

Episode 282: The Art of the Pivot with Jordan Babineaux



Intro: [00:00:00.18] Welcome to the Workology Podcast, a podcast for the disruptive workplace leader. Join host Jessica Miller-Merrell, founder of Workology.com, as she sits down and gets to the bottom of trends, tools and case studies for the business leader, H.R. and recruiting professional who is tired of the status quo. Now, here's Jessica with this episode of Workology.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:00:25.47] Welcome to the Workology Podcast sponsored by Upskill HR and ACE the HR Exam. This has been an unusual year and H.R. leaders have had to support teams and transitions to go remote with their work, keep essential workers protected and work to keep our organizations on track with strategic goals. For most of us, 2020 meant that we had to evaluate, prioritize, change forecasts and essentially do that all over again. We are performing a pivot that dance troops would envy. Today, I'm joined by Jordan Babineaux Jordan, recently transitioned from nearly a decade in the NFL to sports broadcasting. He's also an entrepreneur, author and business executive. In his book Pivot to Win, Jordan generously shares his successes, his failures, his struggles and accomplishments, and his moments of pride and despair, Jordan helps teams and companies navigate their pivot through speaking and consulting. I think everybody right now can relate to this topic. So, Jordan, welcome to the Workology Podcast.

Jordan Babineaux: [00:01:27.54] Awesome. Thanks, Jessica. Thank you for having me. Great intro, by the way,

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:01:32.40] Let's talk about your background. After nearly a decade playing in the NFL, you became a sports broadcaster and the voice of the Seattle Seahawks. You're an entrepreneur and business executive. Can you tell us more about that?

Jordan Babineaux: [00:01:44.98] Yeah, that's you know, really it's almost as if when we start to go through and have this sense of identity of, you know, being so long in a certain position and many people recognize you for that talent or that skill set or that title. And we all make that that transition in our life, whether it's a promotion, we leave the workforce to pursue an ambitious endeavor. We venture out and, you know, we kind of we kind of keep this this old title and description of the things that we've done in the past. But to others and in your own world, you know, you've grown personally, spiritually, emotionally. You've you've established new relationships, maybe even move to a new city. Right? And and so it's it's really all about a story of change and transition and growth. And certainly, you know, here in the last year after the world has been, you know, massively dealing with the global economic of the pandemic, we've all been forced to pivot both personally and professionally. And so here I am, you know, establishing and creating my own pivots.

These are what I call pivotal moments. And when, you know, things kind of start to ease and government mandates start to lift and people are in some way going to the new normal post covid, there'll be different people. There'll be a lot of different people. And so for me, pivoting away from the NFL, while it was a tough transition, psychologically and mentally and even financially wrapping myself around this new lifestyle, it's also been a catalyst for growth.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:03:29.64] I love that. And I think that's what I'm trying to think about myself and my family during this crazy, uncertain time during the pandemic is this is a quiet time and it's an opportunity for you to really focus on yourself and kind of think about the new person that you want to be when you step out of this pandemic into the new normal.

Jordan Babineaux: [00:03:50.01] Yeah, and I think, you know, one of the things about this pandemic, you know, certainly while, you know, there's been a lot of change, you know, and uncertainty and anxiety, you know, in lives lost through this pandemic, you know, and, you know, many people, you know, I really lost lost jobs. They've lost a sense of themselves. The mental health in the workplace is, you know, probably more challenging than ever. Women have been forced to leave the workplace to, you know, take care and manage home and home, school and child care. And and then the other side of it is, you know, the gaps that are, you know, further compounding due to the pandemic. You have the digital divide, you have access to health care. You have, you know, jobs lost and you have, you know, people who are now having to deal with mortgage debt. And so while that seems devastating and it certainly is, you know, we couldn't be in a better position in terms of everyone. You know, many people equally have an opportunity to seek new employment, to find new. Ways to build a life and and other opportunities that may be accessible and available, so it's been a tough year. It really has just and, you know, I guess it's hard to put into words, you know, what people are feeling. You have so much social and political distress between groups and races. And, you know, it's hard to kind of find some level of sanity when every time you turn around, a news outlet is reporting, you know, something so, so devastating. So but at the at the other side of the pendulum are, you know, some newfound positives in life. And my hope is that, you know, people can can look to those positives even coming out of this time of uncertainty and loss.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:05:45.69] I agree. And that's why I feel like the quiet time, if we can if we have the opportunity to take it and and think about really what we want, what we don't want and think about prioritization of what we want the world to be for ourselves and for our families. So I want to talk about your book as well, Pivot to Win, it's an Amazon bestseller. Congratulations. You talked a little bit about your journey, but kind of walk us through a little bit more about the book and how you help readers be able to pivot and what winning might look like.

