Episode 2
Forge Technologies
Talent scheduling and sharing app

Guest: Stacey Ferreira, Forge Founder and CEO

Angel: Hi everybody this is Angel Cicerone, your host of **Easy+Retail+Tech** and I'm here today to bring you a tech solution that's going to help you with employee scheduling and retention.

With the unemployment rate under 4% there isn't a retail store or restaurant owner I've met in the past couple of years who hasn't gone on a pretty angry rant about the difficulty they are having hiring and retaining qualified employees. It's a really big challenge and one most small owners haven't been able to work around.

So today I'm so excited to bring to the show Stacey Ferrara, the CEO of Forge, a new platform which is changing the way the world works by creating a new social contract between hourly employees and employers. But before we talk about the Forge, before I introduce Stacey, I want to give you a bit of background on my very accomplished guest. She is the co-founder of a company called My Social Cloud whose investors included Sir Richard Branson and was acquired by www.reputation.com in 2013. She's a Thiel Fellow which awards grants to young talented individuals who want to build new things instead of sitting in the classroom. She is the co-author of a book called ***Billion under 20. How Millennial are breaking down age barriers and changing the world*** and she was awarded Forbes 30 under 30 in 2016. Stacey's a sought-after speaker and we are so delighted to have her here today to discuss her latest venture called Forge.

Welcome Stacey! I am thrilled that you're here because I know you're going to blow people away with Forge.

Stacey: Thank you so much for having me, happy to be here today. It's a thrill.

Angel: So based on everything you've done, my first question for you is where did the inspiration come to start Forge.

Stacey: So the inspiration really came, you know Forge is my second company. So kind of always had that entrepreneurial bug I think from a young age. But the inspiration specifically for Forge came after I published my book. One of the big takeaways that I had from the book as I was talking to just hundreds of young people across the globe, was really the way that people wanted to work was changing. A lot of the young people that I was talking to kept saying things to me like, you know I value work-life balance more than I even value the paycheck. I'd rather have control over my own life, be my own boss or at least be able to pick and choose when and where I work than get paid a lot of money and so that was really an interesting concept that I grabbed onto and started kind of looking deeply at what historically work looks like for people and where do we think that that's going in the future based off of these new technological innovations that allow people to have a lot more freedom and flexibility.

Angel: So what started out as being an opportunity for an employer or, excuse me, for an employee, became a huge benefit for an employer, is that how it worked out?

Stacey: Exactly. And as I started talking to these younger folks you know the thing that I kept coming back to was you know it's great that you want flexibility and the ability to pick and choose your own hours. But at the end of the day the businesses are the ones who pay the bills and they're the ones that allow us to put food on our table. So I started talking to the other side of the equation, which is the business owners and operators, and started asking them about what are the challenges that you have when it comes to labor and retention, as you know, is top of the list. People are constantly looking at how do I retain my talent; how do I attract more talent when I haven't retained people and how do I just make my business stay afloat knowing that labor is the biggest expense a lot of times these businesses have?

Angel: Okay, so on your website it says that Forge is a flexible employee scheduling software. So let's start with the simplest explanation of what Forge is and what it does.

Stacey: So at Forge, we've got a software that allows businesses to come into our technology platform, list the hours that are optimal for them to have workers within their location working specific jobs. So I'll give you a very concrete example. If I am a restaurant owner and I know that I need three servers from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and I need three cooks from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., I'm over simplifying here, you load that into the Forge system along with all the employees that work for you for those specific positions and then our system will automatically send out a push notification to those employees mobile phones that, say, you're a cook at restaurant A, there's a cook position from again 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. are you available and interested in working and the employee can opt into that shift and say, yes I'm interested and that just pings the manager, hey Stacy's going to come in and work this cook shift at this time. Do they can build the labor schedule that's ideal for their business in there and then allow their employees to pick and choose the hours that they work and fill out those hours so that the employees kind of build that schedule for them based off their preferences.

