

Simon Mainwaring:

Leadership has never been more important than today, or more in need of reinvention, whether you're a startup or global enterprise. But where do you start if you want to live your purpose, and ensure those around you can flourish? The secret lies in how we think about leadership in new ways, and how that can align with who we are as human beings living in the natural world. Today's guest is a leading academic and practitioner from one of the world's top business schools, and she'll reveal this latest thinking for us, so that we can be our best selves, build companies and teams that thrive, and work together in new ways that better serve the planet. She'll give you actionable strategies to use in both your personal and professional life, along with insights as to how you can think differently to transform your own leadership. So, if you want a fast track to a way of being that supercharges your life, business and leadership, listen in now.

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 today, I'm joined by Dr. Katia Sol. She's the Assistant Director of the Stanford Flourishing Project, and a lecturer at Stanford University teaching classes in Leadership for Social Change, Wellness and LifeWorks. And we'll discuss how we can regenerate ourselves to show up most effectively for others and the planet, and how we foster a culture of purpose and service to navigate these challenging times and course correct our future. So Katia, welcome to Lead With We.

Dr. Katia Sol:

Thank you so much, Simon. It's great to be back in conversation with you.

Simon Mainwaring:

Katia, I'm so excited to talk to you because you focus squarely on two topics that are so important in today's very challenging world, the first being the nature of leadership, because there's so many more demands on us today than there was arguably two and a half, three years ago, before the pandemic and so many more crises shaped our lives. But then you also focus on human flourishing as well. And so, could you speak to kind of both aspects, and maybe how they're related?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Sure. For the last 10 plus years, the organization that I've co-directed is called the Ecology of Leadership, and so we really take an ecological perspective in how we approach leadership, just in the current context of sustainability and the conversations you're having here on this podcast. When we look at the general state of the planet, and moving towards a more regenerative world, to me, it is impossible to create a more regenerative world if we, as individual human beings and leaders, are not living in a regenerative way. And so in a way, I feel like we've been trying to create this new operating system for how to be on the planet with global flourishing, and yet from this old operating system of the old model of leadership, which might be lone wolf leadership, having to just do it all yourself. Whereas a leadership model that's for flourishing and is really taking into perspective an ecological context of, who are all of the people who are involved in creating the common context for flourishing?

Simon Mainwaring:

It sounds like you're integrating both the very personal and often private side of a leader with their more public persona, but at the same time, the role of the leader in the context of everyone else that they touch through their leadership. Would that be fair?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Yes, absolutely. And I think too often, we try to silo out people's individual experience and pretend that it's not happening, but it's become more and more clear. And I think through the pandemic, it's almost like we cannot hide those fault lines anymore, and just like global warming and the climate crisis is becoming impossible to ignore. Also, the ways that we've been living unsustainably as individual humans and as leaders are starting to crack. We're seeing through the cracks, leading to things like the Great Resignation, where people just simply are not able to keep up the facade anymore.

Simon Mainwaring:

I couldn't agree more. I mean, I think one of the hidden gifts of COVID, as tragic as it is, is that this last couple of years has allowed us to be more private in public, to be more vulnerable. And I'll put my hand up and say there have been times I just wanted to throw in the towel. "I can't do this anymore. I want to give up. I'm so passionate about the change, but the demands on me and the responsibility of the team, clients, the larger ambitions we have for change, it's all too much." And you just kind of, you crack, as you say. So, through all the one-on-one trainings you do and the coaching that you do, how would you characterize how leaders, in a very generalized way, are feeling out there?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Yeah, it's exactly what you're saying, Simon. I actually had COVID at the beginning of the pandemic, very beginning, March 2020. And so, I've had to go through having long COVID, and it's a similar experience where there are just days where I wake up and I have zero energy and capacity. And it's like, "How am I going to show up to teach, to mothering my three children, to be with my coaching clients?" And then the next day, I might feel fine. And so people are on this roller coaster, but the extremes are, again, just impossible to ignore at this point. And I think that there's a recognition that we cannot do it alone anymore. We need one another, we need a community, we need different models and ways of being in leadership, because on the day that my child is sick and I can't make it in, who am I going to call? How am I going to show up for my work? Or is there a model where I can... I've had my child on my lap during my calls where I'm leading 25 global social entrepreneurs, and he's sitting right there and actually, for a lot of them, from the cultures they're coming from, that's amazing, and they love it. And it actually opens up a kind of space-

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, it humanizes...

Dr. Katia Sol:

Right.

