Simon Mainwaring:

Companies today must deliver on both growth and impact. Not just to build a better future, but to ensure it's a future that companies can thrive in. Fortunately, businesses of any size can leverage purpose to drive profit and take advantage of rising market forces driven by investors, employees, and consumers who want to invest in, work for and buy from companies doing good. I'm very excited about today's guest who is the former associate dean of the number one innovation school in the US and who's a global expert on how organizations solve challenges related to growth and impact. You'll hear from us both as to what we believe the future of leadership must look like if we hope to build our businesses and transform our future. What does this mean for your personal and professional life? How do you lead in such turbulent and uncertain times? And how can business be a prosperous force for good in the world? Let's dig in and find out.

From we first and Goal 17 Media, welcome to Lead With We. I'm Simon Mainwaring, and each week I talk with purposeful business and thought leaders about the revolutionary mindsets and methods you can use to build your bottom line and a better future for all of us. And I'm excited to have a very special episode, which is called Our Point of View episode, and that's where we actually don't do the regular interviews with CEOs, entrepreneurs and founders, but rather speak to a subject matter expert so that you actually get to hear our discussion through a certain lens. And that lens today is really leadership and management.

I'm having a little bit of a fanboy moment because I'm so excited to have Dr. Tom Hunsaker joining us who is the former associate dean of innovation for the world's top-ranked global management school, Thunderbird School of Global Management. And we'll discuss what leadership can and must look like to ensure your company thrives while also scaling its impact and how to find balance in your personal life, company culture, and place in the world to best serve yourself and our future. Tom, welcome to Lead With We.

Tom Hunsaker:

Simon, fantastic to be here with you. Looking forward to the discussions.

Simon Mainwaring:

Now, Tom, you and I have been deeply invested in this whole idea as business as a force for change for a long time now, through different lenses, whether it be through the door of purpose or otherwise. But let me ask you this. Every six months, every three months over the last few years, it seems to be like we're living in a new world. Every week is a new world. How would you characterize where this whole dialogue is right now, good or bad, in terms of business showing up in the way that it needs to?

Tom Hunsaker:

It's interesting. If we were to zoom out a little bit, in some ways it feels like we can characterize the current moment as this very significant shift from the relic of shareholder capitalism, which strongly emphasized investors and customers almost to the exclusion of everyone else, to this very strong resurgence of multi-stakeholder capitalism. And so I think if we look at it through those lens and then have the discipline to help ourselves or to ask ourselves to look at the integrated interest within those multi-stakeholders, it gives us a different perspective as leaders. In some ways it makes the job just a little bit bigger than it was previously, but in other ways it really clarifies where we need to be focusing our attention.

Simon Mainwaring:

I love the shift away from shareholder to stakeholder capitalism, there's something that royally... This is a technical Australian term, pisses me off, which is there's a lot of discussion in and around the need or responsibility to share more evenly in the benefits of stakeholder capitalism, but there's not enough discussion about sharing in the responsibilities of it, in as much as a consumer or a leader or a supplier or an employee. We all need to show up differently if we're going to achieve a different result, which means what I buy, where I work, where I invest my money, what car I drive, what diet I have, and how I show up in my professional capacity at work, so that if we want to share more evenly in the benefits we've got to share in the responsibilities as well. Would you say that's fair, off base?

Tom Hunsaker:

No, I think that's completely fair and I think there's a lot there. And maybe we can put two things on the table and then let's talk about it. On the company side or the leader side of things, we're seeing this shift from compensatory, which is if you were fantastic at one thing or if you were delivering financial returns, then somehow the other things or maybe the unsavory aspects of your approach could be glossed over. On the front that we're shifting to now, we're starting to see this much more combinatorial approach, which is actually you're only as strong as your weakest behavior. When we look at it through that lens, absolutely the leader has to now look at these integrated interests across the stakeholders. But I think we also have to be looking at ourselves in the mirror a little bit here and recognizing that we have agency and with that agency it's not necessarily fair to project onto others our morality or our interests without being able to reflect ourselves or being willing to reflect ourselves on the decisions that we're taking.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, I completely agree. And one of the things I try when we work with brands, large or small is we say, "Really, you are not the center of gravity and you talk about yourselves to others and try and inspire or compel them to buy your product or work for you or whatever, but rather you are a platform on which different stakeholders from suppliers, employees, and consumers can actually stand to express or bring to life their own agency for change, that they want to see in their own lives and in our future to give them fulfillment and compensation and so on." I really believe that brands need to be a platform out there for the agency of others, because you engage them because it's about them and then they become effective advocates and amplifiers for whatever the company's doing because they're so invested in it, they're part of it. That's the approach that we take.

