Tech show branding sequence begins with montage of colorful graphics interspersed with closeups of circuit boards and hardware tools. Cut to a digital clock on a desk as it strikes midnight.

Transition to a residential garage door with the words Lenovo Late Night I.T. prominently displayed.

The garage door opens to reveal an open workspace with a relaxed environment. Show host Baratunde Thurston and his guests Kamila Sip and Jon Levy sit at a large wooden bench in the middle of the garage. Cut to a closeup of host Baratunde Thurston speaking. The shot pans out as he turns towards his guests.

Baratunde Thurston ([00:10](#)):

Welcome back to Lenovo Late Night I.T. Where thought leaders tell us what they're really thinking. I'm your host Baratunde Thurston. Now this pandemic completely changed how we think about work. We learned that going to an office doesn't have to be a job requirement and neither does wearing pants. The question is, can we ever go back to the way things were? And do we want to?

Today we tackle the pros and cons of remote work. I'm joined by Dr. Kamila Sip, a neuroscientist, strategist, and speaker who specializes in using scientific research to help organizations advance behavior change at scale. She spent the last five years at the Neuro Leadership Institute, a global research and consulting firm where she managed and oversaw the implementation of rigorous scientific findings into corporate solutions. Now Kamila's also an accomplished dancer, who's going to perform for us at the end of this taping. Didn't know that, did you?

Kamila Sip ([01:04](#)):

I didn't.

Baratunde Thurston ([01:05](#)):

Got to read the fine print, Kamila.

Now also with us in the garage is Jon Levy. John is best known for his work in influence, human connection and decision making. He specializes in applying the latest research to transform the ways that companies approach marketing, sales, consumer engagement and culture. More than a decade ago, he founded the influencers dinner, a secret dining experience for industry leaders, including Nobel laureates, Olympians, celebrities, executives, artists, and me. When Jon first invited me, I told him, "Don't call it the influencers dinner. I'll be there if you change the name." He said, no. And I went anyway because, free food.

Jon, Kamila, what's up, y'all?

Kamila Sip ([01:48](#)):

Oh, good.

Jon Levy ([01:49](#)):

This is super fun. I'm happy to be here.

Baratunde Thurston ([01:51](#)):

I'm happy that you're here. Kamila, I want to start with you. What have we learned about remote work because of this pandemic?

Kamila Sip (01:58):

First, I'm not going to dance.

Baratunde Thurston (02:01):

You keep saying that, let's see how it plays out.

Kamila Sip (02:03):

Who knows? Who knows? Yes.

Well, it depends on many different ... in how you ask the questions in terms of what is that you're actually driving at. I think remote work, what we know about remote work and hybrid work is not necessarily the same thing.

Baratunde Thurston (02:17):

So can you go ahead and define the difference between those first?

Kamila Sip (02:19):

Sure. So, remote work is more about actually working flexibly and working outside of a physical office space.

Baratunde Thurston (02:26):

Okay.

Kamila Sip (02:26):

When hybrid work, when we think about doing it right, is actually a combination of onsite and offsite workers, but treated them as one cohesive unit

Baratunde Thurston (02:36):

Okay.

Kamila Sip (02:36):

Rather than one and one glue together.

Baratunde Thurston (02:39):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip (02:39):

And that's where I think organizations have struggled the most over the last maybe year and a half since the pandemic, because suddenly our life, it's not that our work went remote, our whole life went remote. Overnight we went to kitchen tables, probably something like this.

Baratunde Thurston (02:57):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([02:57](#)):

Dark bedroom corners with cats and dogs and everything.

Baratunde Thurston ([02:57](#)):

Closets.

Kamila Sip ([03:01](#)):

Closets and other adventures in the house. But that kind of shift was so abrupt to so many of us, that organizations have to actually struggle in terms of, how to, what is that we are going to do now in the hybrid? What does hybrid look like?

Baratunde Thurston ([03:16](#)):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([03:17](#)):

And do we know what we mean when we say hybrid? Do we actually mean just remote? But then we are forgetting about the entire population, which is mostly about 70-80% of population of workforce that actually doesn't work remote. They need to come to...

Baratunde Thurston ([03:17](#)):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([03:32](#)):

...the office or on site, or just like the crew with us today, need to be here physically.

Baratunde Thurston ([03:37](#)):

So, what are the thing that you've noticed most in the past year and a half to two, about how companies are changing their understanding of remote and hybrid work?

