60 Put It Where the Goats Can Get It - Simply AI in Workforce Development

ACT ready for WORK

From the stage of ACT's Workforce Summit in Atlanta, episode 60 brings humor, insight, and real-world wisdom on AI's role in workforce development. Host Jasen Jones is joined by tech experts DJ Burrel, Joshua Cox and Davin Jackson to explore how AI is transforming cybersecurity, government, and education. From ethical hacking to gaming as a gateway to tech careers, the panel breaks down complex topics in a way "the goats can get." If you're tech-savvy or just curious, this episode offers practical takeaways and inspiration for navigating the future of work with AI.

Voices of Excellence on Episode 60

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Links and Resources

- Episode 60 of the Podcast
- ACT Work Ready Communities
- ACT Workforce Solutions

Transcript of Episode 60

[Opening Jingle and Music]

Guest: I'm going to say it. And then you're going to repeat after me. Say this. AI is a tool

Audience: AI is a tool.

DJ: I am not a tool.

Audience: I am not a tool. (laughter)

Now you respectfully you might be sitting next to a....no! Don't do that. We're not going to go super highbrow and everything. We're going to put it where the goats can get it.

Jasen: Let's demystify the role of AI in workforce development, coming up on episode 60.

[Podcast Open] Ready for Work is a podcast from A-C-T! spotlighting excellence and innovation, throughout the workforce ecosystem! Jasen Jones hosts this journey, with trends and ideas to help your region's workforce reach its highest potential.

[Jingle] Now, let's get Ready for Work!

Jasen: From the stage at ACT's most recent Workforce Summit in Atlanta, we featured an entertaining and enlightening panel of experts that helped us better understand how we seize AI opportunities in the workforce ecosystem.

I had the pleasure of co-facilitating with DJ Burrel, the Manager of Talent Acquisition for Pure Recruiting Agency. We'll hear from Joshua Cox, the I.T. Manager for the City of Forest Park, GA, along with Davin Jackson, Founder of CEO of Alpha E-Sports and Technology and Alpha Cybersecurity.

DJ Burel: I want to just jump into this before I introduce my friends. AI is not the boogeyman, okay? Literally, AI is a friend. It's a tool. So, in fact, the Baptist preacher thing...ready? I'm going to say it. And then you're going to repeat after me. Say this. AI is a tool

Audience: AI is a tool.

DJ: I am not a tool.

Audience: I am not a tool. (laughter)

DJ: Now you respectfully you might be sitting next to a....no! Don't do that. So we're going to try this again okay. Listen AI, AI is a tool is a tool. I, you yourself, I, I am not a tool. And if you didn't know, okay!

Anyway. So, some friends of mine. My buddy, Davin Jackson here, Davin runs a wonderful spot in the town of Swansea, Alpha Esports and technology. He's going to be talking all about that.

A little hit. We all grew up going to the arcades, right? I mean let's be honest, we did Pac-Man, Galette, Galaga, whatever, quarters or whatever. Kids are still playing games. They're just doing it online. The big question is who are they actually playing with on the other end? Part of what

Davin and Alpha Esports does, is they verify the person on the other end, is definitely like your child, who's playing on the other end. He'll talk about that later.

My buddy Josh over here, an I.T. guru at the City of Forest Park. So, to lead things off, when we talk about AI, it being a friend, not a foe. There's a couple of little components. Again, we're not going to go super high brow and everything. We're going to put it where the goats can get it.

That was my grandfather's saying when grandfather grew up. Country boy said, son, I only got a sixth-grade education. You can make me understand it, everybody can understand. So, put it where the goats can get it. That's what we're going to do today. We're going to put it where the goats can get it. Is that right? All right. Good.

So, when we talk about AI it's a tool, say it again. AI is a tool. That's it. Okay. Now people say, well, what about this? What about that? Who remembers when the internet started, '94, right? We're all over 40. You remember! I remember turning on the Today Show, Katie Couric. Bryant Gumble, and look what that little thing. Right? Remember that. Okay, so that's this is the next iteration of that thing. Right.

With that being said, Davin, let's talk about how you got started in this whole tech thing as it directly relates to Big Brother AI.

Davin Jackson: A quick story.

DJ: Go ahead. Quick story. Quick story. I know you could do 30 minutes, but try to do it in flow.

Davin: I actually I've been in second cybersecurity now for about 20 years. I got into tech or because of Dragon Ball Z and video games. So, full circle. Now I have an e-sports program, but I work in cybersecurity in what is known as an ethical hacker, a penetration tester. And what I do, is, I test the security posture of different organizations.

