

Simon Mainwaring:

From We First and Goal 17 Media, welcome to Lead With We, I'm Simon Mainwaring. And today we are doing things a little bit differently. You see my new book, Lead With We is available now in bookstores and online. And so I'm joined today by my friend and colleague, Greg Mollner, co-founder and CEO of Goal 17 Media and a long time investor in purposeful companies. And he's actually going to be interviewing me about what it really means to lead with we. So Greg, I guess I handed over to you.

Greg:

Oh, Simon, I've been waiting for this for a year and a half, but go. All right, we're here to talk about the book, but we're not really as much here to talk about the book as we're going to talk about you. I want to go back into your background because the evolution of your background is what came to your first book, We First in 2011 and now this book Lead With We. I saw three segments. And the first segment is an introduction to Lead With We and quotes and research from people that have walked this trail with you.

Greg:

The second one goes to a lot of case studies. And case studies really are where people learn. I don't understand what worked and what didn't work. But there's the third component, is sort of a roadmap. I've already pulled out pages and sat down with my wife and asked these questions. It's series of, okay if we really want to do this sincerely, one of the questions we asked to ourselves, how do we go about this approach? And so I commend you because a lot of these books are well intended, but at the end of the day the question is, okay, how do I do it?

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. I was very intentional about the structure of the book because I'm not someone who ever wanted to be a writer. And I never thought about writing books. I just happened to write a lot, to get things done. And then people say, you're a writer. I'm like, "Well, I guess so." But writing is a bittersweet thing, it takes a lot out of everyone who puts a book together. But I was very intentional about having the higher order narrative around how business needs to change. And that is a loftier conversation and one that is being had all around the world through institutions and organizations and heads of state and so on.

Simon Mainwaring:

But then to drop down to these very tangible, actionable discreet areas that build on each other through the book. And so it's a difficult thing to do because you've got to throbble on both cylinders all the time. But the last thing we need is another book talking about good intentions or a great idea without giving a roadmap and how to do it. And also we've been lucky enough at We First for the last 10 years to really do this day in, day out with big, small, famous unknown companies.

Simon Mainwaring:

And so the way we think and the way I think and everything in the book is a function of all the teams work, We First. Everything is about, okay, how we get it done? How're we doing it for real? How are we measuring our success? Are we moving the needle forward both for our business, but also for the impact that we need to create? So that's why the book is the way it is. And hopefully we've captured a

lot of the thinking that we've been sharing with clients over the years and made it available in the way that people can follow.

Greg:

Well, you did. And the other thing is there's an extraordinary amount of research into the book. There's quote after quote and study after study. But I imagine you had to get a lot of approvals because some cases you're doing case studies that weren't successful and you're talking about companies. How does that approach happen? How do you reach out and get these kind of approvals for these things?

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. When you an opinion, you're going to have a point of view that is going to point to certain practices and also seek to upgrade certain practices. And the way that works in the book well it is you reach out to folks and say, "Okay, listen, we're talking about you in the book. We want to share that with you and want to make sure that it's accurate and that we've got permission to explain things in those terms." So there's a process to that. But I think the reality is this, we can't nice each other to death anymore.

Simon Mainwaring:

We can't tiptoe around each other anymore. We can also stop pointing fingers and blaming. I really made a conscious effort book not to shame and blame, because firstly we've got to put all our energy into fixing things. And secondly, there's a lot of people doing that with good reason, but knock yourselves out. But I'm much more interested in the solution than I am in attributing blame.

Simon Mainwaring:

And so the book is positive and it really lays out the emerging embrace of a new way of looking at business to re-engineer and reimagine how business can show up, one that works with nature rather than against it. And one that really serves the collective and all stakeholders working together to improve conditions for everyone, so everyone can benefit rather than to oversimplify what's been happening for a long time, which is vast majority of the wealth that capitalism generates gets filtered into more smaller and smaller number of hands.

Greg:

Right. Right.

Simon Mainwaring:

And that is not only unconscionable in the sense that so many are suffering when others are doing so well, but also it's unsustainable from the economic model point of view. And we're seeing things break down. So it just doesn't make sense to me.