Angel: So that's all well and good. So what happens if nobody opts in?

Stacey: So as you do when you're running a business, you have the ultimate control. So managers can always go in there any point and assign folks into shifts. So let's say Thursday rolls around and your company policy is Friday the schedule is published, then Thursday night the manager might come in and any of the shifts that aren't filled - they can just through our system click and drag people's names into those shifts and it'll notify the employee saying no one picked up a shift, so you're actually working it.

Angel: Okay so you have the option as a business owner to either fill that schedule or allow employees to opt in to the hours that are preferable to them.

Stacey: Exactly.

Angel: Okay so that's fantastic. Now what else does it do?

Stacey: A lot of other things. Like other kind of workforce management systems that are out there, we, of course, have a time and attendance platform in there as well. So not only can you schedule your employees through Forge, but employees can also clock in and out through their mobile device or through a company-sponsored tablet or laptop that's in the back. For some of our clients that have larger properties, this is really aimed at cutting down the time that it takes for an employee to go to the back break room, clock in for their shift and then get to their station. Allowing them to do it just through their mobile phone when we geophone the location really saves a lot of time and energy and at the end of the day, money, that the company is spending on wages that the employee is not actually doing the work --they're walking from the place to clock into their station. We've also got a chat functionality in there so that managers can chat back and forth with employees through the system and then we've got some other cool stuff that we're doing as well with hiring and taking a new spin on that - something that we call talent sharing.

Angel: Okay, now let's go back to the clocking in and you talked about geofencing. Can you just explain that to our audience how that works exactly so somebody who may not be familiar with geofencing understands the simplicity of this?

Stacey: Definitely. So when a client decides to use Forge, what we'll actually do is we will take the coordinates of their location. so if it's - I'll go back to the restaurant example-if it's a restaurant we'll actually map the restaurant and where its coordinates are and through our app any time that an employee shows up in within those coordinates. So whenever they show up at the restaurant our system recognizes that and if they have a shift associated with that location, our system prompts the employee through their mobile phone and says it looks like you're at the restaurant; would you like to clock in for your shift
And through their phone, through the click of a button they can clock in straight through their mobile device for that shift. They work the shift, they can again take their breaks. So we can prompt the employee -you've been working for four hours, we see that you're still on site you haven't clocked out, time to take a break. So we prompt them to take those breaks and prompt them to clock out at the end of the shift.

Angel: So that's a great point you bring up about the clocking out. So one of the ways, obviously, a small retailer or restaurant is going to control payroll is to make sure people leave on time. So you're actually the employee. Now when you do that are you pinging the manager as well?

Stacey: So mostly pinging the employee to start. Managers kind of handle the process the same way that they do today which is at the end of the day, the managers still have control over what's happening at their location. So we do recommend that they still make sure that they are having those conversations with employees. The app is pinging people to take their breaks, to clock out. But at the end of the day, the manager is still the one who's responsible for that. So we do work with managers to make sure that they're still taking on that responsibility.

Angel: So now, I'm a restaurant owner or a retail owner and today I have this dashboard, so basically, I open my computer, I see this dashboard and it's telling me who's working today and if I have any shifts that are and so I think some of the questions people will have. How do you know how to do payroll? How do we know how much each person is earning? How do we know they're not applying to be in the wrong job for that day? So tell us a little bit about how that works.

Stacey: So payroll is pretty simple on our end. Companies can come and for each individual, list the wages that the individual makes. So you can say Stacy is working at my restaurant as a cook and we pay her $10.50 an hour. So you can put that on my profile on Forge that for this position you pay me $10.50 an hour and our application actually keeps track of all of that data. So we know with the clock in and out we know exactly how many hours I've worked, we know what my pay rate is and we can send all that information into your payroll provider. So we ourselves do not do payroll. but we'll do all the calculations for you and on your dashboard, we will show you how much you're spending out on labor and then we package that into typically for most clients, it's two-week intervals and send that data into whatever payroll provider you might be using, be that ADP or Paychecks or Gusto. We can send all that data into your phone.