Tom Hunsaker:

And I think this takes us to an interesting place and I'd love to hear your thoughts on this, Simon, because from the brand perspective it seems like... And again, please push back if need be. It seems like the easier thing to do is for the marketing teams to focus on understanding the need and then putting words or messages to that, but not so much on delivering on the deed or the actual substantive elements of what that might look like or what those needs or what that real purposeful intent looks like. How are you seeing companies reconcile that? Because there's a lot of PR benefit to putting these messages out and to being attached to what seems to be a multi-stakeholder approach, and yet there's also a lot of risk to being viewed as inauthentic when your efforts or lack of efforts are exposed.

Simon Mainwaring:

I think there's a few parts to that answer. One is I think the encouraging news is that the BS radar of every stakeholder out there is so highly attuned now. Over the last decade of social media and so on, we've become emboldened in terms of it's not just a consumer pushing back against a CPG brand because they don't like a product, but leaders are being called out in so many different ways. The Me Too movement being a great example. You've got not just consumers calling out brands and not just employees calling out brands, but now you've got the investor class calling out brands. That's one component. I think we can take heart from the fact that no one's got any tolerance for disingenuous behavior.

Secondly, I think we have to recognize that in and around any conversation, whether it's sustainability or CSR in the times gone past or whether it's purpose now or ESG, there's an evolution of that conversation, the sophistication and maturity of that conversation, that includes a shakeout like you've seen with ESG recently where it's the shiny squirrel, there's the flight of all this capital, we're all going to go and slap that ESG label on our fund and then all is well and good and we're going to attract everybody and the investors we need. And those disingenuous behaviors have shaken out. And that doesn't mean it's wrong, it just means that it's that early first flush of excitement or interest and then it shakes out and matures. That disingenuous behavior, it's not good or okay, but it has its place.

Then I think thirdly, I think you are starting to see now just this recognition that the change we need to make in the world is not linear because the problems we're solving for are concurrent and compounding in the future and hurtling back towards us in the present, in which case the needs that we need to solve for are exponential, they're not linear. And so is the expectation on business to do it. If you are sitting there, and you're CEO or a founder or some company and sitting there going, "What did we do last year and how can we iterate or incrementally innovate and do a little bit better than we did last year?" You are not solving for the reality of the world that we live in and I believe you need to actually project out to the future three or five years down to track and reverse engineer how you show up and build milestones in terms of that. Back out of the future rather than build on the past.

I put my trust in all the stakeholders that are calling out companies now. I see that shakeout in any dialogue, ESG or otherwise as a necessary part of the evolution of that conversation. But I also recognize that companies that are of sleepwalk their way into the future are going to be caught flatfooted because these issues are becoming so real and present in our daily lives and it's exponential. And so you need to get ahead of it just to be relevant.

Tom Hunsaker:

Listening to you, Simon reminds me of a very recent conversation I had with a CEO of a tech company that really is on the leading edge of being able to quantify some of these ESG initiatives and really interesting to talk about the different interests within a company. He'll say "The marketing department is really excited about the message aspect of this or the stories that can be told from this." The finance department is starting to sharpen the pencil and say, "Wow. It's neat to know that you can now quantify these things. You can quantify the carbon footprint down to the very shirt that we're wearing, but that's going to cost what? And it's going to involve what kind of operational complexity?" And so there's the absolute we need to project into the future and act with this urgency now in order to meet that future. And then there's the dilemma of the practicality of still needing to provide returns and the other things that businesses do.