Simon Mainwaring:

It opens a space, it humanizes. And I want to come back to that new mindset you sort of alluded to there, because you can't achieve new results without a new mindset. But I really want to lean in on this vulnerability aspect, because here we are, going into a new year. We've all had a break, but I think a lot

of us are probably like, "Oh my God, here we go again." So when you deal with these leaders, these social entrepreneurs and so on, what do you tell them about these kind of challenging feelings they have? They're not enough, they can't cope, there's too much to take on. Do you tell them, for example, "That's okay, and just own that and honor that"? Do you give them ways to work through it? How do you get them from where they are now to where they can go?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Mm-hmm. Yeah, I mean, first of all, I think that anytime that we acknowledge what is true and authentic, it actually creates more space for movement. And so, we talk about it in my work with the Ecology of Leadership as landfilling. We've been in a culture of landfilling, emotionally and culturally. So, what that means is we stuff everything down, don't show it, pretend like it's just under the earth, which Annie Leonard said, "There's no such place as 'away.'" But we're stuffing the emotion, and then what happens is this leadership, which is almost superficial, right? It's like, have all of that stuff. Now, like I said, the cracks are happening. And so if you don't acknowledge them, it's still visible to the people from the other side, but we're not able to be empowered with it. Whereas actually, if I can just own, "Today, I'm having a hard day," then for me, what I experience is that it creates space. That's the way that emotional healing works, is that once you acknowledge it, the emotion can actually leave and move. And so you can say, "I'm feeling that," and then I can actually drop into a more authentic present space with my clients, with my students.

Simon Mainwaring:

And in practical terms, I want to speak to that. I mean, at We First, with my team, what we do is something called strengths and stretchers on a weekly call, where everyone on a personal or professional capacity can talk about what's working, what's not, how they're coping, not coping, if their pet's sick, and so on, to your point about surfacing up these hidden emotions. What are some practical tools that you advise these leaders with to use to, for themselves, surface up those emotions, but more importantly as well, for their team?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Mm-hmm. Yeah, I mean, exactly what you're doing, which is having a space for people to speak it, can be really powerful. So for example, this past quarter, I was teaching this class called Living on Purpose at Stanford and had all these students who are some of the most high-achieving students in the world, who are used to needing to present themselves as excellent in all things, and pretty much perfect in all ways. And so we were entering one class, and I could just tell from the looks on their faces. It was like week six, they were tired, they were clearly struggling. And I've had my lesson plan, and I was going to go into it, and I stopped. And I was like, "You know what? Let's just go around and check in." And there's this question that I love, which is, "How am I, really?" So often in our world we say, "How are you?" And people are used to just giving the inauthentic answer. But if you say, "How am I, really?" And I started by sharing myself, how I was, really, that day.

Simon Mainwaring:

Wow. That's really the thing. That's challenging. That is really challenging.

Dr. Katia Sol:

Yeah, and I went for it. And so I shared, and then it was so beautiful what opened, and it didn't take that long. It was maybe 25 minutes, for a minute per person for my whole class, in the three-hour class. But

it was such an opening, and you could just feel the energy move in the room. You could feel people breathe a deep breath for the first time. You could feel the authentic connection between the students, and then that created space for them to be ready to learn and to move into the content that we had for the day.

Simon Mainwaring:

And so in practical terms, when you've got a team, if you're a founder, a social entrepreneur, well, you might have 5, 10, 20 people, or if you're a larger organization, you've got 1,000. What sort of cadence would you use with those sort of strategies?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Yeah. It's just about, depending on how many people you have, you can do it in different ways. You can just have a breakout of pairs, so you take four minutes and two minutes per person. I don't think everyone needs to hear everyone else's answer. It's just about, it's like, each person bringing themselves present in the room. And then sometimes when you're working in a team where you really, it would be beneficial for everyone to know how everyone else is really doing, it's worth the time, even if it took the entire meeting, to have that check-in, because I would bet that your work for the next week, two weeks, month is going to be more effective based on having made the space for that authentic connection.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. I think even the permission to do so is half the solution. I mean, so often I found, with the We First team, that when someone says they know that they can say that they're not okay, and then they share it, not only do they feel better about it, but others in the team, who also feel the same way, rally around that person. And then suddenly you feel supported, you feel like that emotion can be processed, and you feel like the whole team can move on. I want to come back to something you alluded to, which is this sort of ecological approach to leadership. I have two questions. Can you dig into that a little bit more as to what that means and what it looks like? But also, who is a leader? Because these days, everyone's got to lead if we're going to solve for the challenges we all face. So who is a leader, and what is an ecological leader?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Thank you. I mean, I love Lead With We. That whole concept is. I really believe we really are all leaders in our own ways. And of course, you have people who are in positions of leadership within organizations, but at the same time, any person on any team can step into leadership at any moment. And I was at EPCOT on Monday with my family and we were in line, an hour plus line for a ride, and my four-year-old was losing it. And everybody, if you look around at the line, everyone is just staring at their phones. No one's engaging with each other. People are just face down, staring at their phones. And my 14-year-old said, "Hey, mom, do you have that game on your phone, that Heads Up!?" And so he took leadership in our family of 15, and he said, "Let's do this." And all of a sudden we're all playing, we're laughing, we're interacting with each other. And so he created connection in this normally you have disconnection. So it's just an example of him stepping into his leadership.