Angel: So you're not just saving me the time that it would take me to schedule, but you're also saving me time and gathering the information for the payroll?

Stacey: Exactly.

Angel: That's fantastic and everything that's on that dashboard is private? So in other words if I go log on as cook A, I'm not going to know how much cook B is earning correct?

Stacey: Correct. So everything on what we call can the manager's dashboard, which can be accessed by a store manager, a district manager, an owner, or operator, depending on the structure of your company, that is all private to anyone that the owner or the admin has designated as a manager and then everything that's employee facing is specific to that individual employee.

Angel: Does an employee need to have a mobile phone or a smartphone in order to use this program? I think that's a question a lot of owners are going to ask.

Stacey: So they definitely do not have to have access to a smart device to use Forge. They can still access it through a web portal. so as long as they have access to a computer that has Chrome or Safari or Internet Explorer on it, the employee can still access it and we have some clients to who - I'll give you a very concrete example - who for the clock in and out portion, because not everyone has a mobile device, they simply have a tablet or a laptop in their back office that they allow people to clock in and out through. Employees can go and select their own shifts they want to work, sometimes while they're on the job. So there are different ways to kind of customize that experience if not everyone has a mobile device or if not everyone is willing to use a mobile device for their job.

Angel: I understand. Ok now where is the cutoff here? How small or large a business can use this program? Because if you have two or three employees does it really make sense.

Stacey: So typically what we find is that companies that have anywhere above eight to ten employees it's really a good fit for the Forge platform and anyone that has over 5,000 employees is kind of the cutoff, will typically partner with another kind of analytics platform to help give richer data to

companies who have over 5,000 employees. So our sweet spot is, it's still a large range but it's really between the 10 to 5,000 employee range.

Angel: All right so now take me through the process. I want to use Forge. How do I access it and what's the process and then what is the ramp up time for me as an owner and then for my employees?

Stacey: So the way that folks can access -it's all web-based and mobile based- so if you're on a laptop or a computer and you want to visit us on the web, it's www.joinForge.com and there's a button there to go ahead and sign up for an account and anyone can sign up and you can also download the mobile apps by going into the App Store and searching for Forge Technologies. Or if you go on the website, again, it'll prompt you with the links to download the app. so those are the two ways to visit us. Then in terms of the ramp up and learning curve, you know, this is one of the things that we've tried to get right - making the ramp up not so steep. I think a lot of times there are these technology companies that have absolutely fantastic software, but just the ramp is incredibly tough and so what we've tried to really do is make a lot of the platform for smaller companies.

Anyone between the 10 to 500 employee range, it's pretty self-serve through the website. We have little visual cues and tutorials that will take you through all the steps that you need to do to get on-boarded and if you spend 20-30 minutes in there by yourself, you'll have a pretty clear idea of what you're doing and for larger organizations, typically what we do is we'll sit down with store owners and go through an in-depth conversation with them about the technology, what it can do for them and then we'll typically do a 30-minute training with managers at one or all of their locations. Then we'll do a 30-minute training with the team members. So the employees who work there typically all through webcast and then we kind of turn people loose and of course we're always there for customer support requests. But really doesn't take more than an hour and a half to get kind of fully on board into the system for most.

Angel: Okay so a small retailer or restaurant should be able to and owners should be able to download and get a good idea and set this up within an hour an hour and a half and then about 30 to 40 minutes for an employee?

Stacey: Exactly.

Angel: Okay now the big question everyone's going to want to know is "how much does this cost?" Because I know I'm saving time in scheduling, I know I'm saving time prepping for payroll. I know I'm getting my scheduling done, perhaps more efficiently and maybe, maybe, maybe my employees are a little happier because they're able to be flexible in they're scheduling. So that's a lot of impact from one piece of software. So tell me how much a small store can expect to pay for this.