Simon Mainwaring:

I want to talk to you about that tension because I'm really excited to hear your answer this question. We are constantly faced with CFOs who haven't bought in or an ELT or an SLT or leadership team or

executive leadership team that hasn't bought into this work, partly because they've got so much downward pressure on their stock price. There's economic headwinds. They're not just saying no for no reason. And the way that we approach it is this, and then I'd love to hear how you approach it because you do it from the academic lens and the practitioner's lens as well.

When we need to make the business case for why a company should be purposeful or take responsibility for its footprint and our future, we do three things. We look at the research out there to support it, independent credible sources that provides the data. Then we look at the competitive set and saying, "Listen, even if you don't want to do it, it's instructed to know what others in your category or adjacent categories are doing." And that typically unlocks a little bit of that competitive instinct where you're like, "If our nearest competitors doing it, either they're really stupid or they're under something."

And then the third piece is let's do a cost-benefit analysis of doing it like "What would it cost to do it, to re-engineer our supply chain to celebrate DNI or elevate it internally?" Or whatever it might be. And also not doing it, cost savings and so on. But also a cost-benefit analysis of not doing it in the sense that if we don't do it, what could that cost us later on as opposed to what are the benefits? It's the research, the competitive analysis and then a cost-benefit analysis of doing it but also not doing it. What have you found works or doesn't work and why?

Tom Hunsaker:

I think you really landed on it. In many ways, the research is what gives you the credibility of the data to stand on. We have a program at Thunderbird called the Global Challenge Lab. Part of what we're doing, because we're taking graduate students and we're putting them out into the world and they're consistently delivering high stakes real projects as part of a capstone experience. And one of the things that we like to share with them is at the end of the day, regardless of Simon, you were born in a different part of the world than I was, we were perhaps raised differently, we might even have different ideologies. One thing that we all share in common, regardless of economic background and socio status is we all hope that tomorrow's going to be better than today. And we all fear that it might not be.

And it's in some ways that combination of hope and fear and understanding how to wait, which aspect of that, for a given context of where a leadership team is in their decision-making profile. And then being able to support that through the modeling and through the credibility research that you talked about, that seems to have the biggest opportunity or increases the odds of being able to get hard things adopted through organizational systems.

Simon Mainwaring:

We're talking about incentivizing companies to do something different or show up in meaningful, measurable and defensible ways. And that's all in the context of the [inaudible 00:14:03]. Like "Hey everyone, look at what this can do for your business and you'll win and keep the talent you need. You'll secure the purchases of conscious consumers, your supplier network will level up its game." But there's also the other side, there's the stick side of it that I think is coming really fast. And that stick side of it could be extreme weather events that disrupt your supply chain, things that are beyond our control. But there are also things within our control that are coming, for example, climate justice lawsuits and these movements around stopping eco side or ending eco side, which is basically humanity how it's destroying the natural world such that it's actually going to compromise our own survival.

If you are having a private conversation with CEOs and so on and you're having that corridor of chat and going, "You might want to think about doing this because there's some big sticks out there that are

coming your way to your company, your industry, to business at large." What would you say? Do you see that coming? Because I think the tolerance for not showing up in meaningful ways is diluting with every passing tragedy out there.

Tom Hunsaker:

And I think we can add to that this in a growing mistrust for news in general. There's certain skepticism about what people put out into the airwaves. I would completely agree with you. I would go back to the example that I shared with the CEO. He's convinced and I share this conviction that we're not very far off from a major exposure if you will. There's too many enterprising reporters, there's too many convicted individuals and groups out there. I think the words that he used with me were there "There's going to be a major brand who's going to have said something and be caught acting very, very differently from that. And that's going to have a shakeout."

And I think that really speaks to what you were talking about, which is you've got these industry level factors where you're swimming in a certain tide and there's going to be some major event that is going to perhaps turn the tide of that industry. But then you have the individual brand level or you have the individual company level where there's a lot of critical thinking/maybe even bordering on skepticism, I hope it's healthy skepticism, that is looking to find companies in inauthentic postures. And as those come to light and as we have better tools to quantify these statements that companies are making, I think that's going to be another part of the potential shakeout. So you've got the big macro events that can occur or the big regulatory events and you can also have just the straight "You said this and you were actually found doing this other thing. And we can now verify it, we can quantify that."