Greg:

Well, yes. And purpose led or We First capitalism, these different terms we'll get into, it's really about looking forward and blaming is looking backwards. And we've got enough of that in our society right now, which is another reason why business has to lead this revolution. But I want to get to that in a minute. But first off I want to jump back and talk about youth for a second.

Simon Mainwaring:

Okay.

Greg:

So born in Australia...

Simon Mainwaring:

So I grew up in Sydney. Yep. Grew up in the water. My happy place is in the ocean. I did a fine arts degree and I was deeply, deeply passionate about art all the way through school and then through university. And then I did a law degree and then I came out and I'm like, "Well, what am I going to do with all of this?" I actually left law school and went to art school and I thought I was going to be a full-time artist and then I realized-

Greg:

Now there's a high pain career.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, no, it's actually really funny. I was just so naive and wide eyed, but I really did think I would try and be an artist. And I would literally left law school and enrolled in art school much to my parents dismay, then realized I couldn't eat, pay the bills, do whatever. And it so happened that someone came up to me and said, "Hey, you've always had an inappropriate sense of humor, you should be a copywriter." And having done law, I thought they meant trademark intellectual property copyright. And they meant copywriter and advertising, and I'd never thought about it. And that started my journey in the advertising world.

Greg:

Somewhere along the line... Here you're an art agency, which is all about hard advertising, promoting products. You're working on a global basis. You're working with a diverse group of companies. Some probably a little bit more purpose led some less. At what time did you start having these thoughts about, this isn't really what I want or this... Did you just wake up one morning and say, I don't want to do this anymore or did the message start just creeping in into your mind? How did this happen?

Simon Mainwaring:

Serendipity, luck, whatever would have it, the universe. I happened to read the speech that Bill Gates gave at the World Economic Forum that year, and then later on the floor of the General Assembly. And I just read it online, because I'd heard about it. It was on NPR and things like that. And he said the private sector needs to play a bigger role in social change because government philanthropy can't fix the world on its own. And this is all when 2007, 2008, the global economic meltdown was happening. It was just right in the middle of all of that.

Simon Mainwaring:

And it was weird. I remember it. I remember it so clearly because it was called his creative capitalism speech. And I was struck by the fact it was called creative because it was like a creative brief. He was basically saying, how can we do business differently? How do we need to think about it differently? And the breadth to that ambition didn't scare me because I'd worked on the Olympics and World Cup

projects, I'd launched big things like the razor and worked on accounts like Motorola and had sizeable responsibility.

Simon Mainwaring:

It was a bit of an aha moment. It's like, wow. It had this visceral experience, especially on Nike where you can do work and shape culture, create movements, do things differently and on mass when you come out with the right communication, I was just like, "What could we do if took the power of that storytelling and it applied it to all of these problems?" And the only reason I cared, there's no brilliance, there's no intelligence here. It's a do insight, which is, I just felt what happened in 2007, 2008 was unfair.

Simon Mainwaring:

Maybe it's an Australian point of view where you sit there and just go, "Come on mate," do right by each other. We're all equal. Maybe that was where it came from. But the way I saw the knock on effect to people's hopes and homes in healthcare and all around the world, Greece, Iceland, the Gulf States, all around the world, I was like, "This isn't right. You can't have a few folks invest in the banking world cause the rest of it all to topple down."

Simon Mainwaring:

And so that's where it all started. I was just like, "Wow, maybe there's an opportunity to selfishly find more meaning in what I'm doing by applying some of the things that I've seen from the movement building lens through my professional experience to this issue that seemed so front and center and so obvious to me," which is, we've got to tell a new story for business and we've got to show up in different ways.

Simon Mainwaring:

And this is at the time when Facebook had just started, Arab Spring was happening, Twitter was barely beginning. And we had these new tools where we could facilitate new dialogues between brands and consumers and institutions and citizens. Maybe this was a new beginning. And so all of that led me to naively again, thank God for naivety or whatever. I walked out of my living room through these doors we had, and I walked out and I heard my voice in my head go, "I'm going to write a book."

Simon Mainwaring:

And I went, pardon the friends, S-H-I-T, "I'm going to write three books." And as soon as that happens in my head, I knew it was a done deal. And I spent the next three years writing We First. And I was such a dork, I went and bought eight books on how to write a book proposal. I was just so stupid.