Kamila Sip ([03:47](#)):

There is a ... it's almost like two different paths that the organizations take.

Baratunde Thurston ([03:53](#)):

Okay.

Kamila Sip ([03:53](#)):

Either they are trying to amplify the remote work and tailor for the remote

Baratunde Thurston ([03:58](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kamila Sip ([03:59](#)):

Virtual environment, technology platforms and different systems and processes. Or they're actually trying, especially recently, moving back to the office for various reasons.

Baratunde Thurston ([04:10](#)):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([04:10](#)):

One is financial, the other one is assumption about creativity and productivity and performance. And also there is some, of course, biases that are coming in, in terms actually assuming that we know better and that we work better physically next to each other, sitting. And it may work for some, but it doesn't necessarily ... it's a one ...

Baratunde Thurston ([04:29](#)):

Okay.

Kamila Sip ([04:29](#)):

...one size fits.

Baratunde Thurston ([04:30](#)):

So it's almost like people are different and we should acknowledge that.

Kamila Sip ([04:30](#)):

I know, shocking.

Baratunde Thurston ([04:33](#)):

That sounds wild. Stop it. Stop your radical thoughts.

We're going to take a pause on this part of the conversation. We wanted to get a better sense of how people feel about remote work. So our team in New York City took to the streets and offered random strangers a penny for their thoughts. But because it was New York, it was more like a buck fifty or even $10 for your thoughts. That town will extort you. Anyway, here's what they said.

The screen cuts to a wide aerial view of New York City. A montage showing the streets of New York and people laughing flashes across the screen. A pedestrian stop light changes from stop to go as the words Tech Walks appear next to it. A man holding a microphone interviews various people outdoors in New York City.

Tech Walks host ([05:03](#)):

So what we're actually talking about today is remote work. Did you have to change from working in office to remote?

Interviewee 1 ([05:08](#)):

Yes. Yes, I did.

Tech Walks host (05:09):
What was that experience like?

Interviewee 1 (05:11):
It was hard to focus on when to close my laptop for the day.

Tech Walks host (05:15):
Sorry, are you at work right now?

Interviewee 2 (05:16):
A little bit. Yeah.

Interviewee 3 (05:18):
There's no work life balance.

Tech Walks host (05:19):
Because your work and your home are in the same place?

Interviewee 3 (05:21):
My desk is in my bedroom.

Tech Walks host (05:23):
Home or office, what would you choose?

Interviewee 4 (05:25):
At home.

Tech Walks host (05:26):
So you basically hate other people is what you're saying?

Interviewee 5 (05:28):
I do work more, but I do miss the personal interaction with my team.

Tech Walks host (05:33):
Are you a video on or a video off type guy?

Interviewee 1 (05:35):
Video off because I don't like seeing my face in the morning.

Tech Walks host (05:38):
Oh, so it's because you're not wearing makeup.

Interviewee 1 (05:39):

No.

Interviewee 3 (05:40):

There's lots of videos online of people going to the bathroom with their laptop and not realizing that they're still on video.

Tech Walks host (05:46):

Have you ever gone to the bathroom with your laptop?

Interviewee 3 (05:47):

Of course, I have.

Interviewee 4 (05:48):

I have stress dreams about doing embarrassing things on Zoom.

Interviewee 6 (05:51):

Don't want any odd sounds coming through the microphone.

Tech Walks host (05:54):

What sort of sounds?

Interviewee 6 (05:55):

You know, those odd sounds. The squeaky sounds.

Tech Walks host (05:58):

You squeak?

Interviewee 6 (05:59):

Don't you?

Interviewee 2 (06:00):

I've taken a shower with it, too.

Tech Walks host (06:02):

Number one or number two?

Interviewee 1 (06:03):

One. I don't know why I said that.

Tech Walks host (06:07):

If certain industries are transformed, how will that affect our sense of identity? Our sense of

community? What do you think about that?

Interviewee 7 ([06:13](#)):

I mean, I think it'll impact us like greatly. But I mean, I think when people usually ask that question, they're thinking about like a doomsday scenario. Like human beings are so adaptable and I think if you look at history, that's how we've adapted to the world around us. We change. And then we get used to that and then the culture, the generation after that, they're like, "Oh yeah, this is the norm." And then whatever. Like we're here, so let's just make myself happy, make you happy, make the people around us happy and that's the way to live.

Tech Walks host ([06:40](#)):
I love you.