Stacey: So our pricing is variable depending on exactly what parts of the solution folks are using and they can spend as little as $99 a month on the entire software suite ranging upwards of about $300 bucks a month if they want the full kind of suite with all the bells and whistles and their own kind of dedicated customer support staff.

Angel: So let's break that down. If I'm a restaurant or a retailer with 15 employees, tell me what that's going to look like for me dollar-wise.

Stacey: So with 15 employees you'll probably pay around 150 bucks a month for the entire suite service. So that includes again the scheduling, the time and attendance, the chat functionality and then some

cool talent sharing and hiring.

Angel: Alright let's go into that talent sharing. That is one of my favorite pieces. So in my work, as you know, I'm all over the country and I'm working with retailers and restaurants and I have literally gone into my clients where, especially in the restaurant business, where they've had to shut down sections of their restaurant because they have no coverage. Because people called out or got sick or did whatever. So the most, for me anyway, one of the most exciting things about your platform is what you're calling a talent share feature. So why don't you go ahead and tell our listeners what that means and then we'll talk about how it works.

Stacey: So talent hearing is a feature that we have that's really born out of the fact that in any given city or small kind of ecosystem there are companies who have labor that are looking for more hours and a lot of times companies are unable to give more hours to an employee who might be looking for more hours.

So the way that this really plays out is you might have a restaurant that's right next to a retailer and they've got kind of similar type employees that might work at both. It's feasible that I work at a retail location and bartend at night and talent sharing allows these businesses to build strategic partnerships to give their employees more opportunities, so that employees stay retained longer. So the way that talent sharing really works that's kind of the fancy explanation for its businesses can partner together through our technology. So again, if I'm a retailer I can say here are the five restaurants or the two restaurants and three other retailers that are right next door to me that I want my employees, who are part-time, to be able to go and pick up a second part-time job. So that to the employee they're working a full-time job. But it's really across two retailers working two part-time jobs. but they're sharing, still getting their 40 hours a week, and to me I'm able to retain this part-time employee for me much longer by simply sharing that employee with the restaurant that's next door or the retailer that's next door.

Angel: I think this is so amazing. So within a certain shopping center you can really be just recirculating employees once you find good ones and everybody has the benefit of them and using them and the employees happy.

Stacey: Exactly you're spot-on. It's kind of a win win win for everyone that's involved.

Angel: Well the first thing I know some of my clients will say, well the other guy's going to steal my employee away from me. Once my employee goes over there they're going to want to work there. So why don't you address that objection.

Stacey: Two things. One is our system is really really good at matching companies together. So we'll actually recommend for you because most companies will load things like wage data into the Forge system, we won't explicitly share that wage data. But we will show you who are other businesses that are similar enough in terms of the types of employees that they're hiring, the profile of employees and wages will show you who the best matches for you to partner with. That takes away that level of, you know, these people might offer a little bit more than me or you know the employee might decide they don't want to work this job anymore.

We do the matching so that it's very similar type worker and companies and then the second thing to that is – and the biggest use case of talent sharing for Forge - is a lot of companies who recognize that they can only offer part-time hours, so for companies that have a large portion of part-timers, they

know that their employees will be looking for other work and if they're looking for full-time work, then that employee is much more likely to turnover. But if the business can get ahead of that and say, hey we can't offer you full-time hours, but we're partnering with other businesses that you can go work part-time hours for as well. So that you can make full-time hours or even above what is traditionally considered full-time, you can work more hours. It's great in that sense too. Because then rather than having that kind of competitiveness with the businesses that are across the street, you have more of a collaborative and environment that helps actually benefit the employee that much more.

Angel: Right because they're in control of the hours that they work. So if they tried to get a second part-time job, it may have conflicted with the first one.