So, schools, hospitals, banks, you name it. I've probably done broken into it legally, of course, but when it's when it comes to I, I think DJ touched on it before. AI is a tool and I think the misconception with it is, is you do have some folks who think it's like, oh, I'm here to take my job, it's Skynet, everything is bad.

And then you have people who think AI is everything and I'm just going to dump all of my questions. An AI professional tip, please. If you work in any coding or development, please don't put your source code into the AI model.

So, you use AI as a tool, but you want to make sure you're using it as an assistant and you're not using it to answer questions that you don't know. For example, if you're going to put in like when I'm doing a pen test. I might need to automate some things. So, I might have AI generate a script for me. However, I know what I want that script to do and I know what that script should be doing. So, AI isn't perfect. It's not invaluable. It will make mistakes.

Remember, AI is in the name, large language model, and it's learning, right? Part of the tips is, that you're training it! So it does make mistakes. And if you trust it solely then that's when you're going to be in trouble.

DJ: Perfect. Thank you for that. By the way, one of the other things I want to do is shameless shout out to my coach friend, Gekko. If you guys want to know more about I get a coach. I

promise you, Frank Gekko is my personal coach. Hey, Frank. The guy knows stuff. He explained it so well to me. I went, oh, great. Thank you.

JINGLE

Jasen: We continue now with our panel on practical uses of AI and the skills-driven nature of AI career opportunities.

DJ: Now when we talk about AI in the future government, just talk to the people a little bit about, because you are, I call you, the I.T. Guy before we start because you're my buddy. Talk to the people about how the government, specifically Forest Park and other municipalities, may be using AI. Yes, sir.

Joshua Cox: It's definitely an exciting time. I've been in government IT for 15 years or so. And so, you look back 5 or 6 years ago, it was exciting to have a Google Home or an Alexa at your city hall, where people can come in and ask questions. And now that's kind of kind of lame and a little crazy. No offense if you're doing that.

There's all kinds of tools that are coming out that have integrations with AI especially. We see it around law enforcement and some of the things that we can automate with AI. I mean, just scanning for license plates coming through the city and for vehicles. So, it's really cool, the way it has come. And like you said, it's a tool that us humans can use with our jobs. It's not something you lean on completely. You have to know where you're going, and it's just a tool to help you get there.

DJ: Absolutely and since it’s a tool. Again, addressing the boogeyman. It's going to take my job just out of curiosity because some people will write just like everything matures and evolves. Okay. Just out of curiosity, how many people roughly. Not that we want Forest Park people to be scared. We're not doing that. But roughly how many people would lose their job today because of AI?

Joshua: You still need the human element to use the tool.

DJ: Thank you and period. One of the things Davin touched on, and it's something I want to do also, shout out on anybody that heard Lashana earlier today when she was talking about some things. She talked about not having a degree. Having a degree. Where do we go with all that? I promise you'll want to get into that stuff too, because one of the keys of AI, and one of the keys of I.T. period is, the bachelor's degree has nothing to do with it, absolutely nothing to do it.

In fact, I used to do a lot of speeches and I'd start out in the room, and go, hey, who in the room has a four-year degree from Georgia Tech? MIT, Stanford, and the like. You're getting hacked by kids overseas who are hungry. How’s that degree working out? And then afterwards they'd come and like, hey, can we talk about that?

So, the point is, AI as a tool. Say it, AI is a tool. I am not a tool! Great! Got that far. All right, Devin, let's get back into the ethical hacking piece. Break down, because we've all heard that. But let's talk about what that really looks like. And how does AI play a part in ethical hacking and where I’m going, and, I'm setting you up on purpose. The first letter is a artificial. All right. Go.

Davin: So, the elements of a penetration test, it’s five phases. You have your reconnaissance. This is where you're gathering your information, whether it's your IP addresses, email addresses, whatever it is that you're focusing to get on your target. And then you have your scanning. So now

you're scanning, you're running port, you're looking for ports, anything that's open, any vulnerabilities.

After that, you're going to do your analysis phase. After you do your analysis that should give you a footprint of what your target is and what what's weak, what could be exploited.

Then you move into exploitation. That's basically the hacking part. That's the part that you see on TV when they're doing this and they go, I'm in. By the way, it never works like that.

But after exploitation, you have your post-exploitation. This is where you're trying to elevate privileges. So, you might come in as a regular user, or you may have hacked, no offense to janitors, but you may have hacked the janitor's account. How do you get to system administrator privileges?