Interviewee 7 ([06:41](#)):
I love you, too. You know, that's what it's all about.

Baratunde Thurston ([06:48](#)):
All right. So what did you see in that video? Thoughts?

Kamila Sip ([06:50](#)):
It's actually quite interesting. We can see the whole spectrum.

Baratunde Thurston ([06:53](#)):
Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([06:53](#)):
Like people wanting to go back, but also liking the home offices, even though it was in your bedroom or at the kitchen table. So the whole spectrum actually was shown. From emotion, from liking it, not liking it

Baratunde Thurston ([07:07](#)):
Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([07:07](#)):
Worrying about it, being stressed

Baratunde Thurston ([07:09](#)):
The stress.

Kamila Sip ([07:09](#)):
About it.

Baratunde Thurston ([07:09](#)):

Yeah. Jon, what have you been seeing over the past year and a half in terms of ... what's jumped out to you in terms of this remote, this hybrid and how companies are trying to adapt?

Jon Levy (07:18):

I think the biggest thing I'm seeing is that leaders are trying really hard to figure this out and nobody has a clear answer. And that we are seeing a lot of companies trying out different things. Some are saying, "If you don't come back into the office, you're done here." Right. Others are saying that if you want to work remote, we'll adjust, we'll pay you, we'll whatever. Because we are so interested in having you as talent, we'll go into that extent.

Baratunde Thurston (07:42):

Yeah.

Jon Levy (07:42):

I think that the problem that I'm most concerned with is that ... what is it that we're trying to accomplish with work? Nobody's asking that question. And maybe some people should reevaluate their relationship and get a divorce.

Baratunde Thurston (07:56):

I mean, a lot of people are.

Jon Levy (07:57):

Yeah.

Baratunde Thurston (07:58):

Mass resignations are happening all over the country and the world, as well. But tell me more what you mean.

Jon Levy (08:02):

There's this question of what you want your work culture to be. And nobody's asking that before they're asking, should people come back or not?

Baratunde Thurston (08:09):

Okay.

Jon Levy (08:09):

If your culture is ... look at a company like Pixar. They're incredibly dependent on interactions between the directors, the creatives, the designers. And when you don't have those hallway conversations, then a lot of the creativity disappears and the culture that's made them so strong and so incredibly successful, disappears. And the problem is that for jobs where trust is really required, where you have to have that high level of trust so that as a creative, I can give you honest feedback about something. At a distance, it's really hard to create trust.

Kamila Sip (08:43):

So that's actually ... it's really, really interesting because yes, trust is built through connection and it's much better built when we are in person because there is so much more going on that we pick up, that we can't really pick up on a Zoom call. But there is also like when you think about culture, organizational culture, it's not the office, it's not the physical space, it's not where you work, but it's how you interact with other people. And a lot of trust is actually built through different steps, it's not just interaction. But it's also through like how consistent you are, how transparent you are, do you actually do what you say, and can I feel like you have my back and the other way around. So it's almost, can I actually trust you with my vulnerable information that it's not going to be disseminated throughout the organization?

And I think that that actually, it plays well whether you are remote or whether you are in person. But the social connection that you are referencing, our organizations have been remote for the whole time before the pandemic. So there was not much of a change and you build a lot of connection actually through conversation. And sometimes when the social connection, physical, is not possible. We do feel shortchanged in some ways, but at the same time, it goes back to how we actually replenish that to create a sense of belonging. Because the sense of belonging is not necessarily physical, that we actually sit next to each other. Because I can sit in an office with 10 other people and if I don't have...

...connection with them, I'll feel as alone as I'm in a Zoom call with one person that cares about me and knows that I like to dance salsa or something or paint when I'm bored, for example.

Baratunde Thurston (10:25):

Thanks for teasing the type of dance you're going to do later on the show. Salsa.

Jon Levy (10:29):

So, I like that you bring this up. And I think that what you're talking about is kind of endemic to specific company culture. It's especially a big issue when you look at the preference of knowledge workers to return to the office. So let's take a simple example, 21% of white knowledge workers said they wanted to come back full time.

Baratunde Thurston (10:51):

Okay.

Jon Levy (10:51):

3% of black knowledge workers. But what's going to happen at offices when there isn't a representation of an already underrepresented group? Because what we know is that, if I see you more often, you're going to be the one that gets the raise...

Baratunde Thurston (11:04):

Right.