Greg:

We've all done that.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. And then the book came out and did well. That launched the company, We First, which has been here for 10 years now, helping companies be more purposeful and really walk their talk authentically. So that's where it all started.

Greg:

Where did you come up with the term we first? Would that just come to you one day or was it...

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. My job as an advertising guy who's done a million taglines in campaigns is to distill things down to their essence, in a way to that you can add water and expand it later on. And I was constantly challenging myself, "What the hell is the root of the problem with the way we are doing business right now?" There was a lot of criticism at the time about the investment banking world and that sort of thing and a lot of people talking about their motives or selfishness and so on.

Simon Mainwaring:

But really at the end of the day to me it was like, yeah, this whole me first mentality that greed is good, Gordon Gekko, profit for profits sake and all of that. And what I do know from my advertising world is that you want to create some inherent tension and you want to capture people's attention. So to capture their attention, you give them something familiar, but in an unfamiliar way. So not me first but we first and to get that inherent tension that captures their interest.

Simon Mainwaring:

We first, isn't that a contradiction in terms, isn't it about the individual that should be first hacker or collective. And so the book was originally called We First Capitalism, and then just in the last few weeks in discussions with the publisher and so on, deadlines, and we dropped the capitalism because it was a larger idea that goes beyond-

Greg:

Right. Absolutely.

Simon Mainwaring:

But it had, we first leadership, we first culture, we first product innovation. It just had a lot of legs like any great ad campaign. And so I wanted to propagate the idea. And I really wanted to, from a brand point of view, lean into this idea of we to really commit my company and my career and my future to helping people understand what a powerful proposition it is, not just in theory, but in practice in business, what can it look like? So that's how it came about.

Greg:

So let's talk about Lead With We, what are the three or four core principles that Lead With We wants to use to inspire social entrepreneurs and existing CEOs and CMOs?

Simon Mainwaring:

Well, I'll draw a distinction between We First and Lead With We first. We First was about leveraging social technologies to help us drive those dialogues which will take us from a me first mentality to one where we prioritize the collective. But it really was about using these tools and this new social fabric we are weaving through social technologies to drive positive change. In the 10 years since the book came out, a lot of that has happened. You've seen a lot of great nonprofits foundation's individuals do amazing work through social channels.

Simon Mainwaring:

But also a lot of the platforms have basically become advertising platforms. And there's been privacy creep and all the different issues that we hear about out in the press every day. And meanwhile, things got worse, climate, loss of biodiversity, ocean acidification, pollution in the oceans, social inequity. All of these problems that I hope the original book could help solve for by using social technologies to build on business as usual didn't get far enough fast enough, and things got worse.

Simon Mainwaring:

So the new book, *Lead With We* is very different. It's about a wholesale re-imagining or re-engineering a business so that we can look at it through the lens of collaborative leadership leading together. So we live and work in ways that restore and protect the natural and social systems on which all of our futures depend.

Greg:

So what are the steps... I'm listening to this, I'm either young, aspiring entrepreneur or I run a pretty good size company and I completely believe that I have to be part of the solution. What do I do? What are the first steps I take to move my company in the way and get by it?

Simon Mainwaring:

I'm going to talk on two levels, one to the company, one to the individual. A fundamental premise of *Lead With We* is that all of us need to lead. Every one of us is on the hook. We can't just be the beneficiaries of stakeholder capitalism. We've got to share the responsibilities as well. So none of this is going to work if you don't drive an alternative energy vehicle, if you don't choose plant based alternatives, if you don't take actions, if you don't work for companies doing good rather than companies doing bad, if you don't invest in companies that are doing good rather than letting your pension fund enable companies that are doing bad.

Simon Mainwaring:

You've got to put your time and dollars in individual agency to work, why? Because we've got to do it together. Why? Because no one else is going to fix it for you and we're out of time. On that premise, as someone, as a CEO or a founder of a company, you've got to tap into what is fundamental concept in the book, which is this virtuous spiral of collective eyes. And let me speak to that. One of the challenges for me is why is what we are doing up till now not working, and even in the do good world?