And then lastly, is the report writing. What AI has been able to do is, AI has not only been able to assist in a lot of those phases. The initial phase is your reconnaissance, scanning and enumeration and analysis. It also will give you a better idea for some folks who might need that. Like I said, that assistant.

No two networks are the same, right? I might work on a system that's Linux-based this week. I might work on an Active Directory network the next week, I might work on something that's completely in the cloud, and then the following week after that, I'm in a mobile app. The targets change, right? And because of that, there's no one way to hack an app.

Whatever I do for Active Directory might not work for Linux, might not work for a mobile phone. AI can again, if you already have an understanding of it, AI can help assist you with that process. Again, it's not going to hack anything for you. It's not going to exploit it for you. There have been some folks who are trying to do that.

But to Josh and point, there is a human element that's needed because guess what? What if something goes wrong? What if you take down a network? What if you break the scope? Because everything that we do, the reason why it's ethical is because we have we have rules. We have scopes of engagement, rules of engagement and things that we have to follow.

So again, AI is not perfect. They might do something wrong. So you don't want to trust it wholly. And then you know, you do that you're going to be in a lot of trouble and possibly have the police at your door. AI is a great tool to assist you, not to replace your daily job.

But like I said, in those first few phases where everything is crucial, it definitely be helpful for that and it actually will help correlate or correlate all that information. And when you're writing your report as well.

DJ: Got it. Perfect. So Josh, softball, right? He just said I can kind of help do this, kind of do that, but you still have to have the human element. I know for a fact you guys have done a lot of education. City employees. Hey, don't touch this. Don't download that. Be careful about this. Talk a little bit more about what that kind of looks like behind the scenes. When you see something like that, or your team, if you will.

Joshua: Yeah, sure. I mean, we use a lot of tools, use automation AI to detect and automatically disable threats essentially. Technology has come a long way from the side of the pen-testing from that has come from, just all kinds of tools that we use. So, we have some software, that can detect

intrusions into the network and automatically segment that network away without us having to do anything.

And so going back to your first point, you still need the human to come in and review all that and look at that and see, okay, what do we need to change? But it really adds a level of efficiency and kind of stops things from spreading and being worse than they are. And a lot of it is through AI.

DJ: That's awesome. So, to the point, Jasen, and all of ACT in saying we still need people, we need people. It needs people. Tech needs people.

JINGLE

Davin: I always tell folks, especially when people come to me say they want to get into cyber security. My first question is why? And it's not like I'm trying to push them away, but I just want to find out what that motivating factor is for them, because you're going to need that sometimes when it gets hard, you know, when the times get hard. It's not as easy as it looks.

Like I said, it's not. Click, click click click click. But you know there's certain pathways you want to go. So, depending on what you want to do, that you start with your I mean, I wouldn't even say A-plus anymore because everybody in here is obviously proficient with computers. But, you know, there's basic networking, you know, learn the basics of cloud, which I feel like got forgotten because of A.I. and I'll touch on that in a little bit, but, there's, different certification paths you can go depending on what career you want to pursue. *[stitch 3a and 3b together on timeline]*

So, I talked about the cloud earlier. Remember when the cloud was going to take everybody's jobs? Remember when the cloud was this big scary thing and they're like, so I'm going to put my data somewhere. And everybody looked up in the sky looking like, how is my data going to? Right. But what actually happened was it created so many more jobs because now you needed people who needed to understand what that was and basically be that person in the middle between the people who don't know and those who do or want it to work. Now the cloud sector is its own six-figure job field.

The same thing can happen with AI. The same opportunities are there with AI. Again, we're in a time right now, where it's still early on, where we can learn these skills or we can get our young folks to learn these skills that will help them get jobs. And I'm not bashing college, but I'm all self-taught, but they can probably do this without college education.
Now, I know I'm rambling a little bit, but to back to your question, I feel like the opportunity there with the kids in the school system. What I have learned over the last year-and-a-half is that there's usually two problems that they face lack of resources, which lead to a lack of confidence.

It's not a lack of technical skills. These kids are way beyond anything we've ever been able to do. you have kids who are as young as four years old who know how to navigate an iPad. So, they have the skills. They just don't know they have it because they just look at it as something that's just everyday for them.

What we try to focus on and I'm just touching at that here. What we try to focus on is focusing on showing them that they have, and I don't call them soft skills, I call them essential skills. We show them that that you have these skill sets already. You're already doing these things. You're already navigating it.

Guess what. If you're playing at home and your internet goes down and you start troubleshooting, you turn off the router, you reboot it. You go directly from computer to modem. Guess what? That's network. That's tech support. That's basic tech support. You already have a lot of these transferable skills.