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, I agree. I think people [inaudible 00:17:01] get caught in lots of different ways because the opportunities for exposure are so many. It's your supplier, it's your employee, it's your partner, it's your customer. I agree. Sometimes when I have meetings with companies, I feel like they want to do the right thing, but they're going to struggle to get there. It's because they don't have the right mindset in place. They're either caught up completely in their little bubble of their company, which can understand, but it comes at a cost that you want to reveal. Or the prevailing mindset of the industry is, or the business at large, is a legacy mindset so they don't feel like they've got to change because there's so many signals to tell them that everyone else is not changing. Why should they?

I deeply believe that you're not going to achieve new goals without a different mindset and you've written extensively around mindset. I've read a lot of the stuff, your mindset positioning and so on. Help us understand why is how you position your mindset the first step you've got to take before you can hope to achieve any of these other goals that the world we live in is now necessitating.

Tom Hunsaker:

It's one of those words that is put out there with such frequency that in some ways it's lost its definition. And so a big part of my work in that space was to say how does mindset actually work? What's the point of this and what does it activate in humans? And frankly, from a very positive perspective, how can leaders then foster these really helpful mindsets in their teams? I think it's helpful if we looked at it from a bit of a diamond perspective. And if we start at the back end of that, we're all looking for outcomes, we all want results. And in order to get results we know that we have to do a certain action or a certain type of activity. The temptation can be to then try to immediately regulate the activity, right? If I have a certain level of sales at 30 calls then I'm going to make 40 calls and magically I'm going to get a better result.

But if you're making those 40 calls with the same mindset or with the same approach that you were making 30 calls, just the sheer volume or doing more of the same thing isn't the predictor, what we found is the predictor of that is doing it with a higher level of quality. And how do we impact quality? Well, we impact quality by the attitude we engage in certain activities and we impact attitude through our mindset. The fun little analogy I like to share, why do you jump when you watch a horror film when you know it's fake. And the reality is it's because our mind is incredibly intricate but it's also fairly simple and it processes believing something and actually experiencing something in the same way, which is why visualization and mindset and these thought patterns are so important.

If we can inject very powerful thought patterns into our leadership practice, it's going to impact the attitude or the engagement with which we undertake actions and that's going to impact the quality that we bring to the table. And it's that quality that is the better predictor of success rather than the quantity of our efforts.

Simon Mainwaring:

I don't think it can be overstated how important mindset is, not just you as a leader but everyone inside the organization to articulate what that mindset is, with a view to the future and reverse engineering out of the past, sharing it company wide and then letting that framework inform everyone's decision. Because otherwise everyone else inside the company will be a drag on what you are trying to achieve. I got to be honest Tom, I have good days and bad days. I have days where I'm really worried about the future and I have days where I look around and go with the innovation and entrepreneurship out there and so on. It's breathtaking.

You have for years been schooling the most and teaching the most... The brightest young minds through the lens of innovation and impact. How do you feel about them? Are they equipped and inspired and ready to take on that future? Are you worried that there's this bifurcation between healthy self-interest and the need to do something for the future? Is it unjust to expect them to fix the mess of previous generations? You had this deal flow of students all the time, what do you... For good or bad, I'm sure there's good days of that, what's that like and what do you see?

Tom Hunsaker:

First of all, I love the openness there, love the vulnerability because I think anyone who is in a leadership position can relate to what you just described. We need to show up with positivity. And yet behind the scenes there are some moments I might add to it. I'm the father of three. And so I think we also share this where, absolutely through the lens of our students but then in a very personal way, there's the whole legacy effect of, are we leaving them better off than perhaps what we inherited and equipped to then do the same for the subsequent generation? I hope that that's a very standard notion. I hope that that's a pretty embedded notion.

As we look at our grad students, I would say... You use the word equipped, I might change it to the progressive. I think they're equipping, I think it's a becoming process rather than an absolute state. They really do have this care for being intentional. The number one concentration within our degree programs has to do with some combination of sustainability and change and transformation. I think there's this real sense that those are not only necessary but they're invigorating for these students.

