

2024 TOP KEYNOTE SPEAKERS: See Who Made the List

RealLeaders

THE COMMUNITY FOR IMPACT

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Menounos**
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OF YOUR
HEALTH

Plus
COLLABORATE
WITH THE
COMPETITION

HOW TO

REEL IN A SHARK

Daymond John on Making the Perfect Pitch

SUMMER 2024



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Renewable transition
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HIRED: 31

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From startup to exit.



HIRED: 51

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HIRED: 10

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A Legacy of Land Conservation

Dean Saunders, ALC, CCIM, Founder and Managing Director of SVN | Saunders Ralston Dantzler Real Estate, has demonstrated his unwavering commitment to conservation and land preservation throughout 2023. His **notable achievements** include the **successful sale of 28,322 acres** in conservation easements across the Florida counties of Osceola, Polk, Highlands, Jefferson, St. Lucie, and Hardee.

Saunders collaborates with landowners in **preserving Florida's natural** beauty and rural landscapes through conservation easements, **highlighting the crucial role** these efforts play in safeguarding the state's unique and irreplaceable environment. Dean Saunders' work **contributes to the enduring legacy** of land preservation, securing a **sustainable future** for generations to come.



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SB | 2024 | BRAND-LED
CULTURE CHANGE

MAY 8-10 | MINNEAPOLIS, MN

SB Brand-Led Culture Change brings together **global brand leaders** who are reshaping the future of commerce. Join us as 500+ leaders convene to unpack critical social, environmental, and business trends shaping the cultural landscape.

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& REGISTER**



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CEO
Julie Van Ness

President
Kevin Edwards

Editor
Carla Kalogeridis

Managing Editor
Kathryn Deen

Design and Art Direction
Super Wink Studio
Heather Winkel & Ananda Walden

Director of Member Impact
Tiffany Saunders

Chief Impact Officer
Mike Brown

Member Impact Manager
Madelyn Dwyer

Collaboration Specialist
Zach Adler

Video Producer
Ramona Stanley

Head Office
St. Thomas, U.S.V.I.

Contact Us
advertise@real-leaders.com
editorial@real-leaders.com
real-leaders.com



WE SUPPORT

"Getting a
Labrador dog."

"Studying abroad
in England
my junior year
of college."

"Aligning my
life with a
purpose."

"Making exercise
and sunlight a
part of my daily
routine."

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Uniting Mission-Aligned Leaders

Growing up, I used to hear the saying, “Choose your friends, choose your future,” and I often wonder what life would have been like if I had not followed that sage advice. I firmly believe that in today’s world — even more than ever — the same mindset has tremendous value in the business world. Whom you align with — and whom you choose not to align with — are equally important decisions with game-changing outcomes that will create a ripple effect throughout your professional and personal life. The journey to find those who are mission-aligned with purpose-driven values, strong ethics, and character can be a daunting challenge.

But one thing is for certain: By uniting and acting together, we become an irresistible force for good.

Through the Real Leaders community, many people have found multiple ways of connecting to elevate their purpose, surrounded by supportive, creative, and dedicated peers. An outstanding example of this purposeful mindset was at the Real Leaders UNITE event in early February 2024. This annual gathering of award-winning impact leaders is one of the few opportunities for mission-aligned leaders to connect and collaborate.

Lessons were learned from highly respected leaders including Stedman Graham, who guided our understanding of identity leadership; Lisa Bodell regarding radical simplification; *Shark Tank*'s Daymond John on raising capital and the do's and don'ts of investor pitches; Tamara Loehr discussing building your personal brand to drive growth and impact; Shadi Bakour on the power of collaboration; and Peggy Shell on cultivating impactful teams, among many more. (See real-leaders.com/unite for the full lineup as well as editorial coverage on page 68.)

There were also global high-profile celebrities and business leaders who care about social entrepreneurship, such as Pharrell Williams, who by video shared his words of advice and the latest news about his phenomenal nonprofit organization Black Ambition, which is helping close the opportunity gap for entrepreneurs of color and was the cover story in our *Real Leaders* Spring 2024 edition. (Read his story at real-leaders.com.)

“Each and every one of you has the power, the will, and the capacity to make a difference in the world in which you live in.”

— HARRY BELAFONTE

In a room filled with voluminous wisdom, everyone witnessed a collective spirit to leverage our business model and make the world a better place.

Every one of us has the choice of playing a small, medium, or tremendously large role in progress — or doing absolutely nothing. I think singer Harry Belafonte nailed it before he passed away in 2023 when he referred to “the power, will, and the capacity to make a difference,” which is why choosing whom you align with, what events you attend, and what you learn from those experiences truly matters.

Most of us see positive changes occurring within the business community, so let's push those doors open even wider to include more newcomers, voices, choices, and solutions. There are no boundaries that we can't collectively advance to create a far better future. ■



Julie Van Ness, CEO
julie@real-leaders.com



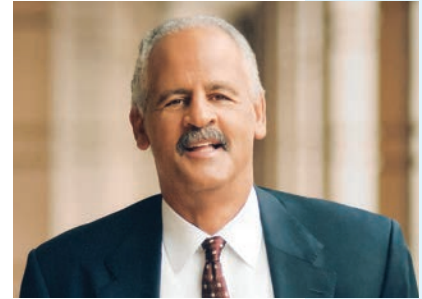
**Real Leaders
UNITE**

Please join us in 2025 and unite with your fellow leaders of the impact leadership movement.

NEW INSIDE

Stedman Graham Debuts Column

Stedman Graham, an expert in identity leadership, debuts an exclusive regular column in this edition of *Real Leaders* magazine. (See page 14.) Graham is a best-selling author, speaker, educator, business advisor, and chairman and CEO of S. Graham and Associates, a management and marketing consulting firm. Graham will continue to provide exclusive content for the *Real Leaders* audience in our print and digital magazines and on real-leaders.com.



Idaho National Laboratories' Jhansi Kandasamy, left, and Elizabeth (Betsy) Brunner with Real Leaders President Kevin Edwards

REAL LEADERS EVENT

Inaugural UNITE Event a Success

Real Leaders hosted a first-of-its-kind event, Real Leaders UNITE, Feb. 5-7 in San Diego. One hundred top impact CEOs, executive coaches, investors, and keynote speakers from around the world gathered to connect, collaborate, and celebrate the 2024 Real Leaders Top Impact Companies. They walked away with capital sources, connections, and a personal peer group of CEOs. Speakers included Daymond John, Felecia Hatcher, Stedman Graham, and Lisa Bodell, with a virtual appearance by Pharrell Williams. Thanks to everyone who made the inaugural UNITE a success. (See more UNITE coverage on page 68.) Get in touch with Real Leaders' admissions now to see if you qualify for UNITE 2025 and the Real Leaders Impact Collaborative.

➔ [Learn more at real-leaders.com/unite](https://real-leaders.com/unite)
or email unite@real-leaders.com.

OUT AND ABOUT

Supporting Our Partners

Real Leaders attended B-Lab's Champions Retreat in March in Vancouver, British Columbia, a key annual event bringing together B Corps from across the U.S. and Canada to connect and mobilize values-aligned people using business as a force for good. This year's theme, Restore, explored the power of healing in community to unlock new ways of thriving for people and the planet.



READY TO BE WOWED?
Receive a Friday morning dose of inspiration with our FREE weekly WoW! Words of Wisdom email: real-leaders.com/subscribe

“Track the one metric that matters.”



CATHERINE GRIFFIN
Founder of Impactable
Winner of Most Innovative Model

“Have a clear vision and mission, be innovative and adaptable, focus on your strengths, be transparent and accountable, support social causes, and celebrate your successes.”



DINESH RAJ SAPKOTA
Director of Creating
Possibilities Nepal
Winner of Most Valuable Mission

What’s Your Best Advice for Fellow Impact CEOs?

From 2024 Real Leaders
Impact Award-winning companies

“Stay true to your mission and values. Take an active role in educating the market about the significance of your initiatives, sharing the value they bring. Embrace collaboration within your industry and among peers.”



IZZY JENSEN
Founder and Chief Investment Officer
of Kakariki Capital
Winner of Best Collaboration
(with Impact Capital)

“Always remember your ‘why’ when challenges arise on the horizon because at various stages of the growth and development of the organization, they inevitably will.”



MICHAEL KÖHLER
Co-founder and CEO of
Silent Yachts Trading GmbH
Winner of Most Impactful People

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See the full list of
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winners and
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2025 awards at
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“We need more TRUTH — Trust in Relationships that seek to Understand through Transparency and Humility — in the world.”



TIMOTHY PURNELL
Executive Director and CEO of New
Jersey School Boards Association
Winner of Most Transparent

THE INSIDE TRACK

LEADING

Anne Weaver,
co-owner and
CEO of Elephants
Delicatessen

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Sustainability
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How to Make Tough Decisions



Tony Robbins is one of the world's leading life and business strategists and is ranked No. 1 on the 2024 Real Leaders Top 50 Keynote Speakers list. You can subscribe to Robbins's newsletter at core.tonyrobbins.com/event-calendar and check out his just-released book in his financial freedom series: *The Holy Grail of Investing: The World's Greatest Investors Reveal Their Ultimate Strategies for Financial Freedom*.

By Tony Robbins

Great leaders are great decision-makers. Anyone can make easy decisions with obvious outcomes, but what makes somebody a really effective leader is their capacity to make tough decisions. You know what I'm talking about. The decisions where there is tremendous uncertainty; where you are trying to make the right choice, but you can't know for sure what it is. Sometimes, it's about making a choice so you can move the ball forward, find out whether it is the right choice or not, and adapt accordingly.

Life is filled with choices. Real leaders understand that to move things forward, they must make tough decisions. At times, the fear of making the wrong decisions grips us so tightly we opt for indecision, allowing the fear of failure to immobilize us and impede our progress.

To break the cycle, leaders can adopt simple principles and processes that I — and many of the executives I coach — rely on. These tools are simple, but practical steps for making those necessary tough decisions. Let's explore four of the simple principles I adhere to when making challenging decisions.

All decision-making should be done in writing.

If you attempt to do everything in your head, your brain will often end up looping over the same conflicting thoughts. Instead of getting resolved, every possible new idea can create more stress because your mind keeps comparing it back to the first thought. What can break this pattern is the use of a visual element. Remember the idea that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Take a moment to jot down your thoughts about the decision you are grappling with, your desires, and your concerns. Frequently, what seems intricate in our minds becomes remarkably clear and more straightforward when on paper.

Be clear about what you want and/or what the organization wants and needs.

The foundation of exceptional decision-making lies in clarity. To make effective choices, you must first gain crystal-clear clarity about your and your organization's goals, values, and priorities. Ask yourself: What is the ultimate outcome that I am after through this decision?

This will provide clarity. Clarity is power. When you know what you want (your outcome) and your why (your purpose), decision-making becomes simplified.

Decisions are made on probability.

No one has a crystal ball to tell them with 100% certainty they've made the right decisions. It's about taking inventory of the information available and making the best choice possible.

Again, leaders are decision-makers, and they will often have to step into their decisions without total certainty that it's going to work out. This is what sets them apart from everyone else. They're willing to take action when everyone else is paralyzed by uncertainty.

Often, tough decisions are less about making the "right" choice and more about making a choice that can move the ball forward and discovering if it's right or not. With indecision, we will never know what is right. If you wait to have all the information necessary to make a decision, the opportunity that the decision offered is usually gone, and you are living life like the average person versus the leader you're meant to be.

If you make a decision that turns out to be wrong or not the best choice, you can change things. The important part is making a decision to start with.

O.O.C.E.M.R. Step-by-Step Process for Effective Decision-Making

Do you have a tough decision you need to make where you can apply these steps today? Tonight? Don't delay! Apply these key decision-making principles and the O.O.C.E.M.R. process to your decision-making – especially the tough ones. You will be surprised how your uninhibited freedom of choice moves you and your decisions forward.

STEP 1: Outcomes

Brainstorm and get clear on your most important outcomes. Be specific. Once you know everything you want, you also have to put them in order of importance. Is the most important thing saving costs, changing the culture, or increasing margin? You often will have to make decisions where you will not get all your outcomes. So, it's critically important to know what is most important – one, two, three, and four – in the things you are going after. Often, this is why people don't make a decision. They come up with options that meet different outcomes. If you have clarity about your highest priorities within the outcomes you're after, you can make immediate progress.

STEP 2: Options

Brainstorm and get clear on your options. One thing I try to teach every leader I've ever worked with is: There are more options than you give yourself credit for. I live by a simple philosophy: One choice is no choice. Two options is a dilemma. There are always at least three choices, and when you have three options, you're going to make a better decision. In reality, when you begin to brainstorm like this, you may not like them all equally, but you may discover there are sometimes three, four, or five options.

STEP 3: Consequences

Brainstorm and get clear on the consequences of each choice. How? By writing down the pros and cons of each option.

STEP 4: Evaluate

It's time to evaluate. It's important to know the consequences. You might have a consequence that sounds very scary if the decision does not work out, but what's the probability it's going to work out or not? I usually measure these on a scale from 0-10. If the outcome that I am worried about is very negative, but it's a 1 on a 0-10 possibility, where 10 is most likely, then I evaluate it very differently than if it is a big challenge that has a likelihood of 9. This is a critical stage of decision-making – and why it is critical to do this in writing – so you can visually see it in front of you. Score each thing as a probability from 0-10, both upside and downside.

This brings you to Step 5, which I consider the most important step of all – at least if you've done the others effectively.

“SOMETIMES, IT’S ABOUT MAKING A CHOICE SO YOU CAN MOVE THE BALL FORWARD, FIND OUT WHETHER IT IS THE RIGHT CHOICE OR NOT, AND ADAPT ACCORDINGLY.”

All decision-making is a clarification of what you and your organization value most.

Each decision we make should point to our values. It can be a tough choice you’re making, but if it aligns with what matters most to you and the organization, you are propelling yourself in the right direction.

There’s nothing worse than making a decision based on fear rather than what feels right in your heart. When faced with tough decisions, don’t let your limiting beliefs trap you into fear-based decision-making. My core belief is that a decision made from fear is almost always the wrong decision. Thoughts like “I’m worried this won’t work out because ...” or “I don’t want to try this because ...” need to be confronted. The easiest way is by expanding your options and exploring alternative choices or paths.

Seek out diverse perspectives, gather information quickly, and challenge your assumptions. By doing this, you can open the door to innovative solutions and unforeseen opportunities. Once you have your mind in the right place and all the information gathered, you need a logical and repeatable process to get those decisions made and you need a deadline. Otherwise, you’ll get lost in paralysis by analysis. ■

STEP 5: Mitigate

It’s time to look at the downsides of your best choices and find a way to brainstorm things you or the organization could do to eliminate or minimize potential downsides. This is where you’re getting ready to make your final decision. So, you may end up combining two choices to help mitigate the downsides of either one.

I remember I was offered an opportunity by former President George H.W. Bush to come to a meeting with only 100 individuals after the Berlin Wall fell and communism collapsed. Those attending the meeting would include former Prime Minister of the U.K. Margaret Thatcher, former President of France François Mitterrand, and former President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev. One problem with the decision to say yes right away: I had a previous commitment for a filming in Fiji that could not be canceled without one of my companies losing millions of dollars.

I went through the decision-making process described here, and when I came to the mitigation stage, I realized I had more than two choices. I came up with a way where I could fly Gorbachev to the meeting and spend three hours on a plane with him finding out what ended the Cold War. (I am a history buff, and I wanted to know what changed history in that historical moment.) I dropped Gorbachev off at the meeting, met Thatcher, Mitterrand, and Bush, had dinner, and then continued on my way to the filming. I just decided to move the filming two days later and be more efficient in how we completed the five-day film project.

STEP 6: Resolve

Eventually, you have to make a decision. You need to come up with a timeline that doesn’t take you forever. Many people have weak decision-making muscles. They have a hard time deciding what to order for dinner until the waiter or waitress is about to lose their patience. Best you learn to make decisions more often so you build more decision-making muscles.

The key is once you decide, you resolve. You do not look back. You move forward and do everything you can to maximize the result. If you are wrong and it is the wrong decision, you can always make a new decision based on the information and make a change – much better than making no decision and no progress. While the responsibility of choices can feel weighty, remember that you always have options in the situation if you simply clarify what’s wanted and needed and the why for your decision.

It's the Age of Self-Leadership

Self-leadership is part of the leadership landscape, and you can't change your circumstances until you first change yourself.

By *Stedman Graham*

I often say in my speeches that there could not be a better time in the history of our world to be living because, through technology, we have access to a global village. Just by using our mobile devices and electronics, we can learn, build, develop, and create opportunities. We have the ability to self-empower and have information relevant to our development, identity, and purpose in life — if we understand how to work on ourselves.

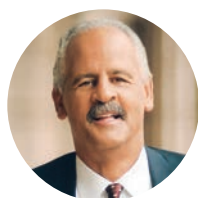
If you're looking for relevancy, resources, and opportunity, it must start with yourself. Knowing who you are is the first step to your future. This is the pre-work necessary for self-leadership.

Self-leadership is connected to self-discovery, which is connected to constant education. This type of learning about yourself — deep, rich self-experience — develops new learned behaviors that keep you on track for a better, more meaningful existence. It is the successes and failures of self-discovery that lead you forward.

Often, these words can blur together: self-determination, self-direction, self-empowerment — all ways of saying the same thing: You cannot love anyone else until you first love yourself. This core principle of life is at the heart of self-leadership too. You cannot lead anyone else until you first lead yourself.

Leadership skills are important at all levels of engagement. It is difficult to have strong leadership without purpose and direction, a process for thinking, improved performance, and continual growth.

The key to self-leadership today is that we should always be in a constant state of growth. Nobody is perfect, and no one is expected to do everything right, but most do not know that — if



Stedman Graham is a Real Leaders Top Keynote Speaker, author, and educator who focuses on identity leadership. He is a business advisor, chairman, and CEO of S. Graham and Associates, a management and marketing consulting firm.



“OUR ABILITY TO EVOLVE WILL DEPEND ON US. IT IS AN INSIDE JOB.”

we can fall down, pick ourselves up, start over and over again, and learn from our failures — we have a chance to reach our potential. It took me years to understand that the process of success is the same for everyone. The difference is some people know it and some people don't. Everything is a process.

No matter if you are a CEO, business owner, executive employee, or volunteer worker, we all have the opportunity to improve our lives and build more value in our personal and professional development. The value we give to ourselves is the value the world gives us. The world sees us as we see ourselves. Again, going back to self — you cannot change your circumstances until you first change yourself.

Self-leadership is part of the leadership landscape. It sets the tone for strategies for overcoming roadblocks. It helps us become authentic in our journey for success and achievement. It helps us manage, learn from others, and unleash our talents, abilities, and potential. We can improve our lives because we are building from a solid foundation of passion, purpose, and intent. Self-leadership helps



us value our time, work on things that matter and that are important to us, and eliminate time wasters. As we eventually learn orders at the highest level of development, our organizational skills increase because we focus on outcomes that make us feel good about ourselves.

Setting goals based on our vision becomes a process for execution and making things happen that are fulfilling and rewarding. We get to define, plan, and prepare with direction — as opposed to being caught up with external environmental conditions that have little or no meaning, can easily disappear, and cannot be sustained because we are simply reacting.

In today's environment, it is so important to have a clear vision of who you want to be and where you want to go. The next important question to ask yourself is: How are you going to gain enough of the necessary information and experience to achieve your vision? That is a lifelong journey. Clarity today is so important because we have so much information that it can be overwhelming to focus on how to prioritize and put things in sequence and alignment.

We often have so many options that we cannot minimize distractions. Social media, external world affairs, and day-to-day family challenges all must get done as well as taking care of ourselves. I never thought of those as skills, but in our modern society, it requires a lot of new skill development to navigate everything in our lives. **“A leader is one who sees more than others see, who sees farther than others see, and who sees before others do.”**

— Leroy Eims

Self-leadership makes you appreciate what you have because everything starts with you. Happiness doesn't come from big pieces of great success but from small daily achievements. Your opportunities to achieve what you want always come from small steps, one at a time. You work every day, piece by piece, layer by layer. **“The best way to predict your future is to create it.”** — Abraham Lincoln

The more we understand these principles, the more we can accomplish in our lives and the more we can help those around us. We can channel the best of who we are to achieve success for ourselves and those we can lead. **“I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.”** — Helen Keller

Self-leadership, to be effective, must answer these questions: What do you enjoy doing most? What gives your life meaning? What gives you peace of mind? What do you look forward to doing more than anything else? What would you do with your life even if you didn't get paid for it?

Adding a value system to those things most important to you creates more opportunities to go deeper in our development. Self-leadership can be a difficult process and journey because it requires us to look at the positive and negative in our lives. The continuous journey of self-actualization can become a never-ending development process. That's why it is so important to build in time for ourselves to become more productive and contribute more to ourselves and others.

Considering all these issues is important to realizing the process of self-leadership. Our ability to evolve will depend on us. It is an inside job. We keep working on ourselves, we go deeper and deeper in our development, and it does pay off.

“You are not your circumstances, but you are your possibilities.” — Pat Healey ■



TRANSITIONS

Hit the Ground Running

Follow this advice to successfully integrate your new CEO.

➔ QUICK TAKE

New Leader Integration goes beyond onboarding to make the leader a fully functioning team member.

Everyone appreciates a good onboarding process — whether you are the new kid on the block or an existing team member trying to understand the changing dynamics when a new leader steps in. But what if onboarding simply isn't enough?

Eileen Rieder is an executive coach and integration expert who works with leaders and organizations to integrate high-performing executives into their new roles. New Leader Integration (NLI) is a proprietary process that accelerates the time-to-value for leaders who have accepted significant leadership roles in new organizations or have been promoted to higher, more impactful roles.

“Typical onboarding efforts are focused on getting the leader administratively into the role, getting the systems and tools, introducing them to their team,

and providing a brief overview of the role,” explains Rieder. “New Leader Integration, on the other hand, meets a more aspirational goal — doing what it takes to make the leader a fully functioning member of the team as quickly as possible.”

In an Egon Zehnder survey of 588 executives (one-third of whom were C-suite), 60% reported that it took six months and 20% reported that it took nine months to have a real impact in their role. Less than one-third said they received any kind of meaningful support during their transition.

NLI engages key stakeholders early to begin the psychological contract between the leader and the stakeholders. The process reveals expectations and opportunities for the leader in the immediate and near-term and identifies pitfalls that have tripped



“KEY STAKEHOLDERS MAY NOT SEE THE CASE FOR CHANGE, AND IT MAY NOT BE CLEAR THAT THE NEW LEADER WAS BROUGHT ON SPECIFICALLY TO BRING ABOUT THAT NEW CHANGE.”

—EILEEN RIEDER, EXECUTIVE COACH AND INTEGRATION EXPERT

up other leaders in the organization. Rieder says this work is best accomplished with the help of a third-party integration expert versus assigning the new CEO an in-house mentor.

“A third-party integrator can remain objective about the role and the organization,” Rieder explains. “They have no interest in gleaning anything but honest feedback from the stakeholders, which provides for greater candor during the interview process. A well-seasoned practitioner from outside of the organization can remain curious about the role and the company, understanding how to follow a thread and ask the next best question to uncover challenges or barriers that someone internal to the organization may miss because of existing biases or assumptions.”

In Rieder’s experience, the most common roadblock is the disconnect in expectations between the hiring manager and other key stakeholders within the organization. “A common expectation is the degree to which the hiring manager expects the new leader to be an agent of change,” Rieder says. “Key stakeholders may not see the case for change, and it may not be clear that the new leader was brought on specifically to bring about that new change.”

There can also be a disconnect in the expectations related to the magnitude and pace of the change effort. One of the keys to effective integration is exposing those disconnects for leadership so they can be transparently discussed and expectations can be aligned. ■

—*Real Leaders staff*

Advice From a CEO

John Arendes has over 30 years’ experience leading teams in the software and compliance training industries. He served as CEO of Traliant and grew the business by double digits under his tenure. He is a strong believer in continual leadership development, and he recently completed New Leader Integration for his new role.

“Upon learning that I would be going through this integration process, I was excited about the opportunity to do this assessment,” he says. “I believed it would help me get a head start on understanding how I could work effectively with the organization based on my strengths and weaknesses. My understanding of my weaknesses, in particular, would help me avoid any potential pitfalls early on in my tenure.”

During his coaching sessions, Arendes became more aware of his thought patterns. “I realized that sometimes what I thought was a problem with only two possible solutions can have several solutions if I approach it from a different perspective,” he says.

Arendes says that while he didn’t have any issues with receiving feedback on himself, he noticed that his team members initially hesitated to share honest feedback. “They were concerned that it would get back to me and affect their working relationship,” he recalls. “However, the coach helped us overcome this hurdle, and eventually we could provide and receive feedback more freely.”

Without going through the integration process and its associated coaching, Arendes says he would have taken much longer to understand what his team values and how he can contribute value to them. “As a first-time CEO, there are various nuances that one does not consider initially,” he says. “You must look at the entire organization and assess how a decision can impact many people.”

To a new leader considering the implementation of an integration process, Arendes has the following advice:

- ➔ **Recognize the value of the program.** “It’s a powerful tool for accelerating your integration into a new leadership role, understanding the organization’s culture, and building solid relationships with your team and peers,” he says.
- ➔ **Be committed.** “To get the most out of the process, staying committed and maintaining consistency is essential.”
- ➔ **Establish confidentiality and trust with your coach.** “Privacy in the coaching relationship is crucial,” Arendes says. “Being open and honest with your coach is vital, and your discussions should be confidential and nonjudgmental. Have a willingness to be transparent about your challenges, strengths, and areas for growth.”
- ➔ **Identify your objectives.** Arendes says to approach coaching with transparency about challenges and your need for help.
- ➔ **Build relationships.** “Use this process to enhance your relationship-building skills within your team and with key stakeholders. Effective relationships are often the foundation of leadership success,” he says.



SYNERGY

The Power of Collaborating with Competitors

By *Mark Van Ness*

Can you start a company with no debt, no private equity investors, and no initial public offering strategy and grow it to be one of the top 10 companies in your industry — all with a strategy of collaborating with all your competitors? At the age of 30, that's what I set out to do. Today, SVN is the trusted advisor on over \$20 billion a year in commercial real estate transactions — that's about a deal every hour, 24/7. Perhaps our story will inspire you to see your competitors in a completely new light.

Imagine what it would be like to be trusted by all your competitors. Now,

➔ **QUICK TAKE**
Creating competitive bidding is far more effective than the commonly used wholesale buyer approach.

picture the power of mobilizing every one of your competitors to increase the value that you bring to your clients. This strategy enabled SVN to quickly grow into a top 10 commercial real estate services firm, first locally, then regionally and nationally.

I had previously led a turnaround for a typical investment real estate company that looked at its business as a zero-sum game. Like everyone else in the industry, the company did its best to keep the competition from selling its listings in an attempt to retain the entire commission. I saw countless listings expire or sell for less than they were worth with this all-or-nothing policy, and I realized that there was a better way than this very limited, dual-agency approach.

SVN was founded on the client-first principle of sharing our fee with the procuring broker with the best offer. Yes, it means we sometimes make less so that our clients can make more.



Our clients appreciate that, and their loyalty and referrals have placed SVN among the Real Leaders Top Impact Companies and Inc. 5000 fastest-growing companies several times.

This concept of making more by making less per transaction can work in other industries as well. Investment bankers, for example, operate under the same limited competition model with high fees and underwhelming results. By increasing the demand and the number of retail bidders, anyone can increase the sales price of their assets. An enterprising young entrepreneur could disrupt that industry today. This is the basic law of supply-and-demand at work. The more qualified buyers you have, the higher the competition for your asset, so the higher the price and terms you will achieve.

A few years ago, we put this fundamental strategy to the test. We commissioned an academic study of nearly 15,000 commercial real estate sales over a 10-year period. When the buyer was represented by a different brokerage company than the seller, they generated a 9.6% higher price, on average, than those kept in-house with the same brokerage company representing the buyer and seller.

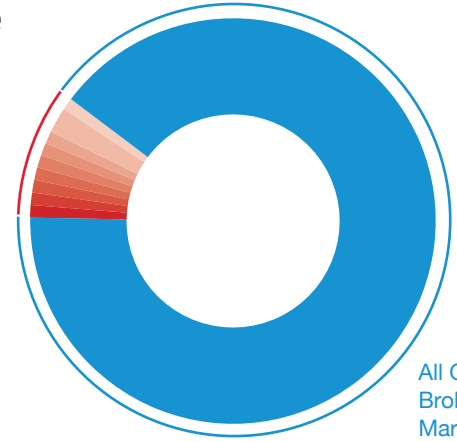
It makes sense that no one company can have trusted relationships with the hundreds of thousands of ultra-high-net-worth investors plus millions of high-net-worth investors. And no one brokerage company represents more than a tiny fraction of the market. In fact, the top 10 brokerage companies combined only represented 10% of the transactions last year. That's why the SVN strategy of collaborating with our competitors to create competitive bidding for our clients has been far more effective than the wholesale buyer approach that the majority of the industry practices.

This strategy would be easy to duplicate, and we only expected a two-year edge before competitors copied us. But 37 years later, they're still stuck operating in the shortsighted, outdated model from the last century. Meanwhile, SVN has risen from a startup to the youngest player in the top 10 companies in its field. To us, this proves that if you actually deliver more value to your clients and customers, they will beat a path to your door. And if you can find a way to collaborate with your competitors for the benefit of your clients, magic happens. ■

Mark Van Ness is the founder of SVN International and Real Leaders.

Market Share

Top 10
Commercial
Real Estate
Service Firms



All Other
Brokers'
Market
Share

SVN's Core Covenants

A company's core values provide clarity on what is truly important for organizational success, personal and professional conduct, and what to expect from each other. SVN's Core Covenants personify its values and culture and differentiate it from the competition.

As members of the SVN Shared Value Network, each employee commits to do the following:

- ➔ Create amazing value with their clients, colleagues, and community.
- ➔ Cooperate proactively and place their clients' best interests above their own.
- ➔ Include, respect, and support all members of the commercial real estate industry.
- ➔ Honor their commitments.
- ➔ Personify and uphold the SVN brand.
- ➔ Resolve conflicts quickly, positively, and effectively.
- ➔ Take personal responsibility for achieving their own potential.
- ➔ Excel in their market area and specialty.
- ➔ Focus on the positive and the possible.
- ➔ Nurture their career while valuing the importance of family, health, and community.



Download SVN's 9.6% Report on the pricing advantage of cooperation at <https://bit.ly/4aUB0TJ>. Read SVN's Core Covenants at <https://bit.ly/3H4ypc4>.

LESSONS

Public Speaking Hacks I Wish I Knew Earlier

By *Scot Chisholm*

The nerves, the rambling, the “umms,” the blanks — no wonder people are more afraid of speaking than dying (no joke!). I used to hate public speaking too, but it’s a skill that anyone can learn. Now, I speak in front of audiences of 5,000+ with no problem. Here are my most effective hacks for public speaking.

Know your audience.

Confident speakers know their audience.

Ask yourself:

- ➔ Who is my audience?
- ➔ How will I help them go from point A to point B?

Your talk becomes the map to get them there.

Practice being natural (not perfect).

It doesn’t matter if you get every word right if you deliver poorly.

- ➔ Focus on the essence of each “chapter.”
- ➔ If you get something wrong, just keep going.
- ➔ Read your notes, but practice without them.

Define three major points.

There’s nothing worse than a rambling talk.

- ➔ Write down the three most important points (in bullets).
- ➔ Structure your talk around these three points just like chapters (1st, 2nd, 3rd).

This will help you move through your talk and not get lost.

Structure it like a story.

The best speakers don’t just talk, they tell stories.

If the chapters are the three main points, then outline the body of each chapter to reinforce your points. Add an intro that hooks and a clear summary at the end.

Have a backup plan ready.

Your mind might go blank, but don’t freak out. Have a plan.

I pause to take a sip of water and think, “What chapter am I in?” I recover 100% of the time. Put down the water and continue.

Create a room of one.

Make the room smaller by talking to one person at a time.

- ➔ Make eye contact with someone in the audience.
- ➔ Talk to them for one to two sentences.
- ➔ Then find a new person slightly to the right.
- ➔ Keep repeating.

It’ll feel like talking to a friend one-on-one.



Scot Chisholm founded software company Classy (acquired by GoFundMe), serving as CEO for over 10 years and leading it to 300+ people and billions in platform donations. More recently, he founded Haskill Creek, a new spin on the traditional pharmacy. He coaches founders/CEOs, helping them transition to high-impact leaders.

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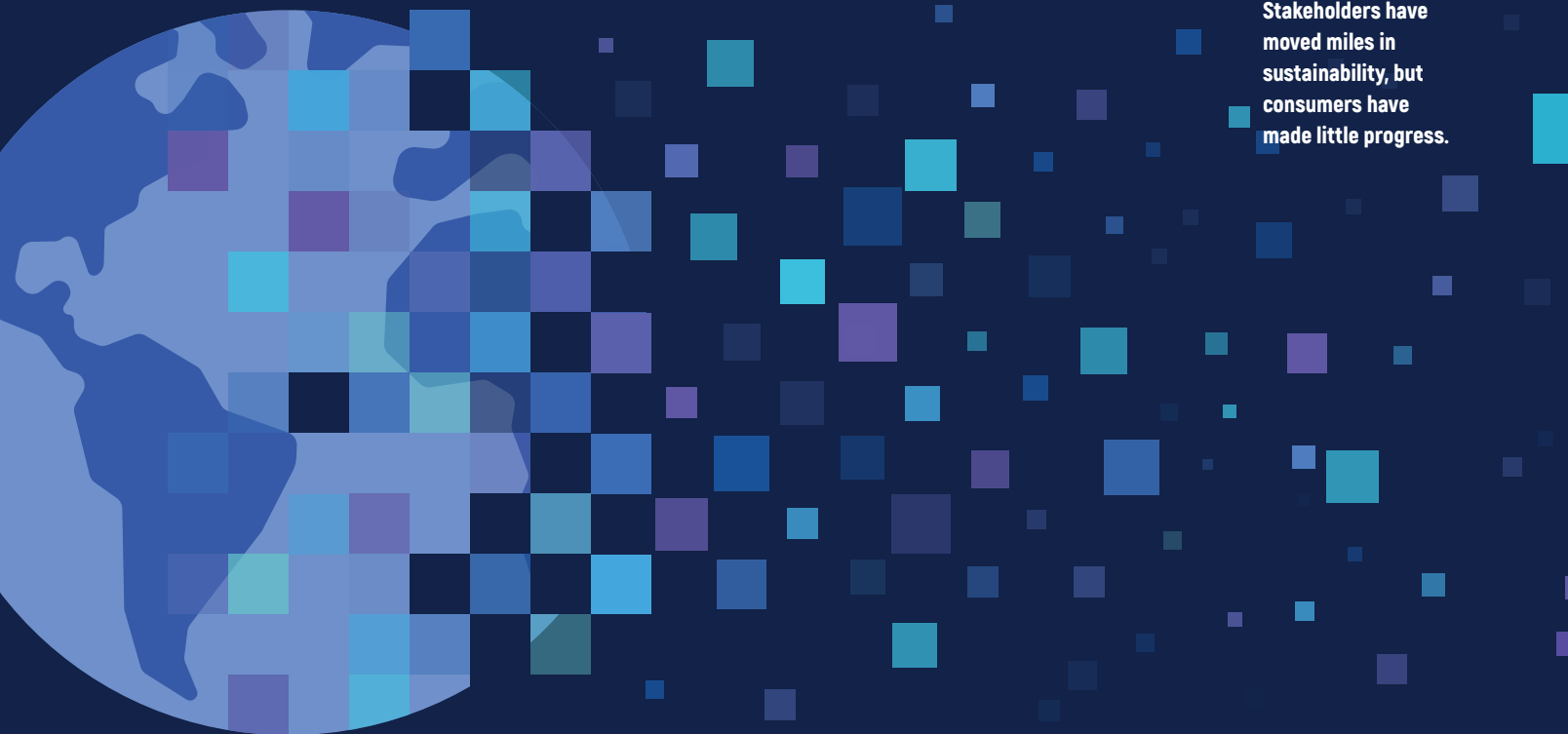


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QUICK TAKE
 Stakeholders have moved miles in sustainability, but consumers have made little progress.

Are You Future Fit?

Learn how to think more strategically about sustainability as a business driver.

GlobeScan is a global insights and advisory consultancy working at the intersection of brand purpose, sustainability, and trust. In this interview with CEO and author Chris Coulter, who co-hosts a podcast about sustainability leadership and business, he explains how companies can think more strategically about sustainability as a business driver.

Real Leaders: Where is society today when it comes to sustainability?

Chris Coulter: We are 40 to 50 years into the conversation of limits, growth, where things are at, and how all of these things are connected. Now, the conversation is more about how we transition and transform into a place that's going to be more prosperous, more stable, more secure, and more thriving.

We've hit this critical mass threshold at a stakeholder level. Businesspeople, civil society, governments, the financial community, and the scientific community all crossed over a hump a decade ago where we have a collective understanding of where to go. While we have sophistication on the stakeholder side, every day there's something new in understanding where it goes, how to regulate it, how to invest around it, and how to drive supplier perspectives. Now the debate is how, when, how fast, and where, and we can see the back-and-forth pendulum shifting.

On the consumer side, we have not engaged the average person on the street in this conversation very effectively. In some parts of the world, it's part of the culture war between those who don't want to change and those who do. So on the stakeholder side, we've moved miles and we're at a much more sophisticated



LISTEN UP
 Listen to our full conversation with GlobeScan on the *Real Leaders Podcast*.

place. On moving society, consumers, and citizens, we're pretty glacial with very little progress overall.

RL: Has the fundamental core driver of business shifted, as opposed to just maximizing share profit?

Coulter: I don't think it's transformative, but it has shifted. There have been generational shifts in chief executives, at senior C-suite levels, and even at the board levels that multi-stakeholder approaches to business are sensible, smart, and a long-term success pathway. However, the execution of that has been limited.

As for fully embracing what a multi-stakeholder approach to business looks like, companies know how to engage investors and listen to investors, and the ESG conversation has been quite catalytic in how companies have responded from at least a disclosure and compliance perspective. As for governments, there are government affairs teams that have had a fracture between traditional lobbying and then policy advocacy that could be oriented toward sustainability — and that's beginning to move as well.

But other stakeholders beyond that constellation — communities of impact, civil society, those more peripheral stakeholder audiences — most companies haven't approached that with a true multi-stakeholder mindset. The ones that do see what's coming around the corner and how to prepare become future fit for this new reality. And those that don't can be very successful for a long time until they can't. There's an attitudinal orientation and shift and lots of data that's coming behind it, but the full execution and embracing at some sort of scale has not

happened yet. And that's an interesting place to support business more fully.

RL: What resonates with the multinational companies that GlobeScan works with? How do you convince them that making a difference is good for business?

Coulter: The business case for long-term success equals sustainability, and I can't think there's any data, model, or example where that isn't the case. In the short term, you can make a crazy amount of money, burn bridges, and destroy things, and you can be successful — but in the long term, it's almost impossible. There's a great quote by a former CMO at Unilever, Keith Weed, who said he'd love to see the business case for unsustainable business.

So broadly, the way we meet our clients and engage, we have a shared mind that in the long term, this is what we're trying to play for and prepare for. Once you begin to plan strategically by looking 10 or 20 years out and ask, "How will consumer sentiments or expectations or sensibility be changing in the future? Who is this younger generation versus the older? What are their preferences? What are their trends?" you can see that it's being more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable, so that's the future marketplace.

The problem is that people are so naturally preoccupied with short-term pressures and responses that we can't get over the hump. Those companies that have been able to create a planning process, an engagement process to have their eye on the long-term, it equals strong sustainability commitment and performance, inevitably.

Becoming Employee Owned

Looking out for its own sustainability, GlobeScan became an employee ownership trust. Here, Coulter talks about the decision-making process.

We're 36 years old as an organization, but we were at that juncture where we asked ourselves, "Do we go to a bigger agency and be sold, do we find a management buyout, or do we do something more innovative?" It wasn't an easy thing to do because of the legal and tax implications, and we're a small organization — just 60 people spread across nine cities in the world — but we've grown substantively over the last couple of years. So we chose this idea of an employee trust, which is not an employee-owned framework. It is a separate trust very much like the John Lewis Partnership in the UK where no one really owns it — the trust owns it. As employees, we're the beneficiaries, and we get profit-sharing because of that. But once we leave, the trust continues and part of this was to maintain our independence, to be an objective voice, and to ride through what's going to be a very disruptive, exciting, but transformative and challenging multiple decades going forward. We're trying collectively to think of not only what we're doing in our work now with our clients, but what about future GlobeScanners? We're trying to have a very long-term approach.



"BEING MORE INCLUSIVE, EQUITABLE, AND SUSTAINABLE — THAT'S THE FUTURE MARKETPLACE."

—CHRIS COULTER, CEO OF GLOBESCAN

RL: How should leaders handle resistance to change among different generations?

Coulter: With any sort of generational tension there are new ideas, and the older guard are like, “That’s not how we do business. Let’s go easy. Slow down a little bit.” That’s OK. What’s remarkable is the Gen Z cohort, a portion of them — not all of them because there’s diversity in all cohorts — are remarkably smart, sophisticated, and super passionate about some of these issues that create this generational tension, especially around inclusion.

As for what’s changing, there are all kinds of conversations. Advertising and marketing have gotten a little more challenging with greenwashing that’s in the greenhushing pendulum. The real shift is that people are feeling that the world is changing for the worse when it

comes to climate change. We do lots of consumer public opinion surveys, and in our latest global study, 40% of the world says that they now feel they’ve been very greatly personally impacted by climate change. That’s different than a decade ago when it was less than half of that.

The biggest obstacle now to sustainability orientation is future discounting. As a species, we’ve evolved to be quite short-term focused. Future discounting is a phenomenon where, if we look too far ahead, we discount the planning toward that. So if I’m a farmer 40,000 years ago trying to eke out a living, I’m not going to be thinking about the next 10 years; I’m thinking about tomorrow or next week. And that has served us well as a species. The challenge with climate and most environmental issues is that if we don’t straighten things out, things are going to get worse, and the worse in the

future is a future-discounting problem.

Now there is an immediacy taking over what people are actually feeling and sensing, which is that things are changing — and not in a good way. This is our moment to try and transform it. The U.S. has the biggest gap anywhere in the world between younger people and older people feeling that climate is having a negative impact.

As leaders, you have to feel people’s pain, be part of the solution, and show responsibility. Half of us are getting away with, “It’s all inflated. It’s exaggerated. Let’s go back to traditional approaches.” That’s a natural reaction when change is imminent, but we’re going to work through it, and eventually, this is not going to be so politicized. It’ll be a standard status-quo approach to business — but we’re not there yet. ■
—*Real Leaders staff*

RealLeaders The Community for Impact

MAGAZINE



Real Leaders magazine is the world’s first sustainable business and leadership magazine. For over a decade, it has earned credibility and respect from 15,000+ readers on newsstands and online.

AWARDS & EVENTS



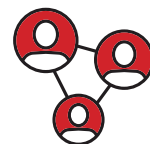
Real Leaders recognizes the Top Impact Companies, Keynote Speakers, Executive Coaches, and Real Leaders of Impact Investing. Winners are celebrated at UNITE, a three-day annual conference.

PODCAST



The Real Leaders Podcast is a Top 100 U.S. Business News Podcast that provides real, inspiring experiences from the world’s most forward-thinking impact business leaders.

IMPACT COLLABORATIVE



The Real Leaders Impact Collaborative is a leadership network that unites impact-oriented, growth-minded CEOs to grow their connections, capital sources, visibility, and business.

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Real Leaders is the only impact business magazine and community that influences thousands of CEOs to leave the world far better than they found it.

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Advantage Capital helped Carmen Tapio secure a loan to purchase and grow a call center after she was denied by several banks.

Changing the Financing Model

Prioritizing equity and empowerment for entrepreneurs and business owners is a winning formula.

By Kathryn Deen

➔ QUICK TAKE

Investing with intention and being motivated by meaningful impact can go together with successful investment outcomes and competitive returns.

Since its founding in 1992, Advantage Capital has invested over \$4.1 billion in over 900 companies, spanning a diverse array of industry sectors and covering the entire risk spectrum through a combination of public-private partnerships. In addition to growing small businesses, the company finances affordable housing and expands renewable energy solutions. Real Leaders connected with President Steven Stull to learn how Advantage Capital is helping lead the way in the impact investing space.

Real Leaders: Describe the problem Advantage Capital is trying to solve.

Steven Stull: Since the founding of our firm, we have worked to bring businesses, jobs, and technologies to communities that have historically lacked access to investment capital.

Those in underserved communities often face economic instability, a volatile housing market, limited opportunities for quality jobs, and various financial burdens. We leverage our investment acumen, legislative experience, and our emphasis on impact to funnel capital to growth-ready entrepreneurs, innovators, and industries



in overlooked areas. We invest with intention in job-generating small businesses — along with affordable housing developments and renewable energy solutions — to grow economies and communities.

RL: What are the company's most innovative ways of addressing lack of access to investment capital?

Stull: We uncover and implement innovative, flexible financing solutions often enabled and accelerated by public-private partnerships, and we meticulously measure the investment outcomes.

It is important to actively advocate for proven public policy that establishes partnerships with state and federal economic development organizations to turn incentives into investments into impact. For Advantage Capital, we have always worked to expand the scope and compliance of tax credit programs to, in turn, expand access to capital across the country beginning with one fund in one state — specifically for small businesses — to dozens of states and programs that include low-income housing and renewable energy investment.

RL: Can you share a couple of Advantage Capital's success stories?

Stull: After being denied by more than eight banks, Carmen Tapio partnered with Advantage Capital and secured a \$1.5-million small business loan in connection with the federal and state New Market Tax Credit (NMTC) programs. The loan allowed her to purchase North End Teleservices, a call center in the highly distressed community of North Omaha, Nebraska. Carmen has grown the company to over 500 employees, providing household-stabilizing benefits including health care, transportation, an apprentice program, micro-academics, performance bonuses, and tuition reimbursement.

Here's another example: When Stirling Ultra Cold was at a pivotal point in its growth trajectory, it needed capital to continue. Advantage Capital's investment, made in connection with the NMTC program, enabled the company to hire new employees, increase research and development, and support the rollout of a new product line. The company manufactures freezers that have become the sustainable choice for hospitals, research centers, universities, and corporate laboratories to store lab samples and other biomedical materials. It is a major employer helping to boost the local economy in rural Athens, Ohio.

“
TAKING A DOUBLE-BOTTOM-LINE INVESTMENT APPROACH CAN LIFT PEOPLE UP, GROW LOCAL ECONOMIES, AND HAVE AN ENORMOUS RIPPLE EFFECT ACROSS THE COUNTRY.”

— STEVEN STULL,
PRESIDENT OF
ADVANTAGE
CAPITAL



RL: What have been some of the company's biggest challenges, and how have you overcome them?

Stull: Our investment strategy is challenging. We go to communities and areas where traditional lenders are not necessarily active or interested, and we provide financing to the businesses and people who need it and are ready to seize it. We do that by being champions of small business — working hard to provide sophisticated and diverse options. And we ensure thoughtful fundraising and structuring are at the foundation of every fund and initiative — with a nationwide network of prominent investors who share our interest in positive impact. At the end of the day, we meet entrepreneurs and other innovators where they are and join them in their journey. It's about sharing a common goal: growth.

RL: Why should other leaders in the field of investing follow suit?

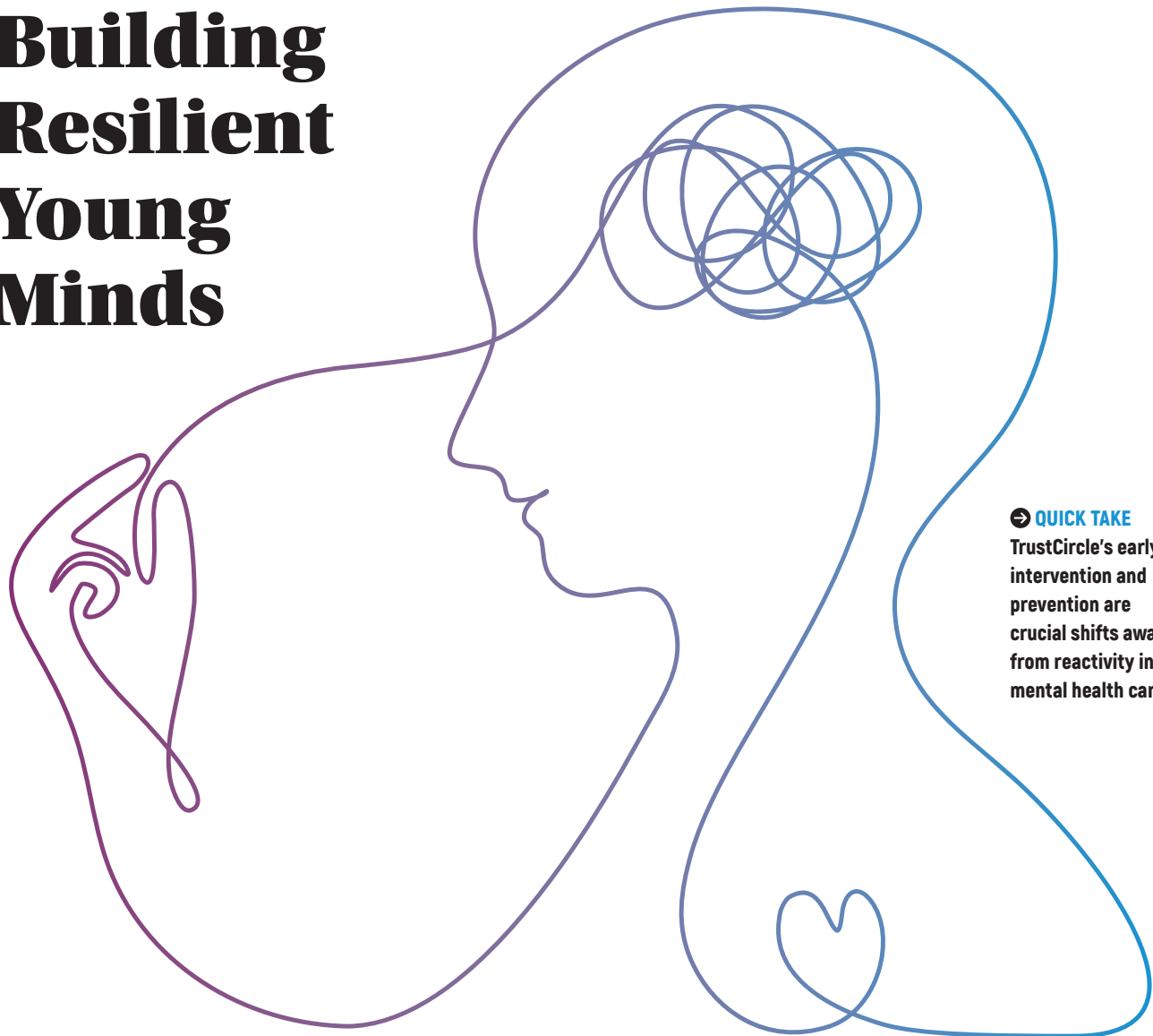
Stull: We know capital changes lives. For many people, life is not getting any easier. Investing with intention and being motivated by meaningful impact can go together with successful investment outcomes and competitive returns. There is an opportunity — perhaps an obligation — to do both. Taking a double-bottom-line investment approach can lift people up, grow local economies, and have an enormous ripple effect across the country. Ensuring talented, experienced professionals are participating in that process is important.

RL: What does the future of impact investing look like, and what role does Advantage Capital hope to play in it?

Stull: The future of impact investing is poised for major growth. Impact investing is a trillion-dollar industry and isn't going away anytime soon. I am optimistic and believe more businesses are going to establish and accelerate strategies that do good while doing well. We will continue to do what we do best — funnel flexible financing to the places and people who need it and are ready to seize it. And we hope to continue to expand our scope as we grow our affordable housing and renewable energy business lines. ■

Kathryn Deen is managing editor of *Real Leaders*.

Building Resilient Young Minds



➔ **QUICK TAKE**
TrustCircle's early intervention and prevention are crucial shifts away from reactivity in mental health care.

AI-assisted resources are poised to help address the mental health crisis.

By Sachin Chaudhry

In the world of mental health advocacy, I'm on a mission to foster social-emotional learning as core to the education system. By navigating the complexities of addressing mental health challenges that often go unnoticed, I aim to help create a world where proactive identification and early intervention are the norm rather than the exception. I join the collective vision for a better, emotionally healthier world.

The genesis of my mission can be traced to a poignant chapter in my family's narrative. Witnessing the emotional unraveling of my

younger brother, Salil Chaudhry — due to relentless bullying at school and subsequent mental health challenges — became the catalyst for my unwavering resolve. The pain of missed early signs and interventions served as the crucible from which I founded TrustCircle, an entity dedicated to ensuring that no one else would suffer a similar fate.

TrustCircle's purpose is to address the global mental health crisis for students. I envisioned how integrating social-emotional learning as core to the education system would revolutionize how we approach mental well-



THIS PROACTIVE APPROACH IS PIVOTAL IN CHANGING HOW MENTAL HEALTH IS UNDERSTOOD AND MANAGED IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS, OFFERING STUDENTS TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO BUILD RESILIENCE AND WELL-BEING FROM AN EARLY AGE.”



being. My journey led to the creation of a unique, AI-based mental health and well-being platform designed to foster emotional resilience and preventative mental health care for students on a global scale.

Worldwide, students are increasingly grappling with mental health concerns exacerbated by factors like academic pressure, social dynamics, and the digital era's challenges. TrustCircle's AI-based well-being platform is a pivotal innovation in this landscape. By integrating social-emotional learning into the education system, TrustCircle is not only directly addressing students' mental health needs but also promoting a culture of prevention and early intervention. This proactive approach is pivotal in changing how mental health is understood and managed in educational settings, offering students

tools and resources to build resilience and well-being from an early age.

TrustCircle's vision and commitment have attracted the attention and collaboration of several global organizations. Partnerships have been instrumental in broadening the reach and deepening the impact of TrustCircle's initiatives, such as those with UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, and the Healthy Brains Global Initiative — a unique endeavor of UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank. Other key partnerships have included the Foundation for the Support of the United Nations, Ashoka, SOFINA, the King Baudouin Foundation, the Hawaii Department of Education, and Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports — Government of India. These collaborations enable TrustCircle to leverage a wealth of expertise and resources, enhancing its ability to make a tangible difference in the lives of individuals across different cultures and communities.

I aim to inspire governments to prioritize mental health in their agenda. Imagine how powerful it would be if educational systems worldwide require 2–3 minutes of self-reflection time in every classroom. Then, every school will start giving the much-needed space to students to self-reflect.

The impact of TrustCircle has been significant and far-reaching. The TrustCircle Well-Being Platform has been selected as one of the best and most replicable innovations across G20 countries for adolescent health and well-being, and the innovation was showcased at the G20 Summit in India in collaboration with UNICEF India and Yuwaah to international leaders including Honorable Minister of Health and Family Welfare Mansukh L. Mandaviya.

TrustCircle is on track to empower 1.3 million individuals across five countries with a goal to reach at least 10% of the global population by 2040. By making social-emotional learning core to the education system, TrustCircle is not just addressing mental health issues but also transforming the way future generations will perceive and manage mental health. This transformational approach emphasizes early intervention and prevention, a crucial shift from the traditional reactive methods in mental health care.

Moreover, TrustCircle's associations with the WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Training in Mental Health, the Schizophrenia Research Foundation, and the University of Warwick bring academic and research-based rigor to its approach, ensuring that our programs are not only empathetic and user-friendly but also scientifically sound and effective. Recognition by Ashoka, a global organization that identifies and supports leading social entrepreneurs, further validates our innovative approach and potential for systemic change.

TrustCircle's journey grew from a passionate idea to a globally recognized platform for mental health prevention and emotional resilience, a testament to the power of vision, collaboration, and innovation in addressing some of the most pressing challenges of our times. With our holistic approach and global partnerships, I believe TrustCircle is well on its way to redefining mental health care and education, inspiring a systemic change toward a more emotionally resilient world. ■

Sachin Chaudhry is founder and CEO of TrustCircle.



→ **QUICK TAKE**
 Environmental,
 economic, and
 social goals all
 can be achieved.

Paving a Better Way

Here are some valuable lessons from one founder's 35 years of trailblazing a path to greener real estate.

By *Jonathan Rose*

The real estate industry has always faced many complex challenges. Today, these include rising climate change risks, insurance risks, regulatory risks, uncertain interest rates, and shifts in resident behaviors and expectations.

When I founded Jonathan Rose Companies in 1989 with a mission to bring green, mixed-income, mixed-use urban regeneration to cities, the key challenges were the capital shortage caused by the recession and the pervasive disinvestment in cities. Holding to our mission and executing with excellence helped us grow capital access and build the organizational resilience to face these and other emerging challenges.

In 1989, the real estate industry was aggressively anti-urban, emphatically focused

on the rapid growth of sprawling suburbs. Our area of focus — to revitalize the walkable and transit-accessible areas of cities with green mixed-income communities — lay way outside of the mainstream investment and development trends of the time. In addition to a disinterest in cities, the real estate industry viewed the added cost and effort to make buildings greener as unnecessary. Affordable housing was considered something for the public sector to build. Why would a for-profit company want to work in a highly regulated environment? And yet, we could clearly see that cities were going to come back, that firms with urban regeneration capacities would be needed, and that affordable housing would be essential to a future thriving economy.

The United States was in the depths of a

recession in the 1990s. Funding was scarce. But there were tax credit equity and Community Reinvestment Act debt for the development of new affordable housing and private equity for acquisitions if we could deliver a 10% cash-on-cash return. And so, we learned early to focus on net cash flow for our private equity investors and on delivering transformative projects for our public partners. And working with the same budgets as our competitors, we figured out how to make our projects as green as possible. Our mission provided all this work coherence.

As a small company, we generated a larger reputation by creating highly visible, award-winning projects that were transformational and financially feasible. Because we had little competition for the kinds of projects that we were doing, we developed many firsts, such as the first green, mixed-use, mixed-income, transit-oriented historic preservation project — The Denver Dry Goods Building (pictured); the first green office retrofit — The Vance Building; the first LEED Gold Shopping center at Highlands Garden Village; the first real estate impact investing fund — The Rose Smart Growth Fund; and others. These won awards, attracted press, pleased lenders and city agencies, and gave the firm visibility.

Lessons from those early years included learning to select projects with care to fully express our mission, deliver on-time/on-budget completions, provide positive cash flow to our investors, demonstrate innovative solutions to our public sector partners, and work with industry organizations such as the Urban Land Institute to scale the solutions.

For the company's first 11 years, we were project-centered, focusing on building a body of financially successful work that reflected the company's mission. In the following decades, we shifted our attention to be company-centered, building an organization that can carry out our mission.

To do this, we had to expand our sources of financing. We had financed all our acquisitions by raising funds on a project-by-project basis from families and friends. We decided to create an investment fund management business. Our first fund, The Rose Smart Growth Fund, was launched in 2005 when most real estate investment funds were still suburban-focused. Our premise was that buying properties within walking distance of mass transit and renovating them to be greener would not only reduce their environmental impact

but also generate higher occupancy rates, making them more economically resilient in times of stress. When the global financial crisis hit, this proved to be correct, and although our rents dropped a bit, our occupancies remained full, outperforming our competitors.

At the same time, we understood that there would likely not be enough public funding to develop all the affordable housing that was needed. In addition, the existing supply of affordable housing was declining due to owners opting out of affordable housing programs in gentrifying neighborhoods. In response, we developed a series of affordable housing preservation funds, raising private equity to match with debt from Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and the Federal Housing Administration.

We have used these funds to buy existing affordable and mixed-income housing, make it green, and bring social, health, and educational programs to residents. Although a goal from the early days of the company, the emphasis placed on social impact grew at this point and became an explicit part of our mission and vision. Safe, green, healthy housing became the platform for resident opportunity. Rich social programming, co-produced with residents, helps to ensure the stability of communities and plays a vital role in enabling residents to access health care, food, education, job training, and other economic opportunities. The delivery of resident services helps to drive social change, advancing equity and social and racial justice.

And as the organization grew, we grew our staff. Having a clear mission and sharing our profits with all employees attracted and retained the best and brightest. The leaders of our development, investment, and acquisition-rehab business lines started with us as interns.

We were early participants in the exciting field of impact investment. As the field grew, investors sought proven investment models with authentic motivation, excellent execution, and reporting of impact. And so, the depth of our commitment to our mission was not only the right thing to do but has also been attractive to impact investors.

There will be many economic and political cycles to come. Having a clear mission as our center of gravity will be the foundation of our current and future leaders' success. ■

Jonathan Rose is founder and president of Jonathan Rose Companies.



**“HAVING
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FOUNDATION
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CURRENT
AND FUTURE
LEADERS’
SUCCESS.”**

Helping to Fix a Broken Industry

Nisolo is bringing hope and transparency to the damaged world of fashion.

By Patrick Woodyard

The deeper you dig, the more you'll come to realize how broken the fashion industry is today. Yet, there is hope — even for the pragmatist.

Brands and manufacturers with a commitment to better sustainability practices are on the rise, fighting to allow the fashion industry to reach its hidden potential as a positive force for good. Since the sustainability movement's inception, we've remained proud at Nisolo to fight alongside similar organizations. Here's a bit about the "why" behind Nisolo and where it all began.

A Rude Awakening

As an undergrad, I studied global economics and business and spent a fair amount of my time in developing countries learning how international

business can have a very positive or very negative impact on the world. Shortly after graduating, I moved to Peru where I pursued an opportunity in microfinance with the goal of helping women grow small businesses. Little did I know, my job was in Peru's shoemaking capital, and I was soon introduced to the centuries-old, fascinating art form of shoemaking. Blown away by the skill that abounded, I was frustrated to learn that the producers I met faced such horrible working conditions and unjust compensation.

I knew things could be different, and I saw massive potential to drive transformational change in this community by starting Nisolo. I'd soon learn what most consumers (blinded by the allure of cheap prices) remain completely unaware of today: The explosive growth of the global fashion industry has fared well for some yet has been violently unjust for most everyone else. The truth is that low wages and poor working conditions are rampant, with an estimated 95% of workers in the fashion industry today not paid a living wage that can cover their most basic needs.

Due to exorbitant water usage, the irresponsible disposal of waste, the exponential growth of manmade non-biodegradable fibers such as polyester, and filthy carbon emissions from coal-powered factories in the developing world, the planet isn't faring too well either. In fact, the fashion industry is estimated



→ QUICK TAKE
Sustainability Facts Labels could increase accountability.

to be one of the top five most pollutive industries in the world, emitting more carbon than the international aviation and shipping industries combined.

A Better Way

To flip the script, we created Nisolo as a brand that would care for the planet and the people within our supply chain just as much as the end consumer. Ultimately, our goal is to play our part in pushing the fashion industry in a more sustainable direction. And as a brand focused on sustainability, we know we're far from perfect.

We recently raised the bar for transparency by launching the Nisolo Sustainability Facts Label to help hold ourselves more accountable in hopes the industry will begin to do the same.





QR code that links directly to the 200 data points evaluated across people and planet for that specific product.

Empowering the Future

Recalling that business can have a very negative or positive impact on the world, our motivation comes not only from how bad things have become in our industry but also from the opportunity ahead. This is an industry that employs hundreds of millions of the world's poorest people. What would the world look like for future generations in these communities if rather than systematically holding people in a never-ending cycle of poverty, proper treatment and a fair opportunity were guaranteed for all producers? I've seen firsthand the impact this has had on our shoemakers and the future of their children. We hope to see this happen worldwide.

As consumers, we must remember the immense power we hold through the dollars we spend. We all want a better industry and a better world. And that's why we encourage one another to dig deeper into our favorite brands' supply chains. If they are not visibly demonstrating a move in the right direction, let's ask for greater transparency where it's lacking.

Ultimately, the sustainability journey is a marathon, not a sprint. By working together, we believe we can drive monumental transformation in the fashion industry within our lifetime. ■

Patrick Woodyard is founder and CEO of Nisolo, an ethical footwear and accessory brand. He serves as executive board member for the Nashville Fashion Alliance and board member for the Nashville chapter of the Social Enterprise Alliance.



Leveraging the research of sustainability experts around the world, we created this to empower consumers to make better choices and to invite brands like us to strengthen their approaches to sustainability. From B Corp to Leather Working Group to Climate Neutral, Fair Trade USA, Higg Index, FLA, SA8000, Textile Exchange, Good On You, Re/Make to you name it, we took it all in to ensure our label accounted for what experts commonly deem most critical to a sustainable approach.

With 10 categories scored across people and planet backed by 200 public-facing data points, the Sustainability Facts Label is one of the most comprehensive yet digestible evaluation tools the fashion industry has seen to date. Each Nisolo product now carries this label as well as a



Serving Up Sustainability

This specialty food store is pioneering a better way forward.

Among the first specialty food stores in the U.S., Elephants Delicatessen was founded in 1979 in Portland, Oregon. Within 45 years, the company expanded into eight retail locations, a catering and events company, and a wholesale division.

Elephants Delicatessen also prides itself on pioneering sustainable practices. In 2011, it became Oregon's first business to invest in an electric vehicle; and in 2015, the company earned B Corp certification. In 2020, it enrolled in Energy Trust of Oregon's Strategic Energy Management program and since then has received over \$18,000 in incentives for reducing its energy use and thousands of dollars more to pay for equipment and lighting upgrades. The company cut its electricity and natural gas use by 25% and committed to reach net-zero emissions by 2030.

"Restaurants have the unique ability to help the communities we are part of," co-owner and CEO Anne Weaver says. "We have the opportunity to showcase our values through our business. Restaurants can lead in a significant way."

Elephants Delicatessen opts to share an annual sustainability report on its website, which looks at the company's use of water, electricity, natural gas, and fleet vehicles, as well as refrigerant loss, greenhouse gas emissions, and waste management. Its latest summary reads, in part, "Elephants saw significant increases in production, staffing, and revenue. ... And yet, with a few exceptions, increases in resources and emissions lagged the increases in productivity and revenue."

Weaver says, "We never settle for 'good enough' - in our food, our business, or our sustainability practices. We've learned the wins are worth it - to sustain both our business and our environment." ■
—*Real Leaders staff*

“
WE'VE LEARNED THE WINS ARE WORTH IT — TO SUSTAIN BOTH OUR BUSINESS AND OUR ENVIRONMENT.”

**ANNE WEAVER,
CO-OWNER
AND CEO**



Net Zero by 2030

In its latest sustainability report, Elephants Delicatessen identified the following initiatives to mitigate its environmental impact and help reach its goal of net-zero emissions by 2030.

- 01 Continue participating in Energy Trust of Oregon's Strategic Energy Management program and reconsider existing goals
- 02 Establish a comprehensive water management plan with revised focus, goals, and practices
- 03 Establish a comprehensive refrigerant management plan to initiate a transition to less emissions-intensive operations
- 04 Establish a fleet management plan to guide reduction and mitigation efforts through 2028
- 05 Conduct waste audits for all locations to better understand the scope and challenges of its waste disposal practices
- 06 Expand its food donation and diversion efforts to better mitigate the negative social and environmental impacts of food waste
- 07 Translate existing and future policies and plans into Spanish to expand accessibility for employees and stakeholders
- 08 Implement more consistent tracking of its actions and practices to better understand and measure their impacts
- 09 Perform a material environmental impact assessment for the entirety of its operations



Miren Oca | Founder and Director,
Ocaquatics Swim School



Robert Safrata | Owner and CEO,
Coast to Coast Experiences
and Novex Delivery Solutions;
CEO, Changequity



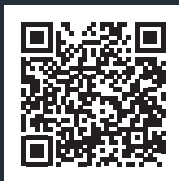
Sandra Moore | Managing Director &
Chief Impact Officer at Advantage Capital



Tamara Loehr,
Co-founder of Beusail Academy

The Community for Impact

Real Leaders is the only impact business magazine and community that influences thousands of CEOs to leave the world far better than they found it. Qualify as a Top Impact Company to join this community of impact-oriented, growth-minded CEOs.



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There are others on the road less traveled. Surround yourself with like-minded CEOs to increase access to capital sources, connections, and experience.



HOW TO

REEL IN A SHARK

Daymond John zeros in on what it takes to lure investors and be more intentional as a social impact company.

By Carla Kalogeridis



If you have even one good business idea in your head, you've probably fantasized about pitching it to Daymond John. What would you say if you had 3 minutes alone with *Shark Tank's* branding and marketing guru?

Well, I didn't get 3 minutes with Daymond John — I got over 30. And while I didn't pitch anything, I made the most of my time with a broad swath of questions to capture the best of America's favorite entrepreneur. John opened up about the big shift in the second half of his career, why he's not leaving his kids any money, and much more.

Real Leaders: Our readers are impact company leaders, founders, entrepreneurs — that's our sweet spot. So, I wanted to start with your experience in hearing and making pitches. What are the most important qualities you look for in a founder or entrepreneur in order for you to make an investment?

John: First of all, can they articulate the story to get my attention? Because that's the human interaction aspect of it. What are you talking about, and why would I care? Are you educating me that this is a problem, or are you assuming that I should just know about it?

Then I ask myself: Is this person a rock star? Do I want to know this person? Is there a need for me to be in this business with this person? If the founder is a rock star, then whether this business works out or not, we're going to do something else together. I hope your thing is baked. I really do. But guess what, if it fails, alright, you'll work with me, and we'll do something else. At the end of the day, that's what it is.

RL: What are the mistakes people make when they pitch investors — the things that make you cringe?

John: Not studying the investment target. Why would you want me as a partner? Do you know what's in it

for me? Some people come to *Shark Tank*, and they think because I have a successful clothing company, I should invest in their clothing idea. Well, if you really knew me, you'd know those are the only companies I don't want to invest in because I have too many clothing companies. I need to diversify my portfolio.

RL: How have your own investment criteria changed over time? What's that journey been like for you?

John: Originally, it was, "I don't have any money," so I had to concentrate on what I could do. Then it was, "I have money and I want to invest in sectors I know." But I made a lot of mistakes in those sectors because I thought money was the solution without putting in the work and doing my homework. Then I moved to being in various sectors. I'd throw money at it, and I was right in the middle trying to learn on the fly. I'm throwing a lot of money at it, and I'm trying to tweak it to find better ways to be more effective.

But what I'm doing now is purely about the people. I have to see where I truly add value. I have to have a passion for it. And I have to really trust that the founder has a massive amount of information in the industry.

RL: What role has social entrepreneurship played in your life?

John: It's huge. My biggest, most successful investment on *Shark Tank* is Bombas socks (a 2023 Real Leaders Top Impact Company), which is about social. I care about what I do. All my investments have some kind of social driver to it. FUBU may not have been a nonprofit and the messaging wasn't social, as in let's make a better planet or something of



that nature, but it was about one culture empowering another culture. Then I move on to *Shark Tank*, which is about investment empowering other people. My books and everything else I do now are about empowering people. So it's critical.

The first half of my career, from an investment standpoint, the social aspect wasn't a big topic. But now, with the success of *Bombas*, I've learned that it's critical to have that component. Customers want to stand for something, and it has to be genuine. I've had some experiences with companies wanting me to be the face of their brand, and I saw that social impact was not their driving force, and they were not being honest with their intentions.

RL: When you look at the investment landscape and how that might impact business leaders what are some of the market disruptions you're seeing?

John: Well, AI is the common one everyone is talking about. But I want to give you some meat on the bones. AI is the market assumption, but it's the use of AI analysis that will cause disruption. AI is such a big conversation. It's in everything in a big way. Think about your newsletters. With AI, maybe you can go from a copywriting and social team of 20 down to five. People think that AI is going to replace those people, but maybe there will be other jobs created as a result of AI. We just don't know what they are yet.

The big thing all CEOs are struggling with is how to get effective work from people, how to deal with remote and semi-remote and virtual, fragmented teams. This virtual, remote, fragmented way of the world working is not working.

John says great speakers are self-aware. They make their audience feel connected to them because they share the same struggles.

RL: You've done a lot of motivational speaking. What makes a great speech and a great speaker, and what are you still trying to improve in your own speaking?

John: A great speaker is self-aware. This is extremely important because they're not making any more attention in this world, and captivating people in the beginning and keeping their attention is very hard. Maybe you can captivate somebody for the first 10 minutes, but then you lose them after 20 minutes. So how do you pack in what you need to say in 20 minutes? How do you relate to them, feel equal to them even though you're the one on stage who is deemed as somebody with this greatness or special information?

It's all in your presentation of the message and how you make people feel. Do you make them feel like they're connecting because you've had the same struggle? And you're both, at the end of the day, arriving at the same solution or inspiration.

A great speaker has a takeaway action that somebody is motivated to do at home. I mean, even if you had the person in tears, what is the takeaway? It's always got to be about what's in it for them. And of course, last but not least, are you in tune with what the client needs? The person or group who asked you to speak — what do they want? The client has a vested interest in your talk. Everything is on the line for them. Some speakers take up the stage with their own priorities, and if you act like that, then you let people down.

RL: Do you like public speaking?

John: Oh, I love it. I absolutely love it. I love that we find a way to connect through the conversation and the struggle.

A man in a dark suit stands on a stage in an empty theater, looking out at rows of red seats. The theater is dimly lit, with several bright spotlights illuminating the stage area. The ceiling features ornate chandeliers. The overall atmosphere is one of quiet reflection and anticipation.

“My passion is giving access to people who deserve it — but not just giving access — also, showing them they already have access.”



RL: What are some of the most valuable life lessons that have profoundly made a difference in your thinking and actions?

John: You have to be extremely hard on yourself in striving for knowledge and constantly tweaking yourself to be better. But at some point, if you have put in the time, then you also have to take a moment to smell the roses. Be proud of yourself. You have to really take inventory of yourself.

You know, the three pillars to success are pretty simple: You got to know your why, you got to set goals, and then you got to do your homework. If your why is the why your parents told you, then that's what success looks like to you. Do you want to belong to a bunch of people you don't know who will never change your life? Then you're setting the wrong goals and you're going to do the wrong homework to get to those wrong goals. Being brutally honest is a really big key to success.

RL: Many of our readers are the heads of family businesses, and they're working on succession planning. You have said that you're not going to leave your daughters any money, citing the importance of a legacy versus an inheritance. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

John: The percentage of generational wealth that gets passed through to children and grandchildren is not that great. It's been said that the first generation makes the money, the second generation enjoys it, and the third destroys it. I'm not going to say the third destroys it, but in only a small percentage of businesses do the second and third generations take the business to another level or expand it significantly. Now, does that money stay there in the family? Absolutely. Do the Rockefellers still have their money? Of course, and their foundation still does great things for this country. But are the children running their own businesses or extending what the family has? Not as much as probably people would think.

So that brings us to inheritance versus legacy. The thing that any parent wants to do is give their children the things that they themselves never had access to — whether it's education, freedom, whatever the case is. But when you give your child everything, you make them the poorest person in the world.

I started off letting my girls know I would not leave them anything. And I did that for various reasons. Number one, someone might come into their life to use them for something that was not best for them. I want them also not thinking there is going to be a pot for them at the end of the rainbow. They need to work hard for themselves. They must become really great people to society.

I've been to many funerals, but I have never been to one where they talk about what somebody had, their possessions. I only heard of how they made



John says the best way to be a force for good in this world is to look within the people who work for you because they may be already working in the communities you want to help and you don't even know it.

people feel and how they impacted people's lives. If my legacy is that my children can say, "My father was an everyday man who tried to empower people," then I think that example will open way more doors for them. I don't want the door open because they got money hidden behind that door.

RL: You once said that anything worth doing is worth overdoing. What is your passion these days? What are you overdoing right now?

John: My passion is giving access to people who deserve it — but not just giving access — also, showing them they already have access. The one thing people don't realize is access is all around us — it's the *use* of access that is not utilized. As connected as we are, I truly feel like we are at the dumbest goddamn time in history because people hit the top link on Google and then wonder why what they're asking for does not work. They say all they get is "no." They say, "I did this and then didn't get that." Did you pick up the phone? No? Pick up the damn phone. It's pretty simple, right? I just don't get it.

I am not about giving access to people who get stuck on these little devices that they're not going to be further than 3 feet away from for the next 97% of their lives. I give access to a CEO who says, "Listen, I'm somebody who nobody knows, but I'm doing a lot of great work out there, and I want to be the voice of authority." Or I will give access to a kid who has no

financial intelligence. I want all our children to have financial intelligence. It's not about having my own personal *Shark Tank*. It's about giving access to the people or foundations who are going to use it for the right reason. That's my passion.

Somebody told me something the other day: "The first half of your life, you do it for your ego. The second half, you do it for your soul." If I think that you're going to do something to make the world a better place — no matter where you are in life — I'm going to give you access by showing you how to utilize the access that you have.

RL: Now that's a legacy.

John: Well, hopefully, the windfall is that I've inspired people of more colors to say, "Whatever my culture, my beliefs, I can work within my community and empower people." No matter what side of the table you're on, you can create investments or ways that people can have a synergistic relationship with those outside America. This is the American dream that's been given to us, that corporate America doesn't care about your color, your creed, your gender. And look at me — if I can do it, you can do it.

But our education system is broken. We're still going off of an 80-year-old system that teaches kids shop and how to build things, but it doesn't teach them financial intelligence — and that's one of the

“Hopefully, the windfall is that I’ve inspired people of more colors to say, ‘Whatever my culture, my beliefs, I can work within my community and empower people.’”

few needs we all have in common. A lot of people don’t know if they want a formal education, but they don’t have financial intelligence starting off as children, and then they get marketed by predatory companies at 16 or 17 years old, and they end up with a \$700,000 debt for a college education that they were not even certain they wanted.

I do believe in higher education. But the data shows that 57% of the kids graduating now will retire with a job title that doesn’t exist today. It’s like telling somebody 20 years ago, “You’re going to be an AI expert or a social media expert.” So you have no financial intelligence, but you do have \$700,000 worth of student debt that you’re not going to pay off until your 50s for a career that you didn’t even know if you wanted. What does that do to our country?

Here’s what it does: All of a sudden, it’s expensive to eat clean. So what happens? Well, you start having a bad diet because the cheapest thing to consume in our country is made of butter, sugar, and salt. Domestic violence rises and incarceration rates rise because if you don’t have an education or you cannot afford enough, what are you going to do? It is a big problem, and it can easily be adjusted if we give our children financial intelligence. We don’t need them starting off with 18% on their credit cards and student loans, with careers they don’t want to have so they can buy a whole bunch of stuff they’ll never need.

RL: Anything you want to say specifically to our readers who are trying to use business as a force for good?

John: I think they need to be more intentional about what they’re doing. We always hear there are so many absolutely amazing leaders and corporate citizens who are doing great things, but they feel dirty about trying to say and show what they’re doing because it feels like they’re trying to make a profit off of doing good.

When George Floyd was killed, a lot of my friends and business associates called me for advice. They felt compelled to do something. I was honest with them. Even though I’m African American, and I want to steer all the help I can to the African American community, I advised them not to take any action just because it’s the trendy thing to do. If your action isn’t coming from a genuine place, the community — be it

the African Americans, LGBTQ+, veterans, whoever — will recognize that, and it could end up hurting you and your brand. As they say, real recognizes real.

If you want to be authentic, start by talking to the people closest to you — your staff, your friends, your colleagues, or business partners. Many of your people have been a part of these communities for years and you may not even know it. That’s a bloodline through which you can take very intentional steps.

People like to be associated with good causes. If you can give them a way to do it, they will talk about it. That’s user-generated content. That’s why Bombas has worked so well. People want to do good and brag about it. Yes, they’re great socks, but they’re just socks. When I did the deal, they were doing 700,000, and they will do 1.4 billion this year. When I did the deal, I had a million dollars’ worth of socks in my warehouse that I couldn’t sell. The only way I sold them is that I was sneaking into your laundry room at night and taking one out of your basket.

RL: I know that’s true.

John: People buy Bombas because they want to brag that they are giving back. If you have a business that’s also doing good, now you save them from having to go and intentionally give because they buy from you and will tell your story for you.

I will tell you a story. My daughter worked at a pizza parlor. She says, “Daddy, I gave 20 times this year. Every time I bought this, I helped clean up the ocean. Every time I bought this, I stopped human trafficking, and every time I bought a pair of socks, a pair of socks went to one of the homeless shelters. And by the way, Daddy, I’m going to buy every person I know socks for Christmas so they can help 10 other people.” That’s an example of why you have to be very intentional about what you’re doing because people want to brag about what you’re doing and what they’re doing. You can be a force for good — and your customers will help you. ■

Carla Kalogeridis is editor of *Real Leaders* magazine.



Voices Inspiring Change

**2024 Real Leaders
Top 50 Keynote Speakers**

About the List

Real Leaders took several factors into account to rank this list, including values-aligned impact, the quality of the speakers' messaging as a force for good, online influence, and published works. Would you like to apply to be considered on next year's list? Fill out the application at real-leaders.com/top-keynote-speakers.



Every year, Real Leaders leads the way in identifying the top speakers of the previous year. These are ordinary people who have achieved extraordinary outcomes and redefined our understanding of leadership. They have created stories, movements, and brands that challenge the world as we know it and move society into action. They are entrepreneurs, activists, athletes, authors, influencers, and investors who change lives every day. They are real leaders on the global stage. [Meet the 2024 Real Leaders Top 50 Keynote Speakers. →](#)



1

Tony Robbins

4TH CONSECUTIVE YEAR AT NO. 1

Topics: personal development, leadership, financial success, business growth

Bio: one of the world's leading life and business strategists; produces audio programs, educational videos, and live seminars; entrepreneur; investor; philanthropist; advisor and coach to four U.S. presidents, several top entertainers, athletes, sports teams, and business leaders; regular columnist in *Real Leaders* magazine (see page 11)

Podcast: *The Tony Robbins Podcast*

Top-selling book: *MONEY — Master the Game: 7 Simple Steps to Financial Freedom*



Simon Sinek

Topics: leadership, culture, innovation, knowing your why

Bio: unshakable optimist known for TED Talks on the concept of why; qualified ethnographer; speaker at the UN Global Compact Leaders Summit; founder of The Optimist Company and The Curve, a nonprofit advocating for police reform in the U.S.; member of the RAND Corporation — one of the world's most esteemed think-tanks

Podcast: *A Bit of Optimism*

Top-selling book: *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*

2

3. Brene Brown

Topics: courage, vulnerability, shame, leading with empathy, resilience

Bio: research professor at the University of Houston, visiting professor in management at the University of Texas, has one of the top five most-viewed TED Talks in the world, filmed a lecture on *Netflix*, launched a show on HBO Max in 2022

Podcasts: *Unlocking Us with Brené Brown*, *Dare to Lead with Brené Brown*

Top-selling book: *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*



4. Gary Vaynerchuk

Topics: marketing and branding, investment and finance, innovation, leadership, entrepreneurship

Bio: known as Gary “Vee;” a leading mind on what’s next in culture, relevance, and the internet; one of the most forward thinkers spotting early trends in business; supports several charities, raised \$2.3 million on TikTok for the “All-In Challenge” for Meals on Wheels

Podcast: *The GaryVee Audio Experience*

Top-selling book: *Twelve and a Half: Leveraging the Emotional Ingredients Necessary for Business Success*



5

Glennon Doyle

Topics: mental health, perseverance, trials, relationships

Bio: known for her wisdom, bold activism, and captivating storytelling; runs Together Rising, a nonprofit that supports refugees, immigrant families, and others in need; especially helps women deal with heartbreak and pain while empowering them along the way

Podcast: *We Can Do Hard Things*

Top-selling book: *Untamed*



6. David Goggins

Topics: mastering the mind, personal accountability, achieving your best, perseverance, personal growth

Bio: known to many as the toughest man alive, his messages inspire others to persist; retired Navy SEAL and the only member of the U.S. Armed Forces to complete SEAL training, Army Ranger School, and Air Force Tactical Air Controller training; ultra-distance racer; former Guinness World Record holder for pull-ups

Top-selling book: *Can't Hurt Me: Master Your Mind and Defy the Odds*

7

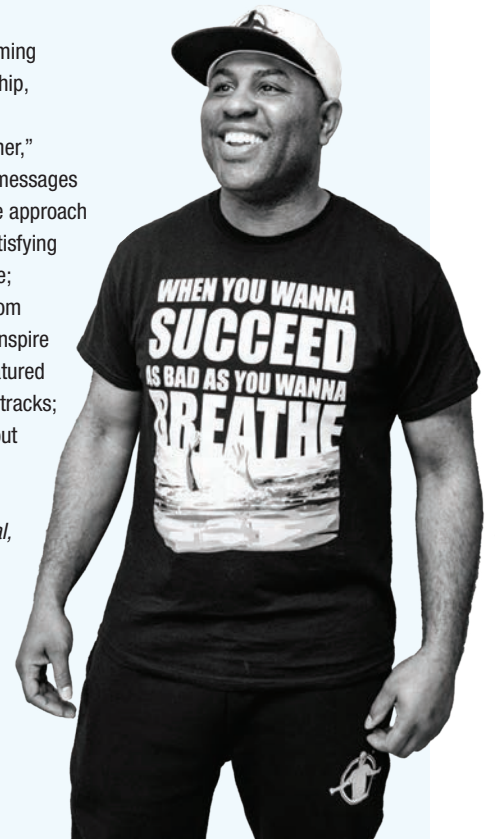
Eric Thomas

Topics: goal-setting, overcoming adversity, education, leadership, entrepreneurship

Bio: "ET, The Hip-Hop Preacher," famous for his high-energy messages and creative, common-sense approach to living a successful and satisfying professional and personal life; formerly homeless, draws from experience to motivate and inspire his followers; consultant; featured on several R&B and hip-hop tracks; educates and guides youth out of hardship

Podcast: *The Secret to Success: with CJ, Karl, Jemal, and Eric Thomas*

Top-selling book: *You Owe You: Ignite Your Power, Your Purpose, and Your Why*





8. Jay Shetty

Topics: health and wellness, purpose in the workplace, conscious communication

Bio: former monk turned life coach who redefined what success means; award-winning content creator; lives a life of service, impact, and passion; co-founded House of 1212 talent agency, Icon Media video production company, and Sama Tea adaptogenic brand; one of the most viewed people on the internet globally

Podcast: *On Purpose with Jay Shetty*

Top-selling book: *8 Rules of Love: How to Find It, Keep It, and Let It Go*



9. Rachel Hollis

Topics: personal development, goal-setting, empowering women

Bio: founded The Hollis Company, a lifestyle brand and media brand that produces content in every kind of media format; empowers a global audience of women who treasure her transparency and optimism; has one of the most successful podcasts in the world

Podcast: *The Rachel Hollis Podcast*

Top-selling book: *Didn't See That Coming: Putting Life Back Together When Your World Falls Apart*

Mel Robbins

Topics: culture transformation, leadership, teamwork, entrepreneurship, women empowerment

Bio: one of the most respected experts on mindset, motivation, and behavior change; research-backed tools and strategies used in clinical and corporate settings; world's top-ranked female podcast host; founded 143 Studios Inc., a media company that has served clients like Starbucks, JP Morgan Chase, and LinkedIn

Podcast: *The Mel Robbins Podcast*

Top-selling book: *The High 5 Habit: Take Control of Your Life with One Simple Habit*





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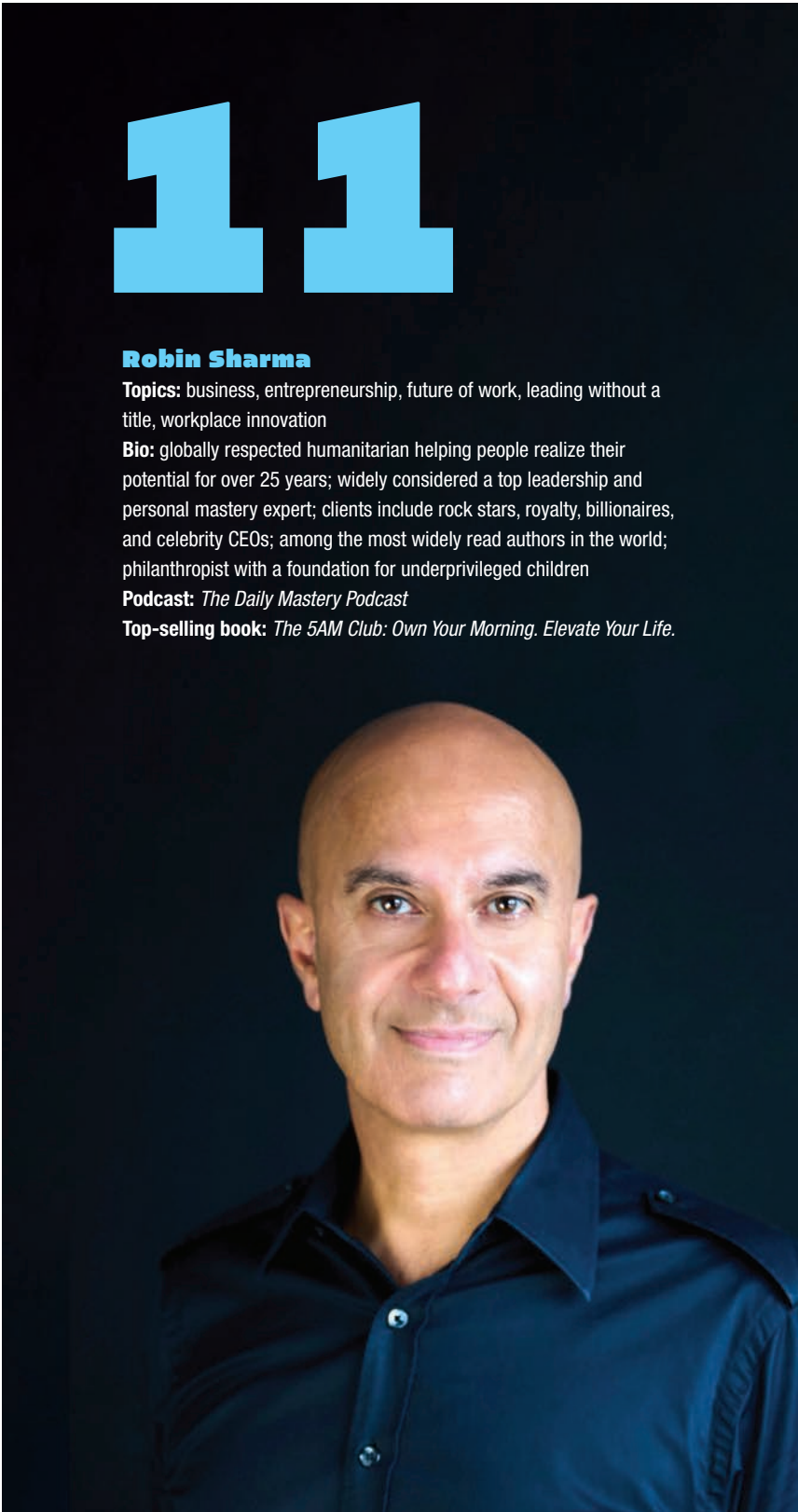
Robin Sharma

Topics: business, entrepreneurship, future of work, leading without a title, workplace innovation

Bio: globally respected humanitarian helping people realize their potential for over 25 years; widely considered a top leadership and personal mastery expert; clients include rock stars, royalty, billionaires, and celebrity CEOs; among the most widely read authors in the world; philanthropist with a foundation for underprivileged children

Podcast: *The Daily Mastery Podcast*

Top-selling book: *The 5AM Club: Own Your Morning. Elevate Your Life.*



12. Jocko Willink

Topics: military strategy, leadership, management, success

Bio: retired U.S. Navy SEAL officer whose task unit became the most highly decorated Special Operations unit of the Iraq War; recipient of the Silver and Bronze stars; leadership instructor; entrepreneur; co-founded Echelon Front, a leadership consulting company that applies leadership principles from the battlefield to help others lead and win

Podcast: *Jocko Podcast*

Top-selling book: *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win* (co-author Leif Babin)



13. Guy Kawasaki

Topics: innovation, enchantment, social media, evangelism, entrepreneurship

Bio: Silicon Valley venture capitalist, marketing specialist, chief evangelist of Canva; credited for popularizing the concept of a marketing evangelist in the 1980s when he famously evangelized the Apple Macintosh to developers; executive fellow at University of California, Berkeley; board member on the Peninsula Humane Society nonprofit

Podcast: *Remarkable People*

Top-selling book: *The Art of Social Media: Power Tips for Power Users*

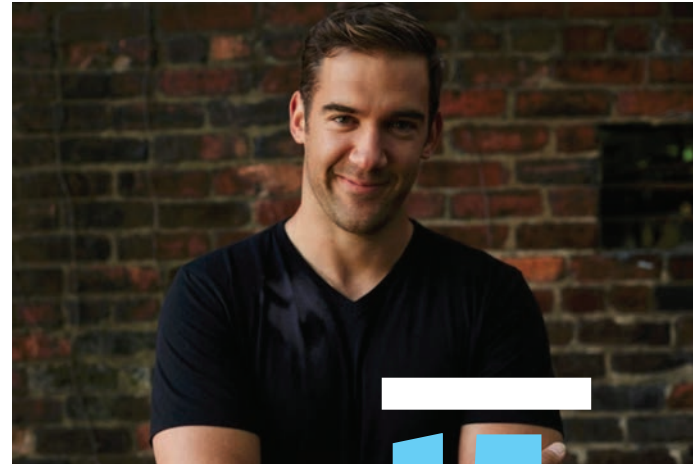
14

Paul Polman

Topics: leadership, innovation, philanthropy, sustainability, equality

Bio: business leader; campaigner; UN Global Compact leader; ambassador for the Race to Zero; former CEO of Unilever, which consistently ranked first in the world for sustainability; helped develop the UN Sustainable Development Goals and works across a range of organizations to deliver them

Top-selling book: *Net Positive: How Courageous Companies Thrive by Giving More Than They Take* (co-author Andrew Winston)



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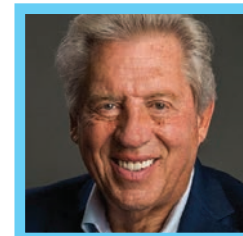
Lewis Howes

Topics: the greatness mindset and journey

Bio: business coach, lifestyle entrepreneur, named one of 5 Internet Gurus That Can Make You Rich, recognized by The White House as a top 100 entrepreneur in the U.S. under 30, All-American in football and decathlon who broke a world record, currently on the USA Men's National Handball Team

Podcast: *The School of Greatness*

Top-selling book: *The Greatness Mindset: Unlock the Power of Your Mind and Live Your Best Life Today*



16. John C. Maxwell

Topics: levels of leadership, achieving success, personal growth, teamwork

Bio: coach and leader who sold over 34 million books; founder of Maxwell Leadership® — a leadership development organization that has trained tens of millions of leaders in every nation; recognized as the No. 1 leader in business and as the world's most influential leadership expert, influencing individuals and organizations worldwide, from Fortune 500 CEOs and national leaders to entrepreneurs and future leaders

Podcast: *Maxwell Leadership Podcast*

Top-selling book: *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*



17. Ed Mylett

Topics: success, happiness, prosperity, unleashing potential, growing business
Bio: one of the fastest-growing business personalities in the history of social media, a top business leader and peak performance expert in the world, hosts the No. 1-rated business podcast and an online series
Podcast: *The Ed Mylett Show*
Top-selling book: *The Power of One More: The Ultimate Guide to Happiness and Success*



18. Jamie Kern Lima

Topics: inspiring and elevating women, business success
Bio: self-made entrepreneur, champion of women, philanthropist, cofounder of IT Cosmetics, formerly L’Oreal’s first female CEO, named among the richest self-made women in the U.S., active investor in more than 15 companies
Podcast: *The Jamie Kern Lima Show*
Top-selling book: *Worthy: How to Believe You Are Enough and Transform Your Life*



STACY KEOCK

Daymond John

★ UNITE 2024 SPEAKER

Topics: nailing pitches, scaling businesses, strategies for financial success in business, negotiating
Bio: self-made millionaire, businessman, investor, TV personality known for his appearance on the reality TV series *Shark Tank*, founder of FUBU and The Shark Group; serves on the Board of Overseers of the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, a nonprofit that empowers people in low-income areas to become entrepreneurs
Podcast: *That Moment*
Top-selling book: *The Power of Broke: How Empty Pockets, a Tight Budget, and a Hunger for Success Can Become Your Greatest Competitive Advantage*



20. Les Brown

Topics: overcoming adversity, personal development, leadership, communication skills
Bio: helps Fortune 500 CEOs, small business owners, nonprofits, and community leaders from all sectors of society expand opportunity; has studied the science of achievement for three decades; Master Trainer; recognized by the National Speakers Association and Toastmasters; won a Chicago-area Emmy for his fundraising pledge drive for the Public Broadcasting System
Podcast: *Les Brown Greatness Radio*
Top-selling book: *You’ve Got To Be Hungry: The Greatness Within to Win*



21. Dambisa Moyo

Topics: global growth outlook, unpacking technology, investment, economics, justice

Bio: economist, preeminent thinker who influences key decision makers in public policy and investments, known for her analyses of macroeconomics and global affairs and her exceptional ability to turn economic insights into investable ideas, member of the Bretton Woods Committee and the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Global Economic Imbalances

Top-selling book: *How Boards Work: And How They Can Work Better in a Chaotic World*



22. Amy Cuddy

Topics: power and presence, nonverbal communication, leadership, personal growth, diversity and inclusion

Bio: social psychologist; researcher; teacher; has the second-most viewed Ted Talk of all time on body language; has one of the most cited theories in social psychology; named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum; former professor who received a Harvard teaching award

Top-selling book: *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*

EXCERPT — William McDonough, No. 23

'The Sustainability Crises of Our Time: A Business Perspective'

William McDonough ranked among the highest in the category of values-aligned impact. His speech at the Global Sustainable Development Congress in May 2023 at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia encourages "waging peace through commerce." Here's an excerpt.

"So what I've seen in the last 40, 50 years now is this awareness of change. That is not always positive. And we hear about these certain changes like the Silent Spring announcements in the United States, DDT, or on various kinds of pollution, various kinds of desertification, and so on. And this buildup does not leave room for question — it's really a climate crisis, as we've heard the words. It's not just change. We've now reached the point where change has become a crisis. So I think that idea, and the urgency that it requires ... it's very important. This is a crisis that built up slowly, and there is no better time than the present to make positive change to ensure a future on planet earth for our children of all generations to come. ...

When John Kennedy in 1960 said, 'We are going to the moon,' the people who did that — and I know because I designed NASA (International) Space Station on Earth — did it in nine years, not a decade. ... And the average age of the NASA engineer who put Neil Armstrong on the moon was 28, which means when President Kennedy said, 'We're going to the moon,' they were students. So how important is education and its leadership?

We have seen the business community take this up. It started with the leaders. It started with very senior business leaders, but it then morphed into sustainability becoming a normal statement with not a highly defined set of parameters, except the first one from the (United Nations) Brundtland Commission, which was: Meet the needs of the present generation while allowing future generations to meet their own needs.

But a sustainable, safe, then circular future is about more than just needs. It's also wants. So we then saw companies setting up chief sustainability officers, and then the whole C-suite. We need leaders, and we need leaders in the academic institutions living it every day, and we need faculty, students who enjoy it and understand this is the future that we decide and make. And so we're at the point now of crisis, and everywhere we see people calling for ESG and getting confused or calling for sustainability without knowing what it means, and we see very strident regulations coming out of Europe even to this day, we see a lot of anxiety, or the concept of offsets and how to report our carbon footprints, and things like that. So it's an amazing time, and we need clarity and the academic community and the business community to both come together to — I think of it as waging peace through commerce."



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William McDonough

Topics: sustainable design and development, creating more good/sustainability, eco-effectiveness, remaking how we make things (re: recycling, waste)

Bio: global leader in sustainable design and development with three firms: McDonough Innovation advises commercial and government leaders on products and facilities; architect with William McDonough + Partners; through MBDC, co-created the Cradle to Cradle Certified® Products Program; active with the World Economic Forum; inaugural chair of World Economic Forum Meta-Council on the Circular Economy

Top-selling book: *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (co-author Michael Braungart)

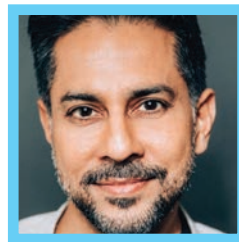


24. Carla Harris

Topics: authenticity, leveraging your voice, winning in the workplace, women's empowerment, diversity

Bio: business expert on how to achieve business success, one of the few Black women to rise to the top echelons of Wall Street, formerly Morgan Stanley's vice chair, now a senior client advisor, appointed to chair the National Women's Business Council by former U.S. President Barack Obama

Top-selling book: *Lead to Win: How to Be a Powerful, Impactful, Influential Leader in Any Environment*



25. Vishen Lakhiani

Topics: levels of consciousness, work culture, diversity, health, education

Bio: entrepreneur on a mission to raise human consciousness and reinvent education for the masses, founder and CEO of Mindvalley — the No. 1 online transformational platform that continues to help millions, named the Most Strategic Entrepreneur at the SME and Entrepreneurship Business Awards

Podcast: *The Mindvalley Show*

Top-selling book: *The 6 Phase Meditation Method: The Proven Technique to Supercharge Your Mind, Manifest Your Goals, and Make Magic in Minutes a Day*



26. Jon Gordon

Topics: leadership, teamwork, culture, sales, service

Bio: has a training/consulting company whose clients include leaders, CEOs, NFL, NBA, and MLB coaches, championship teams, and high performers; inspirational teacher; author of 28 books; clients include The Los Angeles Dodgers, Campbell's Soup, Dell, Publix, Southwest Airlines, Miami Heat, Snapchat, Truist Bank, Northwestern Mutual, and West Point Academy

Podcast: *Positive University*

Top-selling book: *The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel Your Life, Work, and Team with Positive Energy*



27. Amanda Gorman

Topics: the environment, racial equality, gender justice

Bio: critically acclaimed poet and activist known for delivering her poem “The Hill We Climb” at the inauguration of U.S. President Joe Biden in 2021, the U.S.’s first National Youth Poet Laureate, founder of the One Pen One Page nonprofit youth writing and leadership program

Top-selling book: *Call Us What We Carry: Poems*



Which of Your Quotes Got the Most Traction in 2023?

“ Leaders confuse culture with cultural aesthetics. Culture isn’t fancy tech or modern breakout rooms. Culture is the work you do every day. If you get the work right, you get the culture right. If your teams spend their days in meetings and responding to emails — that’s your culture. If they spend their days doing innovative work or meeting with customers — that’s your culture. What kind of culture do you want?”

— Lisa Bodell, No. 42

“ The new normal mindset, much like the Olympic motto, ‘swifter, higher, and stronger,’ is not the superlative or the highest form of the word or action. It’s the ‘er’ stem ending that propels me to greater. I can be the swiftest today, but swifter tomorrow. This new normal mindset isn’t a destination; it’s a springboard for endless growth. To grow, we must amputate fear and transform our adversity into our advantage.”

— John Register, No. 50



Cristina Mittermeier

Topics: enoughness, conservation, protecting the ocean

Bio: photographer, marine biologist, and conservationist with a passion for environmental storytelling and over 25 years of field experience; co-founder of the International League of Conservation Photographers; co-founder of SeaLegacy, an organization devoted to promoting ocean conservation; advocate for preserving Earth's delicate ecosystems, inspiring change, and fostering a profound connection between humanity and nature

Top-selling book: *Sublime Nature: Photographs That Awe and Inspire*



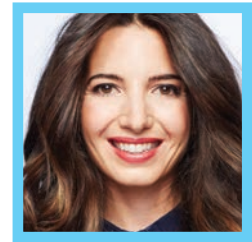
29. Nick Vujicic

Topics: overcoming adversity, hope, perseverance, self-acceptance, finding purpose

Bio: founder and CEO of Life Without Limbs; creator of the "Attitude is Altitude" Social Emotional Learning Curriculum; born with tetra-amelia syndrome, a rare disorder characterized by the absence of all four limbs; shares key principles that helped him realize his potential; anti-bullying advocate

Podcast: *Nick Vujicic Ministries Podcast*

Top-selling book: *Life Without Limits: Inspiration for a Ridiculously Good Life*



30. Marie Forleo

Topics: success in business and life, empowerment/realizing your potential, marketing and branding, sales

Bio: no-BS businesswoman, founder of the Marie Forleo International business coaching practice, named by Oprah as "a thought leader for the next generation," entrepreneur, business and life coach; hosts the *MarieTV* YouTube series; partners with nonprofit foundations like The Malala Fund, which fights to end child marriages

Podcast: *The Marie Forleo Podcast*

Top-selling book: *Everything Is Figureoutable*

“We often think of innovation as billion-dollar bets in lab coats. Instead of high-risk moonshots, the leaders of the most innovative organizations cultivate a high volume of ‘micro-innovations’ and build a culture of everyday innovation. Imagine your organization where everyone innovates in their everyday work versus a select few making costly mistakes.”

— Josh Linkner, No. 47

“Reading carefully is the new listening. Writing clearly is the new empathy.”

— Erica Dhawan, No. 46

“So many of you have this overwhelming fear of failure, and my counteroffer is that you don’t have a fear of failure. You have a fear of ‘them’ watching you fail. You’re afraid of what your big sister will think if you don’t finish the half marathon you signed up for. You’re afraid of Marissa from eighth grade seeing on Instagram that your new business is struggling. It’s not your fear holding you back — that’s your ego.”

— Rachel Hollis, No. 9

“How do you show up after you win? The answer to this question tells me everything I need to know about your belief system regarding success. You either rest and become complacent or you recognize the highest performers in the world are never seduced by success. When they win, they realize winning comes from attacking the process to drive results, and they attack the opportunity to repeat the process over and over and over again.”

— Ben Newman, No. 35

**31.
Seth
Godin**



Topics: the leadership cycle, business growth and culture, marketing

Bio: teacher; author of 20 books; entrepreneur; coordinator of *The Carbon Almanac*; founded Akimbo, home of the altMBA,

a 30-day workshop to change lives; founded Squidoo and Yoyodyne (acquired by Yahoo!); pioneered ethical online direct marketing; in the Marketing Hall of Fame and Direct Marketing Hall of Fame

Podcast: *Akimbo: A Podcast from Seth Godin*

Top-selling book: *The Practice: Shipping Creative Work*

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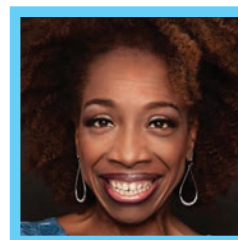
Trent Shelton

Topics: overcoming hardships, personal brand-building

Bio: successful NFL star turned philanthropist and motivational speaker; transformed countless lives with his messages of empowerment and self-love; founder of RehabTime, a nonprofit supporting change for the better; firm believer in life after sports

Podcast: *The Trent Shelton Podcast*

Top-selling book: *The Greatest You: Face Reality, Release Negativity & Live Your Purpose* (co-author Lou Aronica)



33. Lisa Nichols

Topics: entrepreneurship, future of work, mindfulness, overcoming adversity, resilience

Bio: from struggling single mom to millionaire entrepreneur, corporate CEO, and media personality with an audience of over 80 million people; founder and CEO of Motivating the Masses, Inc.; her nonprofit, Motivating Teen Spirit, has impacted 270,000 teens and supported over 2,500 teen dropouts in returning to school

Podcast: *The Lisa Nichols Show*

Top-selling book:

Abundance Now: Amplify Your Life & Achieve Prosperity Today (co-author Janet Switzer)



34. Janet Mock

Topics: diversity, education, activism, LGBTQ+, women's issues

Bio: film director and producer; magazine editor; transgender rights activist; on the board of directors of the Arcus Foundation, a charity for great ape conservation and LGBTQ+ rights; started the X (formerly known as Twitter) trans feminist hashtag #GirlsLikeUs; first trans person to sign a production pact with a major studio (*Netflix*)

Podcast: *Never Before with Janet Mock*

Top-selling book: *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*

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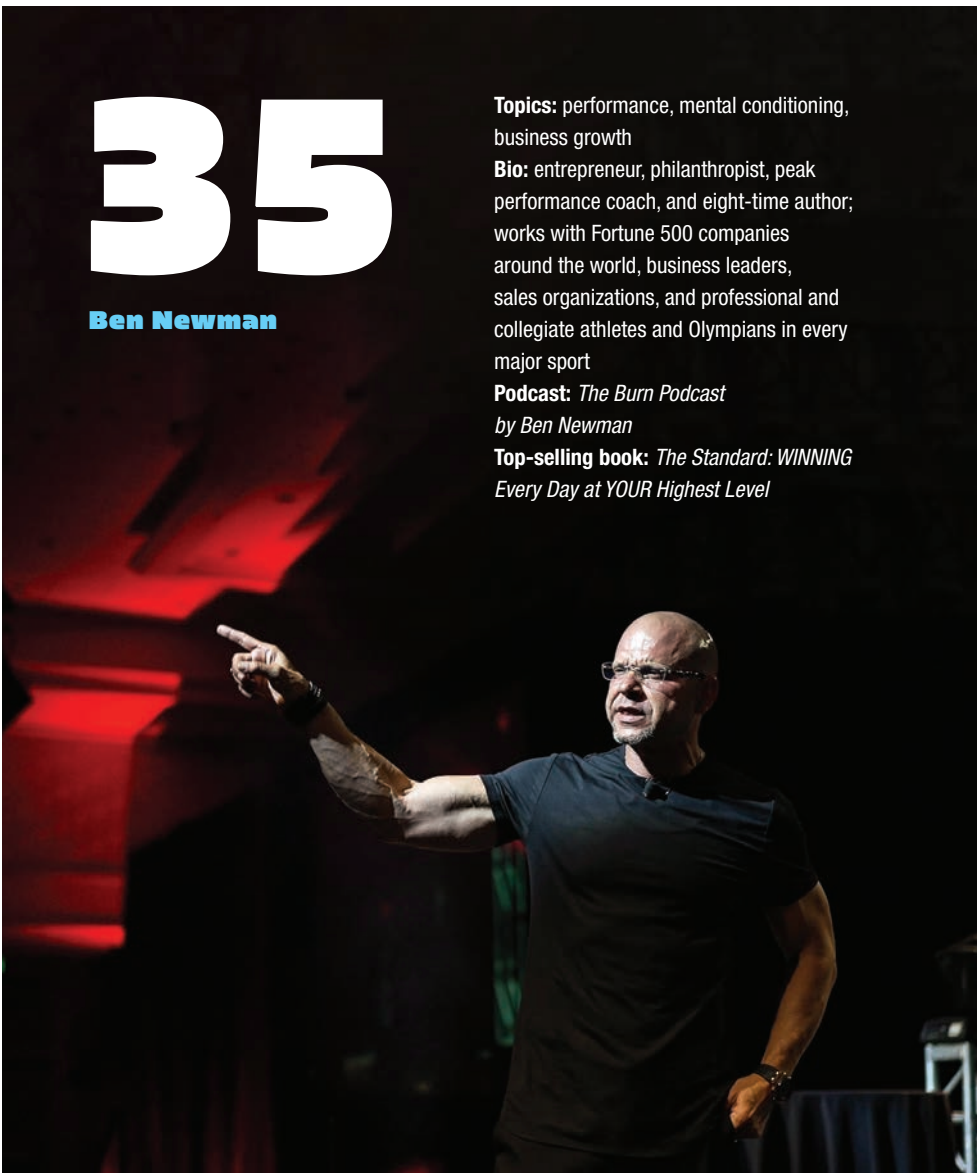
Ben Newman

Topics: performance, mental conditioning, business growth

Bio: entrepreneur, philanthropist, peak performance coach, and eight-time author; works with Fortune 500 companies around the world, business leaders, sales organizations, and professional and collegiate athletes and Olympians in every major sport

Podcast: *The Burn Podcast*
by Ben Newman

Top-selling book: *The Standard: WINNING Every Day at YOUR Highest Level*



36. Lynne Twist

Topics: empowering women, ending world hunger, transforming people's relationships with money, social justice, environmental sustainability

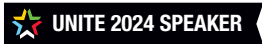
Bio: global visionary leader of 40+ years; philanthropist; teacher; founder of the Soul of Money Institute; featured speaker for the United Nations Beijing Women's Conference, State of the World Forum, and Synthesis Dialogues with His Holiness the Dalai Lama; United Nations Woman of Distinction; co-founder of the Pachamama Alliance for indigenous preservation

Top-selling book: *The Soul of Money: Transforming Your Relationship with Money and Life*



STACY KECK

37. Stedman Graham



Topics: identity leadership, strategic marketing, business development, brand building, competitive advantage

Bio: educator, author, and business advisor; chairman and CEO of S. Graham and Associates, a management and marketing consulting firm; founder of AAD (Athletes Against Drugs), which has awarded \$1.5 million in scholarships since 1985

Top-selling book: *Identity Leadership: To Lead Others You Must First Lead Yourself*



38. Felecia Hatcher



Topics: success, innovation, inclusion and diversity in business, personal transformation

Bio: CEO of Black Ambition, the nonprofit founded by Pharrell Williams to help close the opportunity gap for Black and Hispanic entrepreneurs through funding and resources; entrepreneur; called on by companies like Google, Spotify, and Disney to help empower their teams to foster inclusive innovation and facilitate transformative personal growth

Podcast: *So Ambitious*

Top-selling book: *Start Your Business on a Ramen Noodle Budget: 12 Lessons on Becoming a Young Entrepreneur When You Are Broke!*

What's the Best Keynote You've Ever Heard?

“Myron Golden’s ‘Four Levels of Value’ provide a framework for understanding the different ways we can create value. Progressing through these levels often leads to increased value for both you and your target market on all levels. It’s a journey of continuous improvement and innovation.” — **Felecia Hatcher, No. 38**

“Nainoa Thompson is the best keynote speaker I’ve heard. He revived the Polynesian art of celestial navigation and open-ocean voyaging. He started the Polynesian Voyaging Society, which has created a whole new generation of celestial navigators. When he gives a keynote, he speaks from the heart. His presence is always powerful, always memorable.” — **Henk Rogers, No. 45**

“I was deeply inspired by the compassion and profound commitment Linda Cliatt-Wyman had to her students when Linda was a fellow keynote speaker years ago, and the way I sign off on my podcast episodes and in my newsletters today — reminding my listeners and readers that I love them — is a direct result of Linda’s keynote address.” — **Mel Robbins, No. 10**

“The best keynote I’ve ever heard is from Jimmy V who was battling cancer because it was so raw, real, and powerful. In his speech, you saw and heard a man who was dying yet still encouraging others with his love, passion, and humanity.” — **Jon Gordon, No. 26**

“I recently heard Aulani Wilhelm keynote for IMPAC5. She started her keynote by convening a Hawaiian song with Hawaiian people who were in the audience. After this emotional and impactful way of focusing the audience’s attention, she delivered a powerful presentation. She made people laugh, cry, and think. She was memorable, inspiring, and most importantly for a great keynote presenter, she kept to her allotted time.” — **Cristina Mittermeier, No. 28**



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Laura Gassner Otting

Topics: living your best life, getting unstuck, thinking bigger, becoming mission-driven

Bio: mission-driven motivator, catalyst, and executive coach who inspires people to push past the doubt and indecision that keep great ideas in limbo; delivers strategic thinking, well-honed wisdom, and perspective generated by decades of navigating change across the startup, corporate, nonprofit, political, and philanthropic landscapes

Top-selling book: *Limitless: How to Ignore Everybody, Carve Your Own Path, and Live Your Best Life*

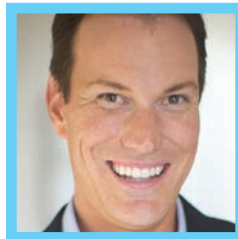


40. Ritu Bhasin

Topics: authentic leadership, inclusivity, engagement, productivity in the workplace, cultural competence,

Bio: inclusion and leadership expert and belonging advocate on a mission to disrupt through empowerment; CEO and founder of Bhasin Consulting Inc., a global diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) leadership consulting firm that has worked with hundreds of world-renowned organizations since 2010; award-winning DEI expert who desires to unlock belonging for all

Top-selling book: *We've Got This: Unlocking the Beauty of Belonging*



41. Shawn Achor

Topics: happiness and meaning, optimism, social connection, conscious positive habits, success

Bio: traveled to 50 countries studying how to create an interconnected approach to potential and happiness; research with UBS, Nationwide Insurance, Google, and more featured on major networks; one of the most popular Ted Talks of all time; clients include Microsoft, American Express, and BlueCross BlueShield; worked with over a third of the Fortune 100 companies

Top-selling book: *The Happiness Advantage: How a Positive Brain Fuels Success in Work and Life*



Lisa Bodell



Topics: innovation, simplification, collaboration, resetting, curiosity as your competitive advantage

Bio: global leader who inspires audiences to change and arms them with radically simple tools to get to the work that matters; influenced executives at top-ranked organizations such as Google, Cisco, Citigroup, and the U.S. Navy War College; FutureThink CEO; taught innovation at American University and Fordham University

Top-selling book: *Why Simple Wins: Escape the Complexity Trap and Get to Work That Matters*



43. Najwa Zebian

Topics: unleashing your inner leader, corporate leadership, authenticity, mental resilience, cultural inclusion/ social justice

Bio: creator who is healing souls through words; since self-publishing her first collection of poetry and prose in 2016, has become an inspiration to millions of people worldwide and a trailblazing voice for women

Podcast: *In the Clear* (co-host Stephan Maighan)

Top-selling book: *Welcome Home: A Guide to Building a Home for Your Soul*



45. Henk Rogers

Topics: ending the use of carbon-based fuels, achieving harmony for humanity and nature

Bio: entrepreneur; video game developer who created Japan's first Role-Playing Game and brought Tetris to the world; dedicated to research, development, advocacy, and implementation of sustainable energy solutions; founded environmental nonprofits Blue Planet Foundation, helping pass the nation's first renewable energy law, and Blue Planet Alliance, uniting nonprofits for a greener future

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UIDELL JIMENEZ

Simon Mainwaring

UNITE 2024 SPEAKER

Topics: business growth, company culture, the ESG advantage, preparing for future climate challenges

Bio: brand futurist; columnist; founder and CEO of We First, a strategic consultancy building purpose, sustainability, and impact initiatives for brands; provides C-suite advisory services for leaders committed to transforming tomorrow; featured expert and jury member for Sustainable Development Goals at the Cannes Lions Festival

Podcast: *Lead with We*

Top-selling book: *Lead with We*

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Erica Dhawan

Topics: modern corporate culture, remote collaboration, innovation, connective intelligence, digital body language

Bio: internationally recognized leading authority and advisor on 21st-century teamwork, collaboration, and innovation; named a top 50 management thinker of the world; speaks on global stages ranging from the World Economic Forum at Davos to the U.S. Army to companies such as Coca-Cola, FedEx, Goldman Sachs, Walmart, and Cisco

Podcast: *Masters of Leadership*

Top-selling book: *Digital Body Language: How to Build Trust and Connection, No Matter the Distance*





EXCERPT — Simon Mainwaring, No. 44

‘The Business Imperative for ESG’

Simon Mainwaring ranked among the highest in the category of values-aligned impact. Here’s an excerpt from his speech at the Association of National Advertisers Masters of Marketing Conference in October 2023 at Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando, Florida.

“Given the concurrent and compounding crises we face, leaders must reframe our role both within our companies and out in the world at large. To that end, three mindset shifts must occur without which new ambitions, goals, or commitments cannot be fully realized.

The first is that leadership will increasingly be defined by your ability to manage multiple crises at once. Your role as a leader — whether that be as a founder or a C-suite executive — must operate much like a steady cam on a movie set where you remain still and focused while at the same time shock-absorbing ongoing social, environmental, and real-time crises.

Second, in terms of the lens through which you look at the marketplace, you must back out of the future rather than build on the past. That’s because the past has less to do with the future than ever given the coincidence of exponential technologies, compounding crises, and rising, younger demographics.

Third, you must reimagine these social and environmental challenges as marketplace opportunities in disguise. The companies that will lead the future will be those that solve these enormous needs by reimagining, reinventing, and re-engineering what they make and how they take it to market. And the outsized growth they enjoy will be driven by the market forces these same challenges are enabling.

So your role as a leader must be courageous, intentional, and resilient. You must lead with integrity of intent and action. You must engage, educate, and inspire everyone in your stakeholder community to build your business with you because they believe in your company and your embodiment of its commitment to purpose.”



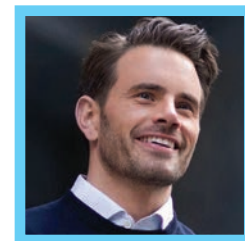
47. Josh Linkner

Topics: innovative leadership, business growth, navigating volatile times, disciplined dreaming, the music of business

Bio: serial entrepreneur, venture capital investor, professional jazz guitarist, globally recognized innovation expert; founder and CEO of five tech companies; during 30 years, helped over 100 startups launch and scale, creating over \$1 billion in investor returns; twice named Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of The Year; recipient of U.S. Presidential Champion of Change Award

Podcast: *Mic Drop*

Top-selling book: *Big Little Breakthroughs: How Small, Everyday Innovations Drive Oversized Results*



48. Seth Mattison

Topics: the future of work, talent management, change and innovation, digital transformation, leadership

Bio: business strategist; coach; advisor; works with high-performance leaders to shape the future of work; studied business performance, transformation, and leadership for almost 20 years inside some of the world’s most recognizable brands; founder and CEO of FutureSight Labs, an organizational design and transformation firm preparing world leaders for the future of work

Top-selling book: *The Future of Leadership: Elevate Your Influence. Navigate Disruption. Bring Out Their Best* (co-author Joshua Medcalf)



49. Christopher Marquis

 UNITE 2024 SPEAKER

Topics: business as a force for good, maximizing business and social value, environmental sustainability

Bio: researcher; professor; authored 20+ peer-reviewed academic articles and 50+ Harvard business cases on social innovation, sustainable business, and doing business in China; examines how culture, ideology, and social and political structures can be changed for a more equitable and sustainable future; former vice president at JP Morgan Chase

Top-selling book: *Better Business: How the B Corp Movement Is Remaking Capitalism*



50. John Register

Topics: adversity, the champion's mindset, disability diversity, navigating change

Bio: offers a roadmap to triumph through change; Paralympic Games long jump silver medalist; two-time Olympic trials qualifier; four-time track and field All-American; Desert Storm combat veteran; advisor to three U.S. secretaries of state, keynote speaker to one; co-chair for President Barack Obama; founded U.S. Olympic Committee's Paralympic Military Sports program

Podcast: *Performance Shift: The Art of Successfully Navigating Change*

EXCERPT — Christopher Marquis, No. 49

‘Better Business’


Christopher Marquis ranked among the highest in the category of values-aligned impact. Here's an excerpt from his speech at the Life's Good Award Conference in January 2023 at LG Sciencepark in Seoul, South Korea.

“A lot of times, companies say they want to be more stakeholder-driven but actually are unable to do so — and then they get called out for greenwashing.

In my book *Better Business*, I developed a model to address these implementation challenges. One key dimension is ESG measurement, which you hear a lot about now. I see this as less of a compliance exercise than as a way to unlock value. The other dimension is stakeholder governance. If a company actually wants to deliver on a social and environmental mission, if the governance of the company is not aligned with that, it's never going to succeed.

A great example of how this works is Patagonia, a company with a long-standing commitment to the environment. Looking at their B Corp B Impact Assessment, you can see their performance across five different ESG dimensions, and unsurprisingly environment and community are areas where they are really strong. But a key reason they are a great example is how they have improved over time. In 2011 they started off with an ESG score of around 107 and are now up around 151. So they're getting better over time. What companies tell me is that rigorous ESG measurement creates an internal impetus for change. It's a way to better understand your company and continuously improve. ESG provides a way to compare and learn and benchmark best practices. And then through stakeholder governance, they are able to align these practices with the rest of the company so it really becomes part of their DNA.

Another great case study is the fashion brand Chloé, which is another B Corp. In 2018 they hired a new CEO to transform the brand into being much more sustainable. Chloé started first just trying to measure and understand areas like the environmental impact of materials, for instance, which led to fundamental insights into their products and now they have moved away from cotton, which uses a lot of water, to materials like linen that are much less environmentally damaging. It became a continuous improvement process over a number of years, and as the company got better and better over time, it actually ended up becoming able to qualify as a B Corp. That was not their initial goal, but after working on ESG and governance over a few years, they realized that through these processes, they had reinvented the company.”

 Watch the full speech at [youtube.com/watch?v=xmgHYSHJoY&t=5s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmgHYSHJoY&t=5s).

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A New Picture of Health

Maria Menounos says real leaders must be CEOs of their own health — and that means making health care one of your best skill sets.





“It’s hard work to be healthy these days. But you must **do this in a way that sets an example for your employees, and then allow them to follow your example.”**

After having an intracranial tumor removed in 2017 and successfully battling stage 2 pancreatic cancer in 2023 — both of which she attributes in part to an accumulation of poor health choices including not prioritizing her health — Maria Menounos is on a mission. Her message: Leaders must be CEOs of their own health.

Menounos is best known for her work in the entertainment world. She was a TV correspondent and host (