Jon Levy (11:05):

...and the promotion. And then all the work that has been accomplished over the past several decades may just end up being lost.

Baratunde Thurston ([11:12](#)):

I was having a conversation about this very point, literally this week. And someone was sharing with me that black employees in this corporate knowledge environment, if you want to call it that, they just felt like they could be themselves more from home.

Jon Levy ([11:27](#)):

Yeah.

Baratunde Thurston ([11:28](#)):

And there's this mask that a lot of us put on to be able to survive the office, which costs hours, it takes extra time and you're slower to respond to things. If I can just get done what I need to get done, then I'm not as distracted by the racism. Like the IRL version of racism, a little more intense. So I'm removed from that environment, I'm actually more productive.

Kamila Sip ([11:51](#)):

But also when you think about gender diversity, a lot of women resigned and had to remove themselves from the workplace nowadays, especially in the last six, eight months. And suddenly reversing all that
actually takes an effort. So then women are also not going to go back to the office as much as white male.

Baratunde Thurston ([12:11](#)):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([12:11](#)):

Which creates the same problem, essentially, you are getting a very homogeneous population physically at the office. When you think about the distance bias, automatically, it has everything to do with how we process information.

Baratunde Thurston ([12:23](#)):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([12:23](#)):

Like if I don't see you, if I don't hang out with you, it doesn't necessarily matter our ethnicity or culture. But if I don't interact with you, I don't have an exposure to you. Automatically, I think of you as my out group. So, I'm not going to think about you automatically when it's promotion time, when I assign a new project, when I want to do a Zoom of real-life cookouts with Zoom.

Baratunde Thurston ([12:45](#)):

Zoom cookouts are the worst cookouts, by the way.

Kamila Sip ([12:45](#)):

I can't imagine.

Baratunde Thurston ([12:47](#)):

Please don't ever say that again.

Kamila Sip ([12:48](#)):

As a scientist, I come from the perspective of that, we are animals and we have so much behind our conscious awareness that's happening from scent, from how we actually feel and smell. I mean, it's actually scent of other people...

Baratunde Thurston ([12:48](#)):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([13:03](#)):

...that is creating the connection, that is creating chemistry. A lot of times the chemistry can be good, can be bad, it doesn't matter, but it's there.

Baratunde Thurston ([13:09](#)):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([13:09](#)):

And what you are mentioning, when you think about when you go to a game and everybody's rooting because they have the shared goal, they have the same agenda. Those people, actually ... there is a lot of studies showing that the people synchronize, both the heartbeat synchronized, the physiology synchronized, the hormonal...

Baratunde Thurston ([13:27](#)):

They become one.

Kamila Sip ([13:27](#)):

...fluctuations. They become one.

Baratunde Thurston ([13:28](#)):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([13:28](#)):

Because they have a shared goal. So you think about the level of exposure, the level of experience, shared experience that's actually contributing to that.

Baratunde Thurston ([13:28](#)):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip ([13:36](#)):

And in person, it's definitely way better because you have so much more input and data for the brain to process. It can be achieved through Zoom, but it takes much more effort. And as human beings, we

don't want to exert that effort.

Baratunde Thurston (13:48):

How can we better use technology if that's a part of the solution, to be intentional about creating that trust, about giving opportunities for vulnerability? Are you seeing practices where folks are doing it well? Can that be a part of closing some of these gaps of belonging that we've talked about?

Kamila Sip (14:06):

Well, I just had a conversation with somebody, it's a startup that they've done a ... it's a tool for teams and getting really quick feedback from teams anonymously. And I think that as a technology, as something that you can plug in into your otherwise big systems and processes. It actually allows managers to have that level of insight in terms of what's happening, where are the challenges, how to move the obstacles, who is struggling, where are the conflicts? Because people are allowed to share their feedback on a very frequent, like it's a weekly basis that you can allow 20 seconds just type in a few things.

Baratunde Thurston (14:43):

Yeah.

Kamila Sip (14:43):

A few questions that are prompted by the software. And it allows a whole range of not only qualitative data, but also you can turn that into quantitative data that allows the manager to see like, "Oh, there is a big reorganization that's happening. And my team is actually not producing" Or there are deadlines on another team that my team is struggling potentially. And they are raising it up anonymously. Like, "Hey, I'm not going to make that deadline." Jon is slacking off the whole time.

Baratunde Thurston (15:10):

As he always does.

Kamila Sip (15:10):

As he always does.