Simon Mainwaring:

One of the reasons I believe it's not working is we've talked in terms of this virtuous cycle where you do well by doing good. But consciously or not, that puts these limits on how much impact you have. It confines it to your sphere of influence, your supply chain, your employees, your customers, your give back, your one for one, whatever it might be. But what we are missing is the connected tissue between all the layers of business. And so as opposed to the virtuous cycle, what I lay out in the book is called the virtuous spiral of collectivized purpose in action.

Simon Mainwaring:

And there's several levels. Imagine in your mind an arrow going upwards, and at the bottom the narrow end is the word me and at the top is the word we. So we're going from me to we and there's a spiral wrapping around going up. The first level is assuming the responsibility to lead. And that's what I just

touched on. The second then is as a CEO, founder, someone in charge of a company or someone inside a company, you've got to define your purpose. You've got to integrate that authentically in your company. And you need to address the issues that are exposed through a honest audit of how you're showing up right now.

Simon Mainwaring:

So you need to move from doing less bad to more good. You need to stop being part of the problem. You need to be part of the solution. And yes, that does involve time and capital costs, but it puts you on the right side of history and it allows you to be a part that others want to work with. So you capture those market forces that will drive your growth. But do an honest audit and address those issues in your supply chain, how you're treating people, what products you're making and how you're taking them to market.

Simon Mainwaring:

You then go to the company culture level. And on the culture level, there are three fundamental things you need to do. You need to address sustainability in ESG. You need to look at what harm you are doing and how you can become more net positive, how circular in your economy you can be. Secondly, you need to look at diversity and inclusion. Don't just be diverse, be genuinely inclusive. It adds value to your business and it's the right thing to do. And then thirdly, you need to pay a fair and living wage to people. We see that in the restaurant industry here in the United States, finally, 15 to \$20 and so on. A big change is happening.

Simon Mainwaring:

Those are the table stakes at the culture level, inside your company. And then you need to address a social issue relevant and authentic to your brand. Whatever that might be, women's empowerment, childhood mortality, access to education, something that's relevant to your brand. Then going up to the next level, you need to look at the community level, which is, I don't think of it as marketing as marketing. I think of it as movement making, as community architecture. And you need to co-create impact with those stakeholders.

Simon Mainwaring:

You see this with the Ben and Jerry's of the world. You see this with Unilever brands where they reach out and say, this is what we're committed to. And whether it's a percentage of a sale of a product will go to a cause, or whether it's showing up and volunteering, or whether it's advocating for change and lobbying for change, you've got to co-create impact with your stakeholder community, your customers, your partners out there. And then above that you have the societal level.

Simon Mainwaring:

And again, we're working our way up the spiral here, the societal level where brands need to drive cultural conversations that shape culture. What do I mean? Airbnb, all the things it does around universal belonging, giving free accommodation to Syrian refugees or firefighters during fires in Australia and California or sustainable living with Unilever as I mentioned. All of these brands are driving conversations that really impact all stakeholders in society and shape culture as you've seen around gun control, women's empowerment, access to voting, abortion, all of these different issues.

Simon Mainwaring:

You saw all the CEOs turn up and demand that the Biden administration set more aggressive climate goals. And then finally beyond this societal level you've got transcendence, which is really what I call. And we've transcended our self-interest in service of the collective and we've restored that harmony between humanity and nature, that symbiotic relationship, where nurturing the natural world so that it can provide the abundance we need to thrive as businesses and we're showing up completely differently.

Simon Mainwaring:

And as you step through each of these different levels of the spiral, it's the connective tissue between them all that's so important. And the foundational idea that makes that possible is leading with we. We are all using lead with we as appointed departure, as a mindset, as a process by which we get it done collaboratively, and as an end state in terms of what success looks like, the wellbeing of the whole so the parts can thrive. Why? Because as I said earlier on the whole is breaking down for the sake of just a few parts and everyone else is suffering.

Simon Mainwaring:

And we're at a point of intolerance now. We're at a point of no return. So there are some of the different steps, but the book lays out a step by step plan for companies of all sizes, with case studies and examples and research and questions to ask yourself so that you can position yourself as somebody who's going to benefit from these new emerging market forces, and actually grow your business by solving for social and environmental challenges. Because they are all just marketplace opportunities in disguise.