So, we try to show them the parallels. And once you do that, that builds the confidence. And what I've seen is, once you build the confidence in them, and they can actually see themselves like this, it's like a light bulb moment for them. The moment you do that teaching them the skills is easy because like I said, they already know that. They already know a lot of it. So that's the problem, just again, the lack of resources or the lack of knowledge that leads to a lack of confidence.

DJ: I love that question. Thank you for the question. By the way, Josh is going to fact check me in a minute. First off, to answer the other question. Get certifications. Get certifications. Get your certifications. Get your certifications. You don't need the Bachelor's degree. Get it. Josh is going to have to have a Bachelor's degree to hire you because that's what the city needs. Get your certifications.

Now something Devin Tabb tapped into that comes directly to that. Be honest. How many of you had to ask your son, daughter, grandson? Hey, help me with this? Because you're smart, right? But there was something technical you couldn't figure out. These kids were born into it. Look at the things the kids are playing with today.

They're doing this. Literally. Watch them next time they're playing a game. They're doing this the entire time.

Davin: Or keyboard and mouse or keyboard?

DJ: Or keyboard and mouse

Davin: Most of my gamers are keyboard and mouse players.

DJ: Remember taking typing class. Some of us still don't even probably remember that stuff, but that's what the kids are doing. They're doing this, right?! So, get certifications. Nothing wrong with getting a degree. We're not saying that. Get the certifications. Because a guy like Josh makes you have to have it. It's part of the requirement.

Now sectors, talking about my dad again. He was a recruiter headhunter for the automotive industry. People lost their minds when the automotive industry started to automate. You know what my dad did? He talked to some computer manufacturers and said, hey, I've got guys and gals that are doing this all day. You got anything for them? Like yeah, he said. Like what? Building laptops. So instead of doing this, they'll just do it like this. So, you went from doing it this way, do it this way, building laptops.

So, to answer that question, yes, there are golden opportunities. I got a lot of people right now that I'm dealing with, that I'm helping, military transition. Love my military personnel. Thank you if you served the country. They have all the skills necessary. Employers got to be willing to give them a chance. I'll say this. I got to be careful. It's not the soldier's fault at the employer doesn't understand.

They did more than that! They don't necessarily know how to write it on the resume. We're here to help get that done. The skills are there. They're transferable. A lot of truckers are getting into tech,

getting into cybersecurity because their trucks have all kinds of technology inside of them. And they're going, well, what is that? And why are you tracking this and what is that? And I'm like, yes! You can transfer your skills from driving a truck into cybersecurity.

Joshua: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, really, some of the best people I have worked with did not start in IT or technology or really have a technical background at all. I think it really comes down to, are you a problem solver, and do you like helping people? And if you have those two things, you really can be successful in IT in general, but cybersecurity, especially. So I think that's what it boils down to.

And going back to your earlier question, as far as attracting people to this field, I think it's really going to be a self-fulfilling thing because it's I mean, if you look at how much technology was part of your job ten years ago, 15 years ago versus today, well, there is going to be a requirement for people to support all that technology.

It's not going anywhere. It's going to keep growing. And so I think there's going to be a vacuum, especially around the security piece of it, just because the more technology, the more risk in some ways. And so therefore you need more security, which, I mean, that's just there's going to be a vacuum of jobs in the next ten years.

I don't think we'll have any issue getting people to the field when, you know, when same thing we saw over the past few years when there is more jobs than people. The demand, the pay, everything goes up. And so it will be very easy to attract people to cybersecurity when you can come out of college and easily find a job making six figures,

Davin; And to the transferable skills, just a little bit about me. I was an aircraft mechanic in the military. I was an F-16 and F-117 aircraft mechanic. I came out and I was like, there's no fighter jets to work on in the civilian world. So, what do I do? And then I worked on, I was an electrician, fell off a ladder, was able to get up, and I said, yep, don't want to do that anymore.

And then I started working as a low voltage electrician doing alarm systems, and actually, some of the very first smart houses that were out that were controlled all by one remote control. And now you take that. And now I'm breaking into those same systems. So, there's definitely opportunities there.

JINGLE

Jasen: Our panel continues now on some of the perceived red flags of AI and helpful considerations to turn these threats into opportunities.

Joshua: I am sure there are some jobs out there that could be at least replaced or made more efficient with you. I'm sure that exists, but from my experience at the city, what we are really trying to do is use AI, use technology to make us more efficient so that the humans could do things the humans are good at, and the technology can do the things that technology is good at.