From the ecological perspective, the model that we use in our program, the Ecology of Leadership, is a tree. So each individual, you can imagine, as their own tree, and they have roots and soil that you don't necessarily see, but that's what's really informing the tree, the canopy, what you do see; the fruits. And so in the roots and soil, you could think of this as your values, as kind of the emotional landscape, your history, your family, traumas that you might have experienced in the past. And all of that is operating

under the surface, and it's helpful to look deeply at what's happening there, at what is informing your outer leadership, because for example, I might be behaving, showing up in a particular way outwardly in my leadership that is unconsciously stemming from an experience I've had in the past or from a belief that I'm holding. And so, we believe in this integrative process of looking inward to then engage in a logical way, so we are able to approach our kind of leadership development from that inner-outer perspective also.

Simon Mainwaring:

And I want to kind of offer a different lens on that and see how this resonates with you. I feel like one of the most powerful ways and the shortest route back to where we need to go to course correct our future is to reconnect with the natural world. And the way I like to think about that is that we are human nature. We are nature. We're the human expression of nature. And everything around us, all species, all the different sort of biological blueprints around us, are all different expressions of the life force out there. And we just happen to be one of those species, and we are the human expression of that nature. And so, I feel like what we're doing is just returning to what is innately true about us and then allowing that to kind of, as you say, flourish within there. How does that land with your perspective?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Well, I designed a new class for Stanford for next quarter that's called Living Leadership. And the first week, the name of the week is called We Are Nature. So, it resonates fully.

Simon Mainwaring:

There we go. There we go.

Dr. Katia Sol:

And yeah, like any species in nature, if given the proper context to flourish, it will naturally flourish. And so, when human beings are given an environment that is full of encouragement, full of support, space to be themselves, space to grow, to develop, to risk, to try new things, then we naturally flourish. And so, there is this... I feel like so much emphasis is sometimes on the individual leader or the individual person, and what I'm seeing is that actually, so much of our focus could be more on, what are the collective containers and experiences that we need to support people's flourishing? And that it's really not an isolated question.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, I couldn't agree more. And also, I think for those listening, my hope would be that they get a sense that your perspective and what I was talking about is a great relief, because you're not on your own. But rather, through this form that you take in this world at this moment in time, you can tap into forces that are much larger than yourself, and synergies and compound efforts, and be part of something much larger. I want to get practical though for a second. I mean, you're talking about reconnecting or aligning with an ecological perspective on life as a leader and even more broadly, but here we are looking at life through these pinhole cameras on our phones and on our computers. We're screen living, and we've been doing it remotely. You can't literally connect to the natural world as easily. How do you do your training? How do you transform social entrepreneurs? How do we do it as leaders in our own companies?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Mm-hmm. Well, I don't think you can replace the value of going back to actual connection with the earth, and it's something that I do incorporate. So even in a remote training, I will make space for people to go outside. And I will tell them ahead of time, if I'm leading a virtual retreat, to plan these two hours, think about where you might go. I will give them practices to do, and then to come back and share about their experience in the virtual container. And ideally, you would actually have in-person things, again, where I'm more and more going back to offering those opportunities also, because at Stanford, I actually teach on the farm. Stanford has an educational farm, and after a few quarters of being in classrooms, I discovered the farm and I said, "I'm only going to ever teach here again." And so in the class, I had students literally go out onto the land and just spend 20 minutes fitting and being.

It's a meditation practice that I guide them first through what's called a sense meditation. Close your eyes, and what is the quietest sound you can hear? What's the loudest sound you can hear? Feel how the air feels on your skin. Open your mouth. Can you taste even any of the essences in the air? Feel what the ground feels like? What's the furthest thing you can see? And then into a deeper connection with the land itself. And when they come back, I mean, just 20 minutes, students who have been on their screens pretty much... these students pretty much since they were born, they don't know a non-digital world. They are transformed. And I take their phones. I take their phones away from them at the beginning of the exercise. I say, "Put them in this bag so you are not tempted, because you will be tempted." And they are so soft and such a beautiful spirit when they come back from that 20 minutes.

And so, then I invite them to make that a practice on a daily basis. Wherever you live; it doesn't have to be this profound, beautiful, old-growth redwood forest. Just go on your front stoop and see what birds are outside of your front door. What do you notice in the landscape? Or what does the wind feel like? And anybody, any of the podcast listeners who are listening right now, you can do this no matter where you live, even if you're in a city. As you said, we are nature, and nature is all around us. And so, you can embody that practice on a daily basis. And with the students, and I say, "Turn off your phone, and now go out on your own for two hours." You can be in person, and then you can give exercises for people to do.

Simon Mainwaring:

And let me ask you this. There are those in this world with inflation, recession, the Great Resignation; all of these different things going on, going, "Wait a minute. You're telling me to be a more effective leader in 2023, I need to carve out 20 minutes to go out in nature? Or even more so; two hours." I don't mean to be funny about it, but what is the ROI of doing that, in ways that you've seen in all your training with your students and leaders?