At the same time, I think if we're really honest, it feels very daunting to some of them. Because we talk about things that are very, very large. And if we shrink ourselves down to the individual state, on the one hand one person can have this incredible power. On the other hand, if we're not careful, we can leave our younger generation thinking, "Well, what can I do? Because the system is rigged or there's so

much divisiveness out there." I think we need to be very mindful of what we're saying, both intentionally but also unintentionally, when we overemphasize divisive parts of our society versus the things that these students have in common.

On the whole, I think absolutely there's this really strong desire to play their part and to be very beneficial to the future and I think that's really exciting. And the equipped being part of it is I think our generation really needs to meet them where their interests are and be honest about certain things that haven't worked really well. Be very pragmatic in what we're sharing with them. We don't want to be pollyannic in any way. But also own our part, let them own their part and come together and see what we can do together here.

Simon Mainwaring:

I have to admit, my wife and I, we've laying in bed at night and we've done the math. In 2035, [inaudible 00:24:35] having kids, and then their kids will be 20 at 2055 and you map projections of what the world is going to look like. And as a parent, let alone a grandparent, you feel very responsible for that future. And we've heard our daughter say, "Hey, we're not sure if we're going to have kids or not for those very reasons." And it's very, very sobering because I'm going to be a really annoying grandparent, at one point I had hoped. I was looking forward to that.

But the other thing I'd say is this, I want to ask you the $64,000 question, which bothers me, is sometimes we're drinking our own Kool-Aid, Tom, we're swimming in these circles of people that for better or worse, to different degrees actually want to make a difference. But the reality is the vast majority of folks out there don't and the majority of business out there haven't engaged.

And there's three forces amongst many others that I see working against us. For example, legacy industries and companies that have made God's money by doing things that either compromise people on the planet. Secondly, there are, especially in the global south, many people that want their day in the sun, their day at the banquet table of capitalism, their flat screen TVs and laptops and God knows what these consumable products and they feel that they deserve that, so they're propelling the behaviors that have got us into this mess in the first place. And then thirdly, you've got this vast and growing majority of people around the world for whom the luxury of fixing the future is just beyond their imagination. They're just living off under $6 or $10 a day just trying to find clean water or find electricity and so on.

So when you've got these legacy brands, these aspiring middle classes, you've got the disproportionately affected around the world. How are we going to overcome that inertia, those forces working against what we're trying to achieve?

Tom Hunsaker:

And I think it was Bill Gates who recently put a bit of a practical anchor out there and he said "It's going to be really hard to achieve these objectives if our primary lever is to ask people to consume less." And I think in large part it's because of what you just described, global development has not happened in a linear fashion. Once a certain group comes up to the point where they can consume what they have watched others consume, they're going to want to be able to do that. Likewise, it's really counterintuitive to someone's personal interest to say "Of my own volition I'm going to profit less so that the collective can profit more." I don't know that we have perfect answers to that. I think part of it is certainly shining a light on the importance as we're doing so.

We saw it just in the way we're looking at human capital that today is quite different than the way we looked at it even a couple of years ago. We say multi-stakeholderism, and yet for too long it was really

investors and consumers, it was people who put money into the pot and everything else was considered a cost. I think we're starting to see a bit of a shift there and I don't know that I have the perfect response for what's creating that shift, but we're starting to see human capital being viewed differently. We're starting to see far more emphasis on climate and these global issues that we did otherwise. I don't know if it's any one thing but I am encouraged that we are seeing some movement in this direction.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, I actually agree. I think the dialogue around human capital, how we treat other people, each other, our employees, diversity and inclusion, it's very, very top of mind right now. And also natural capital, how we're starting to see dollar value put on everything from wet grasses to blue whales so that we can actually start to recognize that every element within the ecosystem is playing a material role that's going to either positively or negatively affect our future. And here's my random theory because I don't think we have perfect answers to this either, and I'd love to hear your opinion on this.