Jon Levy (15:12):

Classic Jon.

Baratunde Thurston (15:13):

But I also, I like that because you then prevent potentially a later flare up.

Kamila Sip (15:19):

Yeah.

Baratunde Thurston (15:20):

If there's no outlet for people to share, what's not working well for them, then you might not find

out until they leave.

Jon Levy (15:27):
Yeah.

Baratunde Thurston (15:27):
And you're like, "For two years you were experiencing this? Why didn't you tell me?" "Well, you didn't create an opportunity where I felt vulnerable and safe enough to share this with you."

Kamila Sip (15:35):
Yeah.

Jon Levy (15:35):
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Baratunde Thurston (15:36):
What about you, Jon? Are things, features.

Jon Levy (15:37):
I've got so many things.

Baratunde Thurston (15:38):
Yeah.

Jon Levy (15:39):
So first of all, I want a feature that's in my calendar that will start blocking chunks of time based on the number of hours I need to work. So it will not let another meeting be put...

Baratunde Thurston (15:39):
Yes.

Jon Levy (15:51):
...on my calendar, even if it's open.

Baratunde Thurston (15:53):
Yeah.

Jon Levy (15:54):
Because that's my four-hour work time that I need that day.

Baratunde Thurston (15:57):
Yeah.

Jon Levy ([15:57](#)):

And if you just keep putting that in, that means I have to do it late night after let's say parents put their kids to bed, make dinner and all that.

Baratunde Thurston ([15:57](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Levy ([16:03](#)):

The second is that I want player cards. I want cards for each person at the company that doesn't just tell me their like name and title and contact info. I want stuff about them, their family, what they like, what they dislike.

Baratunde Thurston ([16:16](#)):

What do you want with all this information, dude?

Jon Levy ([16:18](#)):

I want to humanize people.

Baratunde Thurston ([16:19](#)):

Ah.

Jon Levy ([16:20](#)):

Right. So if all I know about you is that you're in accounting, then every time there's a problem with accounting, I'm like, "Oh, you're a jerk." But if what I know is that you have five kids...

Baratunde Thurston ([16:31](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Levy ([16:31](#)):

...and that you're a single mother or something like that, then suddenly I'm like, "Oh, if it's taking a few minutes, I understand why."

Baratunde Thurston ([16:40](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Levy ([16:40](#)):

Because that kind of stuff humanizes you. And then it also allows us to find our common ground. If we actually design the experience so that they have influence, so that they can connect with people, then it changes the game.

Baratunde Thurston ([16:52](#)):

So I have a question for you, and I want you to keep it brief. But you're talking to a CIO or a CTO and you want to give them some advice about what they can do to reduce tech burnout amongst their

employees. What do you have?

Jon Levy (17:04):

Realize that technology isn't just about making things more efficient, it's also about making the experience better in general.

Baratunde Thurston (17:12):

Okay.

Jon Levy (17:12):

And so we want to keep optimizing, speeding things up, getting things to be as frictionless as possible. And that's often the job of the technologists at the company. But to also realize that then, what technology resources can we have that actually build community?

Baratunde Thurston (17:29):

Okay.

Jon Levy (17:30):

Can we have on the internet, a group's opportunity for people who want to take rides together, or that are part of sub communities that actually want to meet?

Baratunde Thurston (17:38):

Yeah.

Jon Levy (17:38):

There's incredible software that can help with that. Is there rules that we can implement that will protect people of when they're getting their messages? Or when their meetings are being scheduled? So all these options are probably things that your employees are well aware of and would request if they knew that they could come to you.

Baratunde Thurston (17:38):

Yeah.

Jon Levy (17:57):

So I guess the big suggestion is, an anonymous suggestion box.

Baratunde Thurston (18:01):

That's good, yeah.

Jon Levy (18:02):

And then let people vote on it.

Baratunde Thurston (18:03):

Yeah.

Jon Levy ([18:04](#)):

Be like, "What's actually important to you?"

Baratunde Thurston ([18:05](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Levy ([18:05](#)):

So you can see who cares about what.

Kamila Sip ([18:07](#)):

Yeah.

Baratunde Thurston ([18:08](#)):

I love all of that. This has been such a great conversation. That's all the time we have for tonight. Shout out to our guests, Kamila Sip and Jon Levy. And thanks to all of you for watching. I'm Baratunde Thurston and I'll see you on the next Lenovo Late Night I.T.