not easy.

Jacob: No, it's not. I think too is to sort of jump on that point...

Renata: But there are people just, just to say, there are people in America that are doing that, specialising and helping people advance their careers during transition.

Jacob: Absolutely. And it's, we have to do what we call code switching a lot, as queer people. More broadly is, and that can be anything from like, you know, gay and bisexual men, for example, who assist gender, who might be campy or a bit effeminate, they have to quote unquote mask up at work because there was a great, a couple of studies that came out from the UK, I think a few years ago now that showed indicatively that, effeminate men and, you know, more masculine Butch, queer women don't get promoted because they're not seen as leaders. They're not seen as traditional leaders because they don't have that, you know, they're too this, or they're not enough of that. And so you're, there's, it's kind of, I don't want to just single out, you know, the T and the NB within the acronym, but it is a tough thing its like, you know, I know that I have felt the pressure for a number of years and, you know, I've been in, you know, UN spaces, Commonwealth spaces. I've worked with a bunch of presidents and prime ministers all over the world.

Renata: You've met the queen!

Jacob: I've received a human rights award from her majesty the queen. That's exactly it and good friends with Harry and Meghan. Um, I like to say, I don't think we're that close friends, but I like to start...

Renata: There's a photo of you and Meghan on your LinkedIn profile. I've seen that photo before, and she's looking at you with such love.

Jacob: Yes, yeah. We're very much on the same track with gender equality and the likes as well. So, yeah, she's a good egg. Um, I mean, I was really lucky to just a quick sidebar, really lucky in 2018 to work with a bunch of other young people who we met with Harry and Meghan at the Commonwealth youth forum, which I was the programmes officer for on the international task force. And we were able to get them to confirm their support for LGBTQ people. Um, I will say just LGBT is the Commonwealth terminology, which is a bit different to what we would do to in Australia typically, context is everything with language, always. You know, we got them to confirm that they supported it and it went everywhere. So now if you Google Jacob Thomas and Prince Harry, the Harpers Bazarre article comes up, the People Magazine article comes up. Um, yeah, the associated press looked after us. It was unheard of, it was unprecedented.

Renata: And still, and still, day to day, you know.

Jacob: It's still, it's still a really big struggle, you know, I know that I still try. And, because this is the thing it's like, I think for me, because I work with gender so much my academic work and my professional work. Um, and so many people don't think

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gender is a thing necessarily, or it's a, or it's an issue that we need to work around. I don't think gender is bad. I don't think anyone's, I don't think anyone should be saying, you know, that gender is bad, let's get rid of gender mirror. But I think what we're trying to understand is the associations that socialise us into these quite policed expectations sometimes, you know, it's just like, I have no issue with masculinity. I think masculinity is kind of attractive sometimes, but then I think also it can be a little bit terrifying, but then you know, I feel the same about the femininity.

Jacob: I feel about the same thing about like, you know, an agendered gender as well, where it's just so like, if it affects, this is the thing, if it's affecting our behaviour to make people uncomfortable and to feel intimidated and to feel, you know, shamed and to feel unloved and unwelcomed in spaces, then I'm going to have an issue with it. Is it gender's fault? No. Because I want people to have personal accountability to things, but is there something that sits around us that kind of informs what is considered correct? And I say that in quotations to be a correct approach, I'm often asked by strangers, thankfully, no one I work with closely. I'm just like, do you think that your femininity kind of gets in the way of your career progression? And I'll say no, because it's got me in a number of great places because no one expects an effeminate masculine presenting non-binary person to be smart or to be powerful.

Jacob: So I use that to my advantage all the time. I'm constantly underestimated. So it's why I'm really great in politics and government relations because people don't expect me to know what I'm talking about, but I had to work really hard to be overly good at something because that transphobia is there. It is constantly there. You know, if I, you know, I'm using, you know, the non-binary pride flag is my background on this zoom call at the moment because I want to be really clear about things is like, this is, this is a really important part of the community that I care about. And so if you want me to bring my whole self to work, I'm going to bring my whole self to work. It doesn't mean that I'm going to be, I'm going to be a bit facetious here, but it doesn't mean that I'm going to just be like talking about like anal sex in the tea room, you know, and just being so like, look at this great circuit party I went to on the weekend.