In opposition to the screen lines we're living, and you and I are doing right now, we need to spend more time in the natural world. Why? Because I think it will reinforce and remind us of our hardwired emotional chemical connection to each other in the natural world. And when we're in the natural world, we have these experiences of awe, whether you see a mountain, the sunset or river, whatever the hell it might be for you. And when you do that, it explodes this human-centric, me-centric framework that we unconsciously have where everything has to be built around us and our wellbeing and our stuff. And we are put back in our context where we are part of a larger system rather than in control of that system.

You most effectively get that visceral experience of it when you reimmerse yourself in nature. And I think during COVID some of us found that when we felt so anxious and fearful and concerned, where we felt the restorative potential of the natural world. But I think more broadly than that, and we're hearing it from indigenous cultures out there, the way back is through nature and by doing so we'll better serve nature and will recognize, not that we have to have less and all that sort of thing, although obviously that's implied, but rather we'll recognize that we're part of something that's larger and you need to protect the whole so the parts can thrive. And I think nature is the door we need to walk through to get back to that.

Tom Hunsaker:

I love what you just said Simon, and one, I share that completely. I'm not expert in this space but I can tell you just from a personal experience, getting out to nature or smelling the pines as we would say in my part of the world, there is something very regenerative about that experience. I think we could also take it a step further and we could say as we can continue to evolve this analogy, this concept of business from a mechanistic approach to a biological approach whereby we are all parts of an ecosystem, and that ecosystem only thrives to the extent that there is some integrated interest. I think that's a really helpful way for us to look at this.

Simon Mainwaring:

My biggest concern is how the hell are we going to get all of us, including me who looks at his phone 75 bazillion times a day back out there? What I've done is I've committed in the last six months to get back in the ocean more. I grew up in Australia, I love the water. And so twice a week I've been surfing and I'm a crap surfer. I look like an old man drowning and he is holding onto a blank. What is-

Tom Hunsaker:

At least you can get up Simon, right? That's more than most of us.

Simon Mainwaring:

I know. If you get up then you fall over, I guess that's called a ride. What the hell. Who cares? But what's your big concern when... You have such a unique perspective not only on younger generations coming through but all your practitioners works and your innovation work and so on. What's the worry that you have right now?

Tom Hunsaker:

The worry is that we will focus so much on what we have that is different or what is different among us that we will lose sight of what is common among us. For you, as I'm listening to you and I share that, although I'm worse than a crap surfer. But my thing is I love to hike, I love to get out. There's something that happens when you put yourself in direct contact with that thing that you're trying to commune with, be it nature or interpersonal dynamics.

It was an interesting experiment and in some ways a pretty poor experiment to see how we started to treat one another when we no longer had direct contact with one another. We no longer lived in commune with one another. It's much easier to be the worst version of ourselves or the most highest bravado form of ourselves when I don't see you walking down the street or when we don't share a common space together. I'm a big fan of hybrid approaches to things, but I think hybrid needs to be very intentional from the sense that we have to commune with one another if we're going to appreciate the person [inaudible 00:33:14] above the politic or above any of these other things that we're... Otherwise, way too prone to divide us or to draw us down.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, I think there's a double, one, two punch here that could be very destructive. One is this separate living that we have, especially here in the United States because I know in Australia and Europe a lot of people are all back at work and they have that direct experience. But here in the states not so much. When we are distanced from each other, we have less of a sense of belonging to a community, big or small, whether it's your state, your city, your company, whatever it might be. And you see that manifesting with The Great Resignation and people being very flighty these days because they don't have that water cooler talk, they don't care about the people as much that they work with and so on because they don't see them.

But then because of that, the concurrent divisiveness that's been compounded by social media in many ways, in other ways, because what we share about ourselves tells the algorithm what's going to be reflected back to us in terms of content or headlines and that [inaudible 00:34:20]. It polarizes us even more. And so not only do we lose that sense of belonging, but those other forces out there that are pulling us apart then have greater sway over us.