Simon Mainwaring:

And the brands that are addressing that right now are already starting to feel the wind behind their back and growing exponentially. The book really lays this out for you in a detailed way and that's why I put it together.

Greg:

You look ahead now in the next five to 10 years in the most positive way you can imagine, what's the good that you see? What can happen if we do lead with we and companies take on this type of a culture?

Simon Mainwaring:

The first thing I'd say is that it's going to be a painful journey because there will be those forces that resist it, there will be those who fail despite their best intentions and there will be those who really effectively succeed. So it's not going to be pretty. The second thing I'd say is being optimistic is a conscious choice because it's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Simon Mainwaring:

If we all say we are doomed, then we're all doomed and it's a fade of complete. If we all say, no, I'm going to do a little bit better and we're going to do a little bit better and they're get a little bit better, then we'll all do a little bit better, we'll all start to see the results. It'll build more momentum. The market forces will reward it and it'll take on a life of its own.

Simon Mainwaring:

So I just want to frame my answer in terms of these conscious choices. But what could happen in the future? I think that we will start to scratch the surface of the gifts that the natural world has been laying out at our feet for as long as humanity has existed and bring those to the foreign business, whether it's decoding the DNA of spiderwebs and making clothing, whether it's-

Greg:

We did a show about someone who decoded the DNA of spiderweb to make fabrics, which is just fascinating.

Simon Mainwaring:

... Or whether it's using mushrooms and mycelium to make leather alternatives and so on. All these gifts will suddenly be revealed for our eyes. They've always been sitting there. We've been looking, we just haven't seen them. I think secondly, we will start to reconnect with the natural world. And that will be a huge tonic for this fabricated divisiveness that a lot of social platforms have created through algorithmically and otherwise. Because I think only when we are put in the presence of something larger than ourselves, a natural world, we've all stood on a lookout and gone, "Oh my God." Or we've all looked at a sunset and gone, "Wow."

Simon Mainwaring:

We become small. And when we're small we become a sub set or something much larger than ourselves. And I think that's reconnecting to nature is just one of the most powerful ways to heal ourselves, to come back together and allow us to work to solve for these issues. And then I think you're going to see the same priority given to purpose in the business world that was for a long time reserved for profit. And sustainability in the near term will be a priority, a premium in terms of what drives purchasing decisions.

Simon Mainwaring:

And you're going to see a whole new shakeout of those companies that are going to be the leaders of the future. And I deeply believe the companies that lead the future will be those with the greatest social impact because we've got these issues to solve for. And so I think we'll be closer together. I think we'll be more connected to the natural world. I see a re-imagination or re-engineering a business where we are leading together in new ways.

Simon Mainwaring:

And I think we'll start to unlock something that indigenous people and others since have known for a long time, which is there is a totally different way of coexisting in harmony with this precious gift called the natural world where we regenerate life. We don't degenerate life. We regenerate on an ongoing basis like our bodies do, like the natural world does in ways that will just add value to everybody, not just dollar value but real value, happiness, joy, connection, community.

Simon Mainwaring:

And I think this will be the beginning of something absolutely extraordinary for humanity. But we had to reach this point of crisis before we were going to retool. So in some sense we are here.

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Greg:

I believe humanity will come together.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah.

Greg:

I think we always have and the goodness will come out. I hope people see what's going on here and they take the time. The book really is sensational. And as I said, it's a roadmap. It's a roadmap that if we're not on that trail now we need to jump on.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. It is. I hope it's a useful guide to everyone. It really gets very specific about what you as an individual can do inside your company in the context of a framework that allows us together to take it to scale. And I deeply believe that's what we need right now. So thank you for the kind words about the book and for the great collaboration with Goal 17 through all of this. And it's interesting to be in the hot seat.

Greg:

Yes. Well, it wasn't so hot.

Simon Mainwaring:

Thanks Greg.

Greg:

Take care Simon. Thanks.

Simon Mainwaring:

Thanks for joining us for another episode. Our show was produced by Goal 17 Media. And you can find more information about Goal 17 and my new book, Lead With We in the show notes. Make sure you subscribe to our show on Apple, Google or Spotify. And do share it with your friends and colleagues. You can also watch our episodes on YouTube and We First TV. See you next episode. And until then, let's all Lead With We.