Jordan Babineaux: [00:06:23.22] Yeah, great. So the book essentially is comprised of, you know, 30 years of life stories and experiences, certainly growing up in Port Arthur, Texas, dealing with, you know, some of the uncertainties and economic distress, an environment of drug abuse and violence. It talks about, you know, cultivating a winning mindset after a division to college-football career and making it to the NFL as an undrafted free agent and certainly dealing with racism and discrimination as a black man in America. And again, it also encompasses one of the greatest challenges that I just discussed and talked about was the psychological and the mental challenges that most athletes experience when going through, you know,

re-identifying themselves after they hang up their jersey. And that's where I kind of, you know, really, you know, have delved into deeper conversations with teammates, sports executives around this mental health component, because it's it's really been kind of this negative stigma that, you know, people don't ask for help. And certainly I can attest to it because, you know, here I am, an alpha male, you know, mentality and personality, feeling like I can do it all or I have it under control when and it's OK to say that you don't. And I think now there are people who need to hear that. I mean, there are people who are suffering and have suffered through the pandemic that may need professional help. And so I would just encourage people to, you know, to seek, you know, the kind of council that's necessary to to get clarity around, you know, their next and most boldest move.

Jordan Babineaux: [00:08:10.23] And I share a little bit about that in the story. I think one of the greatest things that people can take away from the book are a few things. One, you know, I talk about cultivating a winning mindset, about a growth and fixed mindset and looking for opportunities to grow instead of looking at failure as an identity. I talk about developing a routine and certainly routine has changed for us all, you know, over the last year and kind of finding out what that new routine is. I think when we create this this new routine or we get back into, you know, some workflow or life flow of a routine, it puts us back in control of our environment. And I think that's important. You know, here in these times right now, just when when so much is kind of coming at us full speed, it's hard to be resilient in these times. It really is. You know, it's hard to persevere. And certainly it's not that we can't. It's just that it's OK, you know, even in these times to still work through and experience this change and his level of growth, knowing that work that we're doing, the routine, the new routines that we're setting for ourselves and for our family is helping us get to a better place.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:09:26.25] What is your morning routine? What does that look like? Walk us through that.

Jordan Babineaux: [00:09:30.57] So I'm an early riser. I don't know what some people may call early, but, you know, usually 5:30 I'm on my my bike. I have a teleton. I'm one of many. I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't say that my home gym membership increased during the pandemic. I had the prototype pandemic. I just used it a lot more during pandemic. So I'm always, you know, you know, I mind, body and spirit. You know, I am on the bike listening to a podcast or, you know, listening or listening to audio book or maybe even reading a book while biking and then, you know, it's really a series of exercises that and mindfulness practices that I like to do to kind of get my mind centered around the chaos that's getting ready to happen between the time I wake up and the time I go back to sleep. And I think what we do have control over are those bookends, right? That morning routine and that evening routine. Before we go to bed now, what happens in between? Right. I mean, we have at least some idea of control over it by trying to manage our calendar. But again, we can't control the, you know, the knocks at the door to got a minute phone calls or the interruption and disruptions that seem to happen every 35 seconds, but putting parameters around how we control that. And so, you know, after after a morning routine, right, of such, you know, which also may include some form of meditation, maybe 10 or 20 minutes of meditation in preparation for the day. And something something to get my mind started with, something that I read. So again, I know many people may not have a morning routine or may get to the workplace and kind of jump right into things, but I think have been establishing some form of routine, again, put some control of that environment and kind of gets us ready for the chaos and disruptions that's getting ready to happen throughout the day.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:11:23.60] I love that and thank, thank you for sharing. I'm always curious about what other people do as far as their morning routines go. One of the other questions I wanted to make sure to ask you is about how you work with companies and teams to help them pivot successfully. Tell us about the workplace work that you do.