Tom Hunsaker:

In some ways as we look for anecdotes, just like in strategy or other things, in many ways the counterweight to what to do is really understanding what not to do. And so there's this healthy need to be able to describe the types of things that I'm not going to engage in. But I think there's also the counterweight that says if I'm too much in a virtual world then what I really need is physical presence or if I'm too much in a particular state, then what I really need is the opposite of that or the counterweight to that. I can tell you just, and I imagine you've experienced the same, just working with different groups

around the world and certainly in our own institution it was almost like this revival moment when people could actually pull the mask off and embrace each other again. It was interesting that it got to that point. And yet I think there's still this relic or this need to shed some of the distance or the disconnectedness that came to be more the norm when we were living in that hyper [inaudible 00:35:46].

Simon Mainwaring:

I completely agree. It was so funny. It got to the point... Not funny but unusual where it got to the point like "How you doing?" "I'm terrible. Oh my god, I am falling apart." Everyone was just like, "Oh my god, we've all got..."

Tom Hunsaker:

[inaudible 00:35:57] it's raced to the bottom because nobody could have any joy and nobody was allowed to have good things going on.

Simon Mainwaring:

And also they're like, "Oh my god, I was drinking at 9:00 AM this morning." They said, "Remember the first few months of COVID where everyone was just like, 'It's the end of times and so on.'" But then as soon as somebody says, "Oh I'm okay," then everyone else is like, "No, I'm okay too." And you fully scattered back to this old mindset. I have to say in that context, these are really, really unique circumstances that we hopefully but may not never see again. Circumstances like that reveal things that otherwise wouldn't be revealed.

And so I want to ask you something, I'll share my version of it first, which is what has this last two and a half years of extraordinary challenges to leadership and community and impact and so on, what has it taught you personally as a leader as to where you might be falling short and how you need to show up differently? My version is I really needed to step back and let go and trust others more within my organization and with the partners and so on that I work with. Up till that point, I think I was holding on too tight. I was white-knuckling too much and didn't allow myself to open my hands and receive what is so readily available if you just give others the chance. And I kicked myself about that. But these circumstances provoke that and I see that as a gift. What did you observe as someone who teaches about leadership and so on?

Tom Hunsaker:

And if we were white-knuckling before this experience, just imagine how much more we were white-knuckling when we couldn't see each other or when we were inventing these theories, these stories of what somebody must be doing on the company [inaudible 00:37:33] or any number of things. I certainly shared that... I tend to be a fairly private person. I would much rather ask questions and listen than I would stand in front of the group and deliver a bit of a dialogue or a bit of a monologue. I found however, and was even asked on a number of occasions, "Let us in a little bit more. Let us know you as a person. We enjoy and respect you as a leader. We enjoy and respect you as a professional. And we're curious about you as a person, but we don't necessarily feel like we really know you in that sense."

I don't want to overstate this because I do think there can be a very healthy balance between work life and other life. But if we are really going to appreciate and focus on belonging and we are really going to focus on someone's personhood before any of the other markers that might be used to describe them. And we have to know them and we have to understand and appreciate a little bit where they're coming

from. And frankly, we have to find ourselves in these experiences where we disagree but do so mutually, respectfully and appreciate that that's a perfectly natural way to live diversity in its true form and its true manifestation.

Simon Mainwaring:

It sounds like these bridging dynamics that bring people back together and allow them to maybe have different points of view but still communicate effectively and not get polarized, is that what's showing up for you right now or...

Tom Hunsaker:

Completely. It's interesting. We use the word inclusion and yet if we're not careful, inclusion can look and feel very superficial when in reality inclusion has always been intended to be this very embedded way of dealing. Where Simon, you bring something to the table that compliments what I bring to the table and somebody else brings another thing to that table. And in order to get to this powerful innovation or this fantastic collective, I've got to hear from you, I've got to listen to you, I've got to understand you, I've got to know where you're coming from and I'm not going to agree with all of it, but I'm going to appreciate where it's coming from. And for us to compliment, then we have to be willing to have this collective goal, but appreciate that it's going to take a diversity of opinions in order to surface something that's going to represent those integrated interests that we're really aiming for, to get back to the beginning of the conversation, in that multi-stakeholder capitalism aspiration.