Stacey: Right and that's why our scheduling and time and attendance platform is helpful in this equation. Because our system can see that Stacey's already working at the restaurant as it cook from 10:00 to 2:00 p.m. so if I were to try and go and pick up a shift somewhere from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m., our system would actually recognize that and it would say you can't work the 1:00 to 5:00 shift; but you could work the 3:00 to 7:00 shift or 3:00 to 9:00 shift. So our system takes care of that scheduling headache that comes with if you're trying to schedule an employee that's working multiple jobs.

Angel: So without getting into too much detail these outside employees, they can't go in and steal shifts from anybody. Everything is set up so that they're not going to steal shifts or be able to a dump their original job in order to take the second shift, you've got this all figured out correct?

Stacey: Right. So the way that the software works is it's also done based off of tenure. So the folks who have been there the longest get first access to shifts. Which hopefully keeps your existing talent pool extremely happy with using the software because they're still getting that first access to shifts the way that they normally would and as you start to hire more people in from the other businesses nearby, shifts will go out to those folks if they haven't gotten picked up by your employees who have been there at the longest.

Angel: So this is an amazing piece of software and I know it's relatively new and I know that you've been using it around the country. Any success story you want to share with us in a certain industry or category that our listeners would like to hear about?

Stacey: Yeah so we've deployed the software, as you said, all across the United States in a few different verticals. So our largest verticals are definitely in hospitality, retail and restaurants. A big success that we've had that we're kind of excited about - and increasingly doing our partnerships with a lot of shopping centers and so what we're doing there is really deploying this concept of sharing talent across shopping centers. because they're kind of this perfect environment where businesses are close in proximity and have a similar type talent.

One of the places that we've just deployed this and things are going extremely well is in Honolulu, Hawaii with a big shopping center there and it's actually one of the largest shopping centers in the United States. We've just seen massive success with over 60 companies at that particular shopping center getting onboard into the system and sharing talent with each other. So it's been really great to see a bunch of big-name brands that we'll be announcing here shortly, in a case study that we've conducted with them, but a bunch of big-name brands kind of coming together to collaborate on this idea around sharing employees to help that entire ecosystem reduce overall labor costs, that are really associated with hiring, training, onboarding new talent.

Angel: Not to mention Hawaii has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country and one of the hardest places to find talent. So I think it's fantastic. Alright so as we wrap up, the main benefits of Forge are, number one it's extremely affordable. It helps keep your employees happy. It allows you to fill your shifts and reduce turnover, it saves you time and scheduling and payroll. What am I missing?

Stacey: I think those are the big things as you said.

Angel: For as little as about $150 a month for about a 15-person staff.

Stacey: Yep spot-on.

Angel: Okay so if somebody wants to learn more they can go to www.joinForge.com?

Stacey: www.joinForge.com or look us up in the App Store. Forge technologies.

Angel: Terrific. So I love this, I really hope our listeners want to learn more about Forge because I think scheduling employees and retaining employees, it is really s just something that's very very hard right now and anything that can make it easier it's going to make retail and restaurant a much easier industry to operate within.

But before we go I would like to ask you one last question Stacy and that as somebody who's built a couple of businesses already and written a book and works with Millennials and entrepreneurs all around the country, if you had to give our listeners any words of inspiration when it comes to hiring and recruiting or in general to keep going in their entrepreneurial journey what would it be?

Stacey: You know, I think the biggest piece of advice is follow your gut. More often than not, especially folks like myself, we tend to overthink things and try and think things through extremely thoroughly. Which is fantastic, you absolutely need to do that, but don't discount your gut especially when it comes to making that hire of someone who's going to materially change your business. Sometimes we have a tendency to look at all the resume marks that check out and hire the folks that have the great resumes. but sometimes there's just someone who's great at customer support or great with people that you want to have in and around your business and don't pass those people up just because of the kind of checkmarks, follow your gut.

Angel: Thank you so much Stacy it's been such a pleasure and I thank you for leading us through Forge and remember its www.joinForge.com. Thanks again.

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