Jordan Babineaux: [00:11:43.23] So right now, much of the the work directly related to corporate and what's happening in that work front is is really just kind of working individually with either mid-level managers, some senior managers, you know, a handful of employees. Right? And so there's a bigger scope of personal development than it is organizational change. And and so that's that's really been the focus, right? It's it's kind of like if I can help you perform better than certainly the you know, the benefactors and the byproduct is that you show up as a better parent, you show up as a better employee, you show up as a better entrepreneur. And and, you know, those areas of business, personal, financial, health, spirituality, all, you know, integrate into creating our own personal identity. So I've been focusing particularly on myself and helping others cultivate winning mindsets around change.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:12:43.65] I know the pandemic became really personal for you and you suffered some personal loss. Are you OK maybe sharing with us a little bit about that?

Jordan Babineaux: [00:12:55.15] Yeah, we can we can go there. Sure. You know, I like many of the, you know, half a million other families across the country, you know, lost a loved one in the pandemic due to covid. And I think, you know, my. One of the things that that really kind of stood out to me is in that time, I know many people were left to figure things out, right? You can't go visit your loved one in the hospital. You you're basically establishing a relationship with the health care team and, you know, nursing staff to help facilitate and comfort your loved one through such a tough time. It was you know, I, my heart goes out to certainly those who have lost someone during this time. But, you know, the health care workers, they're the real heroes. I mean, time and time and again, have had to, you know, share the devastating news of the loss of a loved one to the families. They've witnessed death over and over again over the last year and and have really been on the front line of what I would say true leadership and leadership in a way that, you know, is exhausting and having to deal with that and manage that, you know, our health care workers, our doctors, our nursing staff and certainly our scientists, you know, now working together to create a vaccine, you know, my heart goes out to them. My heart goes out to them.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:14:24.90] I'm also thinking about the resiliency factor that it takes to be able to have to be motivated every day, deliver those kinds of conversations that and come to work knowing that there are many people at the the hospitals that aren't going to be coming home. Can you talk a little bit about, touch on the resiliency factor that you talk about in your book and maybe think I'm thinking about like all the people that are listening right now that are burnt out because it's been a year for H.R. too. What can what can you offer up for them in terms of resiliency?

Jordan Babineaux: [00:15:05.24] It, real, I know, I really love that, and I think, you know, again, we're probably challenged more than ever to find something deep within and, you know, kind of harness our own individual, you know, levels of resilience when dealing with so much for so long. The burnout is actually a real thing. And, you know, I think the one thing that that maybe is continuing to help us overcome and get through this tough time is, one, knowing that we can lean in with other people. And one thing I talk about in the book is having an accountability group or having an accountability partner or performance partner or a mentor or coach, you know, someone that you can truly express yourself with and in a sense of no judgment. But really, you know, kind of lay down that baggage. And, you know, most of the time what I like to do is, and when when people want to get real and kind of have those, you know, fierce conversations, I just offer them a safe place like and though they may know it, I just want them to I want them to hear it from me. And maybe, again, like, this is a safe place for you to, you know, express yourself, to shout if you need to shout, to cry if you need to cry.

Jordan Babineaux: [00:16:24.02] But to be real, and it's real sense of vulnerability, you know, I think that that keeps us connected as humans. And, you know, we talk about vulnerability from the leadership perspective, that sometimes it's hard to get your team to lean in and raise their performance because of the level of vulnerability from their leader. So, you know, in developing and creating this this this level of resilience through this tough time, you know, one of the things that I that has helped me is kind of live in for a bigger cause. Right? It's like what what is the big cause for me to make it through this tough time? Like, who needs to see me at my best, even though I may feel like I'm at my worst? If you're a parent, sometimes it's your child, right? Or if you're in a relationship and it could be your spouse or maybe even passionate about the work that we're doing. Right? It's like , is underpinning of what? Essentially, H.R. professionals do as well as, you know, they're there to help people, right? And they're there to, they're there to help create a culture within an organization. Right? And oftentimes, you know, you can feel down on yourself, but be inspired to do something good for someone else.