Simon Mainwaring:

So what would your advice be? There are so many moving parts to our experience of life and so many components that would need to be adjusted to get us where we want to go. But someone in your position, you get to go, "If I could pull any lever or inspire people to do just one thing right now, that can make disproportionate difference in their life, in their business, in our future." What would your advice be? Because there are solopreneurs, there are entrepreneurs, there are business executives listening to this. What's that one thing that you would say "Right now really focus on this"?

Tom Hunsaker:

It's always hard to pick the one thing. I might hedge a little bit on you Simon, and maybe have two things. But if we're looking at it at the individual, the agent level, I would say find yourself in the by the way moments in the day to day, looking at your environment and trying to see opportunities for new advantages, improvements, even in the common experiences that are around you. And use that as a way, a mechanism to roll up into bigger, potentially grander thoughts. The other thing I would say is very intentionally find yourself initiating conversations or engaging with media or sources that aren't part of your natural algorithm, that actually probably bring a little bit different lens to the table and find yourself trying to bring this learning is always the answer mindset to the table as you do so.

What we find is it just tends to not only put you in a different place in order to see things that you would've otherwise missed or frankly that other people are missing, but it tends to make you far more collaborative. And those are really the premium skills we're looking for as we move forward in innovation. We need people who, in under biased or less biased ways, can see new opportunities and are willing to do the heavy lifting of connecting. But frankly also, for bridge builders, can collaborate with others and get things done even if those people don't share every single granular aspect in common with you.

Simon Mainwaring:

I think it's funny you talked about this learning experience because I think I have a similar point of view, but I would express it differently, which is, and this is a funny old thing for me to say, but I almost hope that people can go digital on things. And what I mean by that is a lot of the times we feel hopeless or incapable of making a difference or feel paralyzed because of the emotion we put around something, the future looks scary, the industry is corrupt or morally bankrupt or whatever it might be. This problem seems so large and so we're stalled by our emotion. But if we take that emotion out of it and just look at it as a different creative bridge, a different innovation opportunity where the parameters are different, but you take the emotion out of it and then you solve for it the same way you would solve for a problem when everyone is fat and happy and everything's good and everything's rosy and the sun is shining.

But I just think that as soon as we can do that, we can start to recognize that these challenges are marketplace opportunities in disguise and that we are completely capable of solving for them, especially when we show up as our best selves and want to listen to others and collaborate, as you say. But I think sometimes our emotion gets in the way. I don't know what you think of that, but sometimes we're our own worst enemy.

Tom Hunsaker:

Let me compliment it because I really like what you said there. I might change the word slightly and rather than remove the emotion, I might say pause the emotion. Because emotion is what gets us out bed in the morning. Emotion is what... It's the engine that-

Simon Mainwaring:

And the Zoom call. Those two things, but yes.

Tom Hunsaker:

But I think you're absolutely right in the sense that pausing the emotion sufficiently to check our biases to the extent possible or to check these tendencies, to reject something that doesn't feel normal to us or doesn't feel like our prevailing norms is really, really helpful. And then maybe rehire the emotion when it's time to get something done. You've got to turn that into action somehow.

Simon Mainwaring:

I couldn't agree more. And I just want to say, Tom, firstly, I have so much respect for your books and your thought leadership and how you've really empowered so many young people to sharpen the world really, really meaningfully. I'd encourage everyone to follow Tom and really learn from his thinking.

Thanks for not only the time today, but the insights on the strength of your unique line of sight because this is a moment in time. I do believe it's probably the most important decade for humanity in terms of our future. And so we all need to be on point and we need our biggest hearts and brightest minds pointed in the right direction. So I can't thank you enough, Tom.

Tom Hunsaker:

Likewise. Couldn't agree more. It was a lot of fun and really enjoy your work as well and appreciate the opportunity to collaborate here.

Simon Mainwaring:

All right, thanks so much Tom.

Thanks for joining us for another episode of Lead With We. Our show is produced by Goal 17 Media, and you can always find more information about our guests in the show notes of each episode. Make sure you follow Lead With We on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Google Podcasts. If you really love the show, share it with your friends and colleagues. And if you're looking to go even deeper into the world of purposeful business, check out my new book and Wall Street Journal bestseller, Lead With We, which is available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Google Books. See you again soon. And until then, let's all lead With we.