Dr. Katia Sol:

The natural source of generativity, of creativity, of flourishing. And so, I mean, I would just ask, how many of you spend 20 minutes a day scrolling on Instagram or TikTok or Facebook? And probably, it's more like an hour or maybe more. So if you were to take just 20 minutes... if you don't have 20, take 5. Just go outside with your coffee for five minutes. I noticed a lot during the pandemic, just I became much more conscious about breath.

Simon Mainwaring:

Right, right. It makes a lot of sense. I want to drop down from the methodology, the kind of ecological metaphor, down to the minutiae of doing. And what I mean by that is, for a leader today that's trying to kind of align their personal and professional selves, and to be more vulnerable and so on, you're up against cancel culture. You're up against a lot more restrictions, and rightly so, around what you can and

can't say. So, how do you know how to navigate when to show up personally and vulnerably as opposed to kind of navigating this more difficult landscape?

Dr. Katia Sol:

I mean, there's a whole interesting field around vulnerability, and I was really struck by, of course, Brené Brown is one of the leading thought leaders in that space. I remember listening to a podcast by her in which she was talking about how she doesn't share so much about her own personal process, and she was distinguishing between vulnerability and just kind of splattering your experience all over everybody around you. And that she's very mindful actually, about who she shares what's happening for her with just a small circle of trust. And in our leadership trainings, what we do is we teach our facilitators, 'cause we have people who are also training to be facilitators of these leadership trainings. There's a difference between knowing, "I am able to speak to my vulnerability and be in my center, and show up powerfully as a leader to hold other people, to hold my work for the day, to hold my team. And I'm actually in a space where I need to step aside and ask someone else to step in for me today."

And our leadership training, we actually always have three of us as co-facilitators, main instructors, so that if at any moment in time, one of us needed to step aside almost into a participant's hat, you had two other people who could hold the center. So in my own experience, there are times where maybe something's been going on for me where I wasn't able to step up powerfully as a leader. And it's my responsibility to know, "Today actually, I'm not going to be in integrity to hold others from this space." This is when I need to say I need help. And that part of asking for help, I think is probably the most vulnerable and the most difficult thing. But what I've learned is that it's better for me to do that than to pretend I've got it together and try to hold people from a place where I'm actually not steady. Because back to the ecological metaphor, if my roots are not strong in the ground, if I'm not able to show up fully, then I would rather step aside and take the ego hit or whatever it is, to be able to know that I am showing up with my strength.

I'm still a mother of three. I'm still exhausted. I still have long COVID. There's all these things. It's not like all of that is not operating in the background, but there's a subtle, energetic difference for me between, I'm able to be with all of that and still be focused on holding the, be it the work or the people or the class that I'm showing up for, versus it's time for me to actually step back and ask vulnerably for help.

Simon Mainwaring:

Right, right. And I want to sort of press in on that even further. So, this is as practical and as actionable as possible. Maybe you can share an example of working with a leader or a social entrepreneur or a student or something. What are some of the questions we might ask ourselves when we feel like we're off our game, when we're feeling unbalanced or energetically kind of off kilter? What are a few questions we can ask ourselves to check in and know whether that's the appropriate moment to step aside or look for support?

Dr. Katia Sol:

I think there are a few different lines of questioning. One is, if you have choice, if I'm feeling not well or something on a particular day, either emotionally or physically, are there things I could do today that would be moving the needle forward for the organization or my work? But maybe I'm not the one stepping in front of a class today, right? Now, with my, for example, teaching at Stanford, I'm there once a week. And so, my classes on Tuesdays, I don't get to change the dates. And in the past year, there was one day where... and I live two hours from campus. So, there was one day where I started driving. I got about 15 minutes into the drive and I said, "If I try to make this drive with my chronic fatigue, I'm going

to be so exhausted by the time I get there, I won't be able to be a good professor for them." So I made a radical decision, pulled around on the highway three hours before my class, stopped on the side of the road, wrote my class and said, "Actually, class is going to be on Zoom today." Went home. I still held the class, but I did so in a way where I was monitoring, this is actually what will be best in service.

So, I think that's one question for me, is what is going to be most of service to the people that I'm leading or serving today? And that's a question, like am I sourcing... that's another question we ask, is where am I sourcing from? So, am I sourcing from ego? Am I sourcing from my pride? Am I sourcing from some sort of a should, or an external expectation? And what will truly serve the intention that I am here for? And so, if there is a different way to do something that might better meet that intention, I might need to let go of my own attachment to how it's supposed to look in order to serve the intention.

Simon Mainwaring:

You know what? What you just shared, it resonates so deeply with me. I think one of the most powerful questions I can ask myself; is what I'm doing or what I'm asking or how I'm showing up coming from a place of ego or of being of service to something larger than myself? And it's a constant tension I think we all struggle with, because it's almost insidious. It's unconscious. It's who you are as much as who you want to be, and it's really, really tough. And I want to kind of level up from the personal transformation aspect as a leader, to the collective. What is that connective tissue between how we kind of nurture ourselves and show up as best as we can, with the healing of the collective that you're leading or society at large? How do we draw that line?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Well, I think we're at a tipping point similar to how... I'm listening to the podcast with Koan. There was this tipping point that she named where people are all of a sudden running to the ball around climate change and sustainability. There's this recognition on a collective level that we've passed a certain point where we know that this is one of the main things that we are talking about that brands need to be thinking about. I think that that personal connection, in terms of flourishing and sustainability, to the collective is also becoming apparent, because it's no longer like, this one person here isn't flourishing, this one person here isn't flourishing, and the companies are able to just continue operating because these individuals are so scarce. With the pandemic, with, I would just say, a series of building pressures, the collective fault lines have been cracking and you're seeing that so many people are going through this similar experience. So many people are tired, so many people are struggling their own personal flourishing that it's become a collective question.

Companies are needing to address this. Stanford is needing to prioritize mental wellness and health. There is a tipping point, just like there has been with race and DEI work where it's like, we cannot ignore this issue anymore, and so we need to put in company-wide measures. We need to put in, at the university level, university-wide measures to address these questions and to support personal flourishing and also connect it to the collective.

Simon Mainwaring:

It's almost like we're breaking down so we can be put back together in new ways, so we can better serve these urgent needs. And that is playing out on a personal level, where you've got to kind of identify when you're not coping and use strategies to show up differently as a leader, but then we've got to do that collectively. Is that fair?

Dr. Katia Sol:



It is. And I would say it's asking for us to do things a different way. All of this talk of there is no going back to normal, what the pandemic revealed was the way we've been doing things hasn't been sustainable actually for a while, but people have been pretending to get by. But now there's this-

Simon Mainwaring:

Because everyone else was pretending.

Dr. Katia Sol:

Yeah.

Simon Mainwaring:

Everyone else is pretending. It's like, what? Yeah, okay.

Dr. Katia Sol:

Exactly.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Katia Sol:

Yeah. So with the permission, there's this reevaluation happening of, is it even healthy? Do we even want to continue doing it the way that we were? And I see this tension happening in the workplace right now and culturally, where there's a part of the culture which wants to get back to action, and actually even faster, to make up for the time lost over the past years, and it's hitting this intersection of the, "But we can't." People just can't. And so, I think it's only going to get stronger. Just like the climate crisis, it's going to get more and more evident. And it's calling for a culture shift and it's calling for a way of doing things differently that's actually more regenerative on the personal level, on the family level, on the community level, on the workplace culture level. And there are specific things which can support human flourishing, and I would argue that that directly connects to company flourishing, to cultural flourishing, to the planet flourishing.

But acknowledging we can't be in this endless growth, endless productivity model that's only been exacerbated by the digital age, I think is the first step. Like, the first step of AA is saying, "I have a problem," right?

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, I know, absolutely. And what I so love about what you're saying is the application of the regenerative concept, not as some higher-order aspiration that we've all got to work harder to achieve and so on, although that is true, but to ourselves on a personal level, that we need to regenerate ourselves and find a new balance in our own lives and between our personal and professional lives so that we can show up meaningfully. I haven't heard it framed in those terms before, and I think it's a powerful way for us to all just think about, as we're going into 2023, especially after the reflection that we had in the holidays and so on, which always is one of those rare moments where everyone puts their pens down and we get to sit there and go, "Oh my God, make it stop." And you get to think about what's important to you and see the people you love and reflect on the last year. And here we are in 2023 to regenerate ourselves.

I mean, imagine as an organization, you commit to systems and structures and strategies and storytelling that serves to regenerate everybody, individually and collectively, in service of their larger goal. What does that look like? Can you give us some examples?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Well, I was actually going to ask you that question, working in companies, 'cause I've been curious about, would there be a market for taking people from companies... I mean, of course there are offsites, but a different model of offsite where it's like, "We're actually focused on regeneration. We're focused on, let's take a week to deeply rest. Let's take a week to connect with each other on a heart level. Let's not be productive for this week." But it is so productive. It's so productive to actually make space for connection, for fertility, for having that regeneration, so that when people go back... It's all on the individual. You take your individual vacation time, and then you're supposed to go back and be ready to go again. And what if you were to make space as a company for a team to go out and have a regenerative experience, to spend time in nature specifically? Are you seeing anything like that in companies?

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. It's a great question. I think a couple of parts to my answer would be that you're seeing leadership embrace willingly their responsibility, the much more mindful of the whole human being of each employee and the company as a whole, in America, especially... uniquely. There's a lot of hybrid work going on, which kind of after a while, atrophies culture if it's not nurtured in an intentional way. So, that's going on. Secondly, you're seeing experiments, like in the UK where there's the four-day work week, and I think there's an opportunity there to say, "Well, maybe on one of those days, on a Friday when you're not on, maybe you do get the opportunity for people to get together and have a collective experience." I'd say, you see some companies, especially in the high pressure circumstances, like Moderna, which had never taken a product to market.

And I was lucky enough to speak to the head of HR at Moderna, and they went from 800 people to 2,000 people in 18 months, and then went through all these challenges. They actually built in intentional mindsets into the company, and they articulated what those mindsets are. And my point being that you can regenerate individuals and the collective by building in strategies and messaging and communications that include looking after yourself, that include time in nature. And I know last year, I think it was for the first time ever, doctors could actually prescribe time in nature as a remedy to physical conditions. So, I think there's nothing but opportunity ahead of us.

Dr. Katia Sol:

Do they get a billing code for that?

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, I know, right? I'm sure there is an insurance fee.

Dr. Katia Sol:

I had a doctor prescribe that to me recently. Now, I'm wondering if he billed for it on the insurance form.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah, I know, and issued some exorbitant price of who knows what. So if we're going to make this shift, I think the first point of departure is to really recognize the root causes, or the symptoms of it, in ourselves and each other. So maybe just off the top of your head, in terms of the leaders and entrepreneurs that you work with, just a hit list of things that you've observed that are real little signals or flags that something's not right.

Dr. Katia Sol:

Yeah. I mean, one of them has to do with what we were speaking about before of the kind of create, crash, create, crash culture. So, this is what I'm noting for myself also and with people that I work with; they feel like they have to get something done, produce, get through the hump, and then they absolutely deflate after, and that's not a regenerative way to do things. A regenerative way is deadly having the energy, and of course, you're going to have bursts of productivity that happens in nature, but we're on a daily, weekly, or even in the daily super productive, come home and crash and watch Netflix. And there is this overall imbalance, I would say, that both of those are not grounded, or imbalance. And even the idea that, if rest is not restful... like, is just sleeping restful? Is watching Netflix restful? Is scrolling restful? What is actually deeply restful and restorative for us? Sometimes it's more having a connective conversation with a friend over a glass of wine, or sometimes it is doing something that is deeply meaningful. This whole conversation of purpose comes in.

When people are off their purpose, there's also this feeling of dis-ease, of almost meaninglessness, like nothing really matters. "I'm doing my job, but..." So, there's this slight kind of left of center orientation I experience in people, which it can show up as depression, it can show up as anxiety, it can show up as exhaustion, as lack of motivation. These are the signs that someone is, I would say, spiritually out of alignment with their purpose, and that it is exacerbated by the pressures and demands where people feel like they don't even have the space to ask the question of, but what else could I do? It's being in survival mode as opposed to driving.

Simon Mainwaring:

And what I love what you just said is the word spirit, because I think, I reflect on it a lot because the human spirit is something that people talk about a lot, though they always often talk about it as a noun. But to spirit something is a verb.

Dr. Katia Sol:

A verb. Mm-hmm.

Simon Mainwaring:

And your human spirit should be a motivating, animating, mobilizing force in your life. And if you're depleted, that spirit can't take you somewhere. If you're detached from your purpose, you can't be spirited to where you want to go. So, can you also flip side, give us, you've touched on some of that, but what are some of the remedies? Like time in nature, something meaningful with a friend?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Mm-hmm.

Simon Mainwaring:

I'll tell you this. I'll tell you this, Katia. I went to a CEO retreat for the first time ever earlier in this year. And I was really exhausted after the book launch last year and things, and I kind of needed to get some outside perspective. And one of the things I came away with is invest time in things that give you joy. And what gives me joy is surfing, and I committed this year and I've surfed once or twice a week all year, and I've had this stupid, big grin on my face every time I come out of the water. I'm terrible. I look like an old man drowning, and then you've got to send in the lifesaver. But it has filled my life with so much joy.

Dr. Katia Sol:

Yeah.

Simon Mainwaring:

What else would you offer in the mix of how we get atonic to these symptoms?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Yeah. I love that so much. And in my group coaching program, it's called Flourish, and the very first thing I have people do for the first month is cultivate their joy. And so it's like, "Let's not look at what's wrong, actually. Let's not even look at where you want to go. Let's just fill up our tanks with joy on a daily basis." And so every day, doing something that bring you joy, and then sharing that. So I would say sharing it, as a second extension of it, is to take that joy... we had the WhatsApp thread, and people would share pictures of this thing, this person, this experience that brought them joy. And so, we can also collectively lift each other up through the joy. Taking that further, in the Living on Purpose class I teach at Stanford, we help students to first identify what they love, which connects to joy. What brings you joy? What lights you up? Are some of the questions we ask them. What are you gifted at, or what are your strengths? So, what do you know? I'm in the zone when I'm doing this. I am flowing, I lose track of time. That's kind of how you know you're in your zone of strength or genius.

And then, what do you deeply care about in the world? So we help them to identify, what are the needs? What are the causes? And to consider what keeps them up at night, what makes them angry. Helping students to think about, what are the things that really fire them up? Because there's so many things that need attention in the world right now. But then what we do is we triangulate and we start to bring together, what brings you joy? What are your strengths? And what are the needs you care about in the world? And to think about how those could come together as purpose. Like, "My purpose could go in this direction. My purpose could go in this direction." But what students find is that, and what the research shows, is that doing something meaningful, like something that's personally meaningful but also meaningful to others, in service to others, actually is so much more healing and helpful for mental health than focusing on your depression or your anxiety, like bringing those things together and being on a purposeful path.

I've heard clients say, "Once I was on purpose, I was no longer depressed. After years of depression, I chose to shift radically to do this thing that was a purpose path for me. I didn't experience a day of depression again." And I don't mean to make light of depression, I really, really don't, but it is a true remedy, to find the thing that brings you meaning, or what you're going to get out of bed for every day and that is also in service to others. I really believe that the stepping out of myself in contribution to life, in reciprocity, this is part of the piece that's missing in sustainability, is being in right relationship with the planet of giving back, of humans remembering what it is to be in a giving orientation.

Simon Mainwaring:

I couldn't agree more. I mean, I think the years of speaking that I've done, I've been around a lot of folks that are very successful and well known, and I've tried to carve out a conversation with a lot of them, 'cause you're always learning from these folks who've run the miles. And one of the things I learned from them was that, for someone who's ran around the world trying to live out different versions of success only to find that, "I felt hollow or unfulfilled inside," I realized that fulfillment is not an outside-in job where you get filled up by the affirmation of others. It's an inside-out job where you fill yourself up through service to others. And that was a massive light bulb moment for me that has animated everything I've done for the last 13 years. And I think it's a big leap for some folks, but if you just go, "Wait a second. If I really want to feel fulfilled for me, with my time and efforts on this planet, I have to be of service to others," it can transform your experience of work.

And as they say, your arm never gets tired when the ball's going in. When you're living your purpose, you've really got that energy and passion. Do you observe that in the folks that you're training and teaching?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Oh, absolutely. And the second magic piece, I would say, is community. So, it's really easy for us to focus on the individual and the organizational levels, and how do you create communities even within organizations where people feel like they are mutually supported and upheld? And so in a lot of my leadership training, I actually much prefer working with groups. I do one-on-one work, but I always encourage people to do both. If you're doing a group program, I can go deeper with you one-on-one, but one-on-one, I really want you to be in my group too, because the mutual, just seeing what other people are doing, getting that affirmation. We're not meant to be solitary creatures, and I believe that we can encourage one another, we can uphold one another, and we can also help to give reflection for like, "Oh yeah, I'm seeing that you're on purpose. You're lit up right now. That is working for you," versus just trying to figure it out on their own.

In reference to what you've said, there's a quote that says, "If you went on a search for yourself, the more you look for yourself, the more you'll lose yourself, but the more you serve others, then the more you will find yourself."

Simon Mainwaring:

Oh, that's interesting. I haven't heard that one before. That's really interesting. And I want to telescope up a bit, because we've talked about personal work and sort of surfacing up those emotions and aligning with our purpose and cultivating joy, and how we can extrapolate that out through our teams and cultures, but we've all got larger problems to solve that are going to increasingly compromise our future. And so, how do we leverage all of these strategies to really think about planetary flourishing? Because it's easy to look at the headlines every day and feel very concerned. So, how do we take it to the next level through our collective efforts?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Yeah. It's a amazing question. It's the million-dollar question. And I loved your conversation with Paul Hawken that you had recently, and also Kraon spoke to this, but just, I think more and more people are saying, "Yes, we need the global agenda, we need global coalitions, we need global agreements," and the locus point of the action, it's going to be local. So, that actually applies also on this level of flourishing. "I am responsible, first and foremost, to tend my own individual vessel. If I'm not flourishing, how can we be flourishing globally?" Those are actually connected. And then, having those small communities of support, be it locally, in person, or virtually. I do have them work virtually, but if you

have a group of people that are working towards flourishing, and then if the individuals are empowered, then they can be empowered to take action, be it locally or globally. But if someone who has nothing to give, has nothing to give on that global level, right?

Simon Mainwaring:

Actually, that's really interesting. If you have nothing to give, you have nothing to give.

Dr. Katia Sol:

Right. Very simple. Yep. Yeah.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. I mean, it's a match. And I'm just trying to draw a dot between living on purpose and cultivating joy, and spending time in nature and being of service to others. So, if somebody listening to this... We're at the start of 2023. We've got probably a challenging economy ahead. We've got growing momentum behind sustainability and ESG and climate and carbon and biodiversity commitments. If they want to start tomorrow in terms of a few actions they can take, either individually or collectively, where would you say they begin so that they feel like they're contributing to a solution that will benefit others and ultimately themselves?

Dr. Katia Sol:

Honestly, how I would respond is I would begin with gratitude. Gratitude, as I was taught it as a Haudenosaunee, part of Six Nations practice from the First Nations of this territory, they experience... so what we call Thanksgiving actually originates in the Thanksgiving Address, which is attributed to the Haudenosaunee Six Nations people. And that is a practice of actually going through all of the aspects of creation and offering gratitude for them. And so, the story is that if you were to give this address in full, it would take four days to tell the whole thing and to go through every single species and every aspect of creation. And of course, I'm not encouraging any of my clients to do that, but there's something about gratitude, which in and of itself, is an affirmation of life. So it's recognizing, like you're saying, that we are nature. It's recognizing, I am alive and I am in relationship with other life, and I'm grateful for it.

And that is the most micro way that we can do that giving back. I really believe that. Personally, in a relationship, they say that receiving appreciation is one of the greatest nutrients, say in a marriage, that you can give. It's appreciation. And so, think about it; what if the planet itself is grateful when we give our gratitude? What if that actually creates a ripple? And that might seem too woo-woo or spiritual, but I really believe that it creates a different orientation in me, where I am then seeing the world differently. And then if I feel grateful for something, then I want to serve it. I want to take care of it. I want to, throughout my day, do things that will actually express that gratitude. So that's a very simple way, is just coming up with a gratitude practice, and there's tons of research about that. I did a TED talk on that, and people can look that up, but there's a science to it actually, to why gratitude... it's like any other mindfulness practice. It improves our physical health, it improves our mental health. So, it's contributing to our personal flourishing, but it also is an act of reciprocity with the planet, I believe.

And then, nature connection itself, so spending time going out into the natural world and having that practice, be it five minutes a day... like start with five minutes, I would say. There's a science to 20 minutes, because when you go out for 20 minutes, then our body rhythm starts to slow where we can start to experience more of the biological benefits of that time. Like any other mindfulness practice, there's a reason there's that 20-minute marker often for meditation, because there's something where

we can start to step out of the busyness of everything that we were doing and drop into that more kind of biofeedback state.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. So, you have a unique combination of lenses, Katia. You have the academic lens through your work at Stanford, you have the practitioner's lens through the training and classes that you do, you have the global lens through the breadth of the social entrepreneurs and so on that you work with. When you triangulate all of these perspectives, do you feel like we're moving in the right direction? I mean, this is another year. It's going to be very demanding on all of us as leaders. Give us a sense of how you see the evolution of the conversation and the engagement around these issues and the topics that we're focused on. Are we moving in the right direction?

Dr. Katia Sol:

It's another million-dollar question. I can say, as a mother of three living in California at the edge of the dry heart clands, there has been many a night in recent years where I've been up till 4:00 in the morning in my own existential panic of, will there be a planet for my children? Does it even matter that I'm helping my 17-year-old with his college applications? Should I be teaching him survival skills? It's a dissonant time, and my belief has always been that we are at that confluence point. So, Thomas Homer-Dixon called it catagenesis, where the catastrophe, the breakdown is meeting the breakthrough, the emergence; that there is this opportunity in the breakdown for the new solutions to emerge. And I think that that is where we have to hold onto hope. Paul Hawken's book, *Blessed Unrest*, was always an inspiration point for me, 'cause he talks about the hundreds of thousands of positive actions that are happening on a local level all the time, that there's this mycelial revolution that's happening around the planet. And I really believe that if each one of us is finding our purpose and taking positive action that is oriented towards service of life... mushrooms have a lot of power to transform even the most toxic landscapes.

I feel like my choice is hope, and it's not always an easy one, but I see so much hope in the next generation, teaching at Stanford. These young people are bright and they are aware, and they're inspired, and they are also weighed down. I did a study on eco-anxiety through the Stanford School of Medicine, and the young people are really suffering. That is true, but through the power that... what the study showed was that having ways to take action is really important. Being validated is really important, so acknowledging this problem is real. And having a community of support is really important, that they don't feel alone. And I think that's not just for young people, I think that's for all of us.

Simon Mainwaring:

Yeah. I think those takeaways are, those three takeaways, are absolutely critical to everyone as we sort of make the most of 2023 for ourselves, for each other, for our future, for our businesses, and for the planet that we all share and that is so precious, and that we love it, whether we know it or not. Nature restores us in ways that are just so fundamentally human. And so, Katia, I want to thank you for your insights, your research, the work you're doing with the entrepreneurs that are going to have a positive impact on the future, and for everything you've shared today. And thank you for giving us reasons to really be excited about 2023 and what we can do for ourselves, but most importantly, what we can do together.

Dr. Katia Sol:

Thank you so much, Simon, for this opportunity.

Simon Mainwaring:

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