Jasen: I like that, I like how you put that.

David: So, when I first got into tech, I learned about Moore's Law. Moore's law states that all technology becomes obsolete with every 18 months, and I apply that to my mentees or how I how I upskill my career. At some point, you're going to want to learn new skills. You're going to want to upskill.

You're going to want to learn certain things. Now I'm not. Yes. Is AI going to make things easier, which might reduce some jobs? It's possible. However, this is why I said there's opportunities here that if you can upskill and stay ahead of the curve, then, you'll be fine. I still know my worth here.

You know, again, AI is an assistant that's going to make things easier for everybody. But if there's an opportunity, unfortunately, as a capitalist society, they're going to try to figure out where they can cut corners. Of course. So, this is where we need to stay. We also need to stay vigilant on what's happening with this so we know how to protect ourselves as well.

DJ: My man Devin here. Alpha esports and technology and Swanny. Check it out. Let the kids do what they do. Let them do tech. It's okay. Davin, if you don't mind going to his point about the recession proof, right. Let's talk about how some of the video games that the kids are playing are actually setting them up for recession proof futures in tech.

Davin: So real quick, going back to the opportunities where I was talking about the lack of resources leads to a lack of confidence. When we try to make sure we eliminate those barriers, how do we do that? We are meeting them where they are. Like I said, most of them have phones in their pockets that are probably more powerful than the computers that we had growing up.

So, we use that and use the skills that they learn from gaming, because yes, there are transferable skills you can get from gaming, collaboration, communication, problem solving, critical thinking skills. These are all things that are very useful in careers like tech. We try to highlight those and boost that confidence. And then we create engaging content. Unfortunately with technology, because they've had technology with them from the for so for so long from so young, they don't have the longest, largest attention span.

You have to grip them within what, what what's a TikTok video now? 30. 40 seconds, right? We try to create engaging content. So you can just so some of the content that we create for example, we have programs where we teach cybersecurity, but we're using gaming topics and things that have happened to be able to explain those topics better so they better understand it.

Since we're talking about AI, everything right now is all about prompts, right? AI prompts how do you talk to ChatGPT? How do you talk to Gemini or Claude or whatever it is, right? Well, how are we going to teach these kids or a teenagers how to how to create effective prompts? Well, there's art programs out there if they're into art, we can teach them how to utilize AI to create these prompts and stuff. In this way, we're creating something that's still engaging and stimulating to them that will keep them engaged in the long run.

For our cybersecurity folks, I partner with another program that actually teaches cybersecurity topics and skills in a story driven game. So, you'll learn the basics of Linux in the game. But then halfway through the game, they'll probably say, oh yeah, by the way, there's a bomb in the computer somewhere. You have to navigate the network and try to find it and diffuse it. Now this is reinforcing all the skills that you just learned.

What I like about that program. And they're not here, but, the name of the program is called Haiku. That program for everybody who's looking to learn those skills, they have a program that they're developing or should be ready by now, that as you learn those skills, it's aligned with the NICE framework, the National Institute of Cybersecurity Education, as well as you'll get LinkedIn badges for them. As you learn new skills your LinkedIn profile will update too. So again, going

back to where there's the opportunities there, these are perfect opportunities for them to teach them these skills.

I call it using gaming as the cheat code to engage in other conversations. If you talk to them, for example, if you go to a kid right now and say, hey, let's work on your communication skills, they're going to shut down, or they probably going to call you some names. But if you go to them and say, hey, you know what? I want you to explain to me, you know, how you navigate a map in Fortnite or something like that, they're going to get on this, I kid you not, I, I gave them a week assignment to do it. A kid came back and had a PowerPoint presentation for me. You just gave a presentation. You just did what we're doing right.

DJ: In a video game!

Davin: Based on a video game. Right. The talk I gave at the NICE conference and the talk I've given at a few cybersecurity conferences where I actually explain those same phases of the pen test, I used Fortnite as the example just to kind of show that there are different parallels there. It's not just a waste of time if you know how to use it, if you know how to use it, there's again, everything is an opportunity.

Jasen: We are fortunate to learn from this powerful trio that helps put AI where the goats can get, as DJ said, and give us some direction on how we deploy AI in our workforce ecosystems. Thanks again to DJ Burrel, Joshua Cox, and Davin Jackson.

[Podcast Closing and Jingle] Thanks for listening to Ready for Work, from A C T, your partner in Workforce Solutions and Work Ready Communities. Subscribe in your favorite app, or learn more at A C T dot org, slash, ready for work podcast.