Break: [00:17:40.86] Let's take a reset. This is Jessica Miller-Merrell, and you were listening to the Workology Podcast sponsored by Upskill HR and ACE the HR Exam. We're talking today about resilience. And I think we know a lot about this right now, but we're talking about it because we need to be more resilient than ever before. And we're talking with Jordan Babineaux.

Break: [00:17:59.79] Personal and professional development is essential for successful H.R. leaders. Join Upskill HR to access life training, community, and over one hundred on demand courses for the dynamic leader. HR recert credits available. Visit UpskillHR.com for more.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:18:15.96] We're talking about resiliency. You have talked about leaning in, motivation. We've covered a lot of different topics. I can't stop thinking about sports and morale in the workplace and really like you're on a team, whether it's work or the Seattle Seahawks or some other team there. Right? How do how do you see the sports and the work like morale and kind of team building happen? Are there obviously there are similarities, but can you maybe talk about that as someone who's been in both high performance situations?

Jordan Babineaux: [00:18:57.03] Yeah, I think, you know, I think that's a very, that's a question that I am pretty sure that many people are wrestling with. If you're a leader or or in your organization or you're a decision maker and particularly in H.R., it's like, OK, well, the biggest question is how do we, you know, safely integrate people back into the workplace? And if you're an employee and you've been working from home, but you've also been thriving through this time, you perhaps may be getting more work done. You've shortened your commute by, just so, you know, walk from the kitchen to the office or, you know, up the stairs. You've gotten a lot of your time back. You might, like many people, have the mindset that, you know, this is this is me for the rest of my working career is like I can work from home and thrive and be OK. And we've all learned how to figure that out. You know, I think there's there's when integrating people back into the workplace, you know, there's there's a lot of a lot of things at risk, you know, for an employer to consider. And again, we talked about burnout. We talked about the mental health of your group and of your team. Those things are essential. You know, I think it's important, again, for, you know, organizations and companies to have, you know, those real conversations and be OK to go there.

Jordan Babineaux: [00:20:19.05] And sometimes it's you know, it's not about the bottom line in this particular instance or it's you know, it's not about the the performance charts or cash flow statements, even though, you know, I'm saying that in a sense that, like, we should care more about our people and take better care of our people. Right? Because when we do that and certainly we take care of customers. Right? A byproduct is that of that, you know, you will see in the bottom line, right? Where if you don't have a great culture or great company, you know, no one cares if you have a great product. Right? You know, yes, there's plenty companies that have went under who had great products but didn't have great customer service or didn't have great processes. So so I think that's probably one of the most important things that I that I hear in the conversations that I've had and, you know, with other other leaders in their organization is integrating people back into the workplace safely, but also with them in the mindset and in the the care for the employee and understanding kind of where their pain points are and doing it to, you know, at some level that's that's manageable, that's workable and still empowers your people.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:21:27.86] I love that because the work from home might be better for a certain group or an individual and the hybrid model might be better for others, but the only way that you can figure out what's going to work and how you can make a team work is if you talk to them and get to know them and build those relationships.

Jordan Babineaux: [00:21:44.60] Absolutely.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:21:45.92] I love how engaged you are on social media. And we're going to include a link to your LinkedIn and your Twitter, and the, then the show notes for this podcast episode. And you've done a lot of AMAs or ask me anythings. I wanted to know, what is your favorite question to be asked when you do those?

Jordan Babineaux: [00:22:02.90] I think one of my favorite questions that stands out now is what don't people know about me? I mean, because they read the bios and they see the headlines, they see the titles, but. There are a few other layers attached, and so that's that's I'd like to share the other work that I'm doing other than what people see and what's visible in the professional work and writing a book and being an athlete. And trust me, those are great stories and conversations, too. But more centered at my heart is the work that I'm doing on the social justice side. I've spent the last few years working with formerly incarcerated, specifically creating employment opportunities. And so we've been focusing on employment and certainly a lot of barriers to re-entry into the community. And I think one of the biggest things is that how do we help this country rehabilitate its people? I mean, there are people who have, you know, have served their time that are still living, you know, this this this crime of that they committed maybe at 17 or 18 and 19. And here they are. Thirty five, forty years old, still trying to get a job. But, but employers, you know, are still living in old hiring practices or or maybe there is licensing and different restrictions for industries that prevent this specific group and population of people to get meaningful employment. And I think it's it's it's a terrible thing, because what we're doing is now we're creating this this net or this ceiling that limits them from economic, you know, from having their economic freedom and in with all of us. Right?

