



In conversation with **Jonathan Stanford**

Jonathan Stanford is Head of People Experience at London EV Company (LEVC).

With over 15 years in people leadership, he has a strong track record of aligning HR strategy with business goals. Since joining LEVC three years ago, he has led talent, learning, and people experience initiatives to drive cultural and organisational growth.

LEVC is a British automotive manufacturer with its headquarters near Coventry, England. It is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Chinese automaker Geely and produces electric commercial vehicles.

What exactly is included in your role as Head of People Experience, how is it different from a standard HR role?

People experience is a relatively new title in the industry, similar to how ten years ago no one used the word "talent" and now talent teams and talent management roles are the norm. I imagine 'people experience' will also soon become the norm. My role is focused on creating an environment where employees grow, develop, and perform at their very best. The three key pillars that I'm focused on are recruitment, talent development, and learning and development, to ensure that we attract, develop, and retain top talent. I also lead on performance cycles and early careers.

For me, it's about shaping the employee journey from entry-level to leadership. So while a Head of HR typically focuses on compliance and policy or operational processes, my role is about how those elements translate into a strong people strategy. From hiring and onboarding to developing and progression, we work closely with my HR colleagues to ensure that the approach not only supports business goals, but we create an environment where people can be at their very best.

Can you share your journey into automotive, especially as someone who is relatively new to the industry?

I think my infancy in this industry is my superpower because you have that fresh thinking, and you're not carrying a legacy of things that have been done in the past. Especially now where change is so fast, you can't rinse and

repeat what you've done before. The industry needs people with different experiences to bring new ideas to the table.

To give an overview of my background, I started within retail as a commercial manager and then went into HR, with my background originally being in a commercial role it really helped me when engaging with stakeholders within organisations as I understand that money-making element. I have a real diversity in terms of working in retail, hospitality and telecoms, with companies like Vodafone, the key thing I learnt from that experience is that they're all very fast-paced, and all customer-driven environments and it means people play a critical role within the business' success.

Moving into automotive for me was an opportunity to apply everything I'd learned about people strategy in different settings. Within LEVC you have strong heritage, technical expertise and unique workforce challenges. When you work in the people space, the fundamentals remain the same. It's about engagement, leadership, and development as a whole. Automotive does have that complex mix of operational, commercial, and production-based roles, so ensuring

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alignment between people and business strategy ends up being an even more key focus.

With your fresh perspective, what key differences stand out between automotive and the other industries, and what lessons from your past work could benefit the automotive industry?

Absolutely there's definitely common challenges like engagement, retention, and leadership. For me, in any industry, leadership is critical. The nature of the workforce with customer expectations and operational challenges mean strategies can look different. The thing about retail and hospitality is they are very seasonal, customer-focused and with high levels of flexibility. It can have high turnover and quite a bit of pressure on that front line. Whereas automotive, with that mix of engineering, production, and corporate functions, it means you tend to have to cater for longer tenures with employees who have that real depth of expertise and that's about finding that balance with new talent entering the sector. The pace of change is also different. In retail and hospitality, you're pivoting and rapidly responding to customer trends, whereas automotive tends to be long-term strategic planning for things like electrification and skills development.

I think we could learn to have stronger internal career pathways. Hospitality and retail rely heavily on internal promotions. And I think there's definitely some lessons on how we retain and develop talent. Also to foster an amazing culture and high-performing teams create that compelling culture with a really clear expectation with employees, at all levels. One of the topics that's become

more important recently is flexibility. While production roles have more set structure, we at LEVC have four-day working, the corporate leadership roles could really benefit from increased agility and flexibility in the working model. I think that would help us to attract a greater diversity of employees within the automotive industry.

Given your focus on career and leadership development, what key skills do you prioritise to prepare future leaders for the evolving industry?

18 months ago, we co-created five leadership behaviours, which we believe leaders need now and going into the future. They are agility, authenticity, inspiration, emotional intelligence, and resilience.

Leadership is evolving really quickly, but there are a few shifts that I think are happening right now—the move from authority to authenticity with command and control quickly fading. Future leaders need to be able to show a bit of vulnerability, to show transparency, and emotional intelligence. I guess I'm slightly biased, but there's that need for coaching over directing. The best leaders don't give the answers; they ask really powerful questions and empower their teams to think and make decisions.

Well-being is becoming a real priority, and that expectation for leaders to support mental health and well-being is growing. Leaders need to be able to foster psychological safety in the workplace and that, again, goes back to flexibility and inclusive leadership. We know that diverse teams perform

better, and leaders who foster inclusivity challenge biases. They create environments where people want to really be there.

I think it's always good that you welcome change and new perspectives, like D&I. I think that's really important not to shy away from it but actually use it to businesses' advantage.

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You've spoken about having dyslexia and turning it into a strength—how has it impacted your career and the way you work?

Dyslexia shapes the way I think, communicate and learn. Certainly, in my education, I found it incredibly tough, but when I entered the workplace, I realised how unique of a skill it was. It helps me to see the bigger picture. Another advantage is that I'm really good at strategic thinking, seeing the bigger patterns and connections, without necessarily getting bogged down in the detail.

I love coaching and facilitating leadership conversations where I'm able to influence, rather than within written formats. Given my work in the people space, I have big empathy for different ways of thinking and navigating some of those challenges

myself. I'm passionate about creating an inclusive environment where people feel supported—not just for dyslexia, but for neurodiversity as a whole.

What organisations can do is normalise it, talk about it, educate leaders, and create an open culture where people feel comfortable discussing different learning differences. One of the things we did here as part of our leadership development program was run the Insights psychometric tool, which helps leaders understand that everyone is different and everyone sees things differently.



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