Jacob: Yes. Queen work, clack clack clack, you know, it's just like, yeah, I just need some basic things of just dignity and respect. That's it. And if you expect us to, here's a big gripe for me. I think I've gone on a slight tangent, but I think this is still really important. It's just like you know, I just, again I just want to be there to work. That's it, if you are only pulling me into meetings again, this hasn't happened for a while, thankfully, but, um, it stays with me. I'm very hesitant to work with some people because there's the expectation that I will be the queer in charge and that anything queer will just come to me and I'll just handle it. And I'll just, you know what, that is, everything credible, unnecessarily, unfairly high responsibility to put on someone. And we say this way, if people of colour in a lot of organisations that are white dominant we say this with love indigenous folk who were in a lot of, um, name an industry, you know, just speak on behalf of people.

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- Jacob: This is a women's orgs. We see this in, you know, uh, in places like men sheds and everything as well, you know, there's, it sits everywhere. And so it's just sort of thrust someone who is probably very smart, very across their industry, but is then also trying to navigate a systemic oppression or systemic oppressions, plural. Um, that's a lot of pressure to put on someone because they're not actually focusing on community care. You're not looking after them necessarily either. You're just saying, 'Hey, you probably deal with this every day. So go deal with the trauma.'
- Renata: And you mentioned, you know, it's not happening to you as much. It's because you've been with the same organisation for quite some time now as well. And I, you know, with people that are job hunting, if they get into an organisation and if that pink money was used and it's tokenistic, then there could be that expectation that they will be, you know?
- Jacob: Yeah. I think it's hard too, is that so many of us are like, I'm not a great example with this because I'm employed and I'm permanently employed. Um, so many people who are non-binary, trans, queer more broadly also have a lot of deep intersections with poverty that have deep intersections with mental health, you know, various other disabilities as well. So, you know, the opportunity to be full time employed might not actually be practical. It might also mean that, you know, it's, we don't have full employment or even, you know, good employment for quality, but also a lot of there's some interesting stats that are kind of coming out here and there, I kind of attribute one at the moment. So I do apologise, but that shows that queer people across the board are generally underemployed, which we're seeing with university graduates as well.
- Jacob: You know, we're seeing this with a number of different populations were underemployed or unemployed because were not getting hired for jobs, because we're, you know, just sort of like, yeah, cool. Like, you know, you can work in this retail job at all and they give you like one or two days a week and that's kind of it, but I'll put you out the back. You know? Um, or yeah, like, it's cool if you want to work here, but if you, but we just going to give you a role that no one has to really interact with you because we don't want to be known for that, like that. Some of the, those are some of the things that, you know, trans and non-binary, people have been told is if we can't see you, then it's fine.
- Renata: You know, you mentioned indigenous professionals. And I remember when I worked really closely with a big accounting firm to get more indigenous graduates into that organisation. And once it was so hard, it was so hard. Once we did that, then a few months later, they were having all sorts of problems with those young associates asking for extended leave. If somebody let's say pass away in their community, they needed to go away for a long period of time. And it's almost like they just expected people to just fit in, and it's just not possible for them. There are expectations that they need to meet as member of their community that they need to be at the funeral for, I think weeks, I think it was. And so we had to do extra work. I wasn't there to help them through that, but they had to do extra work with HR to then do some work around, to see how they were going to do that.

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- Renata: And it can be done, you know, where you worked. And I used to work there as well. You can reorg reshuffle your leave. I've done that many times when I was at Monash where I would buy out extra time, so I could have more time with my kids, things like that, but it was just something that they had to do. I'm thinking of this for reasons of health, you know, and need to take time off either for surgery or for adoption or for surrogacy or whatever. Um, and that not really be being built into EBAs or insurances or anything.
- Jacob: Yeah, no, you're bang on it's, we're seeing, I think it goes back to an earlier point, is that we are seeing we are seeing some leaps and bounds, right.
- Renata: Didn't you go to Canberra to talk about this with some folks?
- Jacob: Probably. Yeah.
- Renata: I remember you mentioned that.
- Jacob: I know I do. I do a lot of things. I talk trends all the time, you know, it's just what I do. I'm just multilingual, you know, it's great I've got English French in trans, so you know, but I think, yeah, we do have some issues with this absolutely around, you know, I guess workplace attitudes and workplace cultures. I think we have forgotten that workplaces are systems that are human made and so they can be readapted, you know, when I'm working with workplaces, or if I'm mentoring, which I do quite a bit at the moment, and have done for years is that I always try and say to, you know, whether it's my clients and my colleagues or friends or strangers on the street is you know, you can adapt the system. That's perfectly fine, you know, and you've got to sort of think about, you know, how you're trying to frame that because when we put things in of just like, Oh, we want to be inclusive.
- Jacob: It's just like, well, you know, why do you want to be inclusive? Because you could just make that your standard. That could just be it because everyone needs health care access, for example, and for a person who might be affirming their agenda, for example, through a medical or surgical processes. Um, yeah. Cool. Like the recovery times differ depending on who you are as a person, you know, people get sick, people can get sick for a long period of time and they deserve to have that security from their workplace to know that they can return. We see issues with people who are pregnant, who you come back and they don't have a job, or their job has been reduced. So I think there's, I think there's ways in which it's not just about making your workplace inclusive for my community. And if you can make that transition, no pun intended to being more flexible and adaptable as a workplace, then do so it should be a thing that's there.
- Jacob: I think we're scared sometimes that, you know, if something is accessible and open and available where your employees don't have to think, you know, can I afford to do this? Can I not afford to do this as well? Is my job secure? Is it not? Um, which is a thing that we're all experiencing all the time COVID or not, you know, where we're trying to, you know, we're worried about these things. Where's the commitment, I guess, from our workplace and from our employer. And, you know, I know for myself is that, you know, I'm mentally ill as well. And so, you know, if I have, I'm very

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open about this, it's just like, you know, if I have a breakdown, I have to take leave because I'm in recovery. It's only happened a few times in my life thankfully, but you know, hopefully it doesn't happen at any time again soon.

Jacob: You know, it's like, there's sometimes I have to take a month off work, I think was the longest one. Because I was so unwell, and it was just so wild to sort of process it because they said yes, and that was totally fine. I had a lot of leave banked up. That was totally cool, but it was so interesting to then extend that to people who have invisible disabilities, who might be in chronic pain, for example, or who have chronic fatigue or who have a myriad of other, you know disabilities that we're not focusing on. And it's just like, well, the workplace isn't flexible for them. I appreciate that I'm trusted. I appreciate that we're getting mental health a little bit more understood, but the standard, as far as I'm concerned should be that people get sick. People need health care access. They deserve to be able to do that and not have to worry about their job at the same time. You know, I should be comfortably assured that I'll come back and be ok in that point.

Renata: Jacob, for organisations that are like, you know, a large percentage of Australians businesses, small, medium size organisations that want to do the right thing, but they don't know how they don't have the tools. They don't have the knowledge, they don't, you know, they just need a little bit of help. Are there, is there support for those employers that want to hire, you know, queer professionals that want to support their staff? Is there a place that they can go?

Jacob: I would say so. Yeah. I don't think we've got, like we've definitely got some specialists, you know, small organisations that can do that. We've got some larger peak body organisations here in Victoria. There are others throughout different parts of Australia who can help with that. You might get charged a consultancy fee. I'm not entirely sure. I don't know what the allowance actually is, but absolutely. You know, we have advocacy organisations who deeply care about this. Yeah. I know transgender Victoria are brilliant organisation. I strongly recommend them, and they're adaptive. They're brilliant, like they're the peak body for trans representation here in Victoria. I can't talk more highly of them. So if they can't assist then, you know, because they're busy. Like all of us in advocacy, then they might be able to refer someone else, you know, and just sort of pointing out a TGV in this case, just because, you know, for the, just to give this podcast some longevity as well as it, they're probably the ones who they've been around. I think for, I think two decades now they've been around for a long time.

Renata: And other States would have similar organisations?

Jacob: Yeah. Like I know New South Wales has acorn, for example, who predominantly focused on health, but they're doing a lot of other, intersecting work across quite a few different industries. So, you know, yes, these are peak bodies. They might not be the best fit for you. But for anyone who is an SME, or a small medium business, I would say is just shop around, shop around as you would for, you know, a consultant for anything else, you know, I'm like, that's okay. It's okay. I don't think, yeah. We're not all one size fits all and that's okay. But what I will say is just a word of advice is

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also be really smart about things like make sure you're not getting gouged by people who are trying to represent us who don't actually represent us well. Or who only chuck us in like a 30, 2nd to maybe 30 minute piece at the end of like a larger queer inclusion training, or reach out to me I'm more than happy to chat to you about stuff if you've should have got questions. I pretty much answer any question that comes my way on LinkedIn or on Instagram. So, you know, more than happy to help out if I can and direct you.

Renata: Wonderful, you're wonderful. Do you have any last thoughts or tips and advice for the currently unemployed listeners?

Jacob: I wish I had something that was just going to turn you lot around and just say, we'll just do this and we'll magically fix it. I think, you know, being, let me say this being unemployed sucks, like it really sucks. I've been unemployed, I've experienced houselessness, and I've experienced, you know, extreme poverty in my youth. I say that as someone who, you know, was homeless for a period of time during university, or houseless I should say, not homeless, but you know, like this is a hard thing is that we're so dependent on work to feel validated. And we're so dependent on, you know, having income to survive, and I just want to let you know that it's not your fault if you're not getting employed first and foremost, it's not your fault. You know, we're in a recession, we're in a really, really tough time at the moment.

Jacob: And I don't think this is calming for anyone necessarily, but I want you to make sure that you're giving yourself the perspective that you deserve, that it's not just you, it's not a reflection on who you are as a person and your qualities and your talents. You know, we're in a really, really difficult time. Yes, things are changing for those of us within our communities as well. And things are slowly building forward and slowly building forward. But you know, again, it doesn't, the bars are low. The bars are so incredibly low so often. So I want anyone who is trying to be an active ally for our community at the moment, not to assume it's done either. Like if you can recognise if you can make the commitment, I guess, after listening to this podcast for your business or for working with your employers even and advocating from within to be able to say, 'Hey, we actually probably need to like work this out.'

Jacob: Like maybe post COVID once we kind of were in recovery and everything is well, to be able to say, we actually need to strategize and work in a priority system. Work in the priority system, do that, like work with our peak bodies, work with our partners and our community representatives to build active strategies. We don't know if we can always trust you and we don't know if it's actually worth our time or if we're going to be supported, if we're going to be able to take that extended leave, if we need it, if we're going to be safe within your organisation either. So do the work, do the work for us. So it's not just us wasting our time and hoping that it's not just transphobia this time that we just weren't lucky enough to get in. So, you know, there's two parts. There's two really distinct parts. For the unemployed, it's not just you, I want you to keep persisting if you've got the energy. And for those of you in industry, I really want you to change that system for us because we're tired and we deserve to come and make your workplace as phenomenal as it can be. So keep us in mind.

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Renata: Wonderful. Thank you so much, my friend.

Jacob: So welcome.

Renata: Great having you on the podcast.

Jacob: Oh, it's a pleasure. There we go. Was that it? Because that was like, that felt very quick.

Renata: That was it, that's it, unless you want to keep on going.

Jacob: You've got me for another little bit. If you want, like it's totally fine. Yeah, probably good too.