Jordan Babineaux: [00:23:47.88] I mean, we all have a job and we all in that job now are customers to other companies. We we're tenants to landlords, we're, you know, account holders to banks. And I think in that same term is that those who are formerly incarcerated still have that same power to do that and, right? And so they're still spending their dollar empowering the economy, you know, rather than, you know, kind of boxing them in or, you know, helping in some way systematically this group of recidivate. And it's one of the things that we're trying to prevent. I think one of the big wins and I'll share this here, Jess, is that one of the big wins here in the state of Washington is that recently 25,000 or more Washingtonians got their voting rights back. Now, Washington was the 21st state to do it. I mean, we're not not like we're trailblazing and leading in that category. But but that's important. And I think that's a first step to dignity that I think those who have experienced and served their time, it's a win. I would say that's a win. So that voter restoration bill passed here in the state of Washington and it was truly celebrated.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:24:59.36] You're talking about this, and I just got off a webinar, a conversation where we we talked about employment opportunities for people who are formerly incarcerated. So I do think change is happening. It's just like anything in the HR and employment states it tends to take a really long time, unfortunately. But I'm glad that you're you're part of the conversation. More voices need to be there.

Jordan Babineaux: [00:25:22.88] Yeah. And I think, Jess, is that the fact is that most employers aren't educated on how to do it in a in a in a sustainable way. Right? And so there's there are companies, I'm actually, you know, helping one company R3 Score provide an H.R. tool for consultants to to use when looking for qualified candidates. In a way we can share more about that offline. And certainly that's a whole nother we could do a whole other podcast on that alone I think. But I think that's the biggest thing really that that stands out is that it's almost as if you have organizations and corporations who are scared to go first, but there they'll go together. Right? And so how do we create, you know, a commission of employers who are willing to take that first step and creates this bigger impact in the community?

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:26:15.76] Well, Jordan, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today. Where can people go to learn more about you, the work you do and your book Pivot to Win?

Jordan Babineaux: [00:26:25.33] Awesome. Yeah. Thanks again, Jess, for having me. It's been great, I mean, time flies. Wow. I, people can check out the website. www.pivottowin.com. There's a free chapter download there. Certainly you can purchase the book on Amazon. And as far as social media, I'm Jordan Babineaux across all platforms. That's Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. Feel free to shoot me a note. Let me know that as you're listening in and how you feel about the book and you know what's been the biggest pivot for you in your life. And I love to share and keep the conversation going.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:27:01.93] Well, thanks again. I really appreciate it, Jordan.

Jordan Babineaux: [00:27:04.36] Awesome. Thanks, Jess. Take care.

Closing: [00:27:06.67] Are you loving the Workology Podcast? Our Workology community reaches over 600,000 H.R. leaders every single month. Want to be a sponsor? Reach out to us at workology.com/advertising.

Closing: [00:27:20.63] Conversations about resilience and how we manage and measure success are essential in times of crisis, and it's even more important to debrief after the crisis. Returning to the new normal in the workplace is going to look very different than how we left it, not just for employees, but also as HR leaders. And our job is to be able to manage, support and communicate with our company stakeholders and those employees who are also struggling. Mental health is such an important conversation to be having. Resiliency is a part of that. The saying about putting your own oxygen mask on before you can help others really fits here. As H.R. leaders, we need to stop put that oxygen mask on ourselves and just take a deep breath. I so appreciate Jordan sharing his insights and experience on the podcast today, and thank you for joining the Workology Podcast. We're sponsored by Upskill HR and ACE the HR Exam. This podcast is for the disruptive workplace leader who's tired of the status quo. My name is Jessica Miller-Merrell, and until next time there's a Workology.com to listen to all our previous Workology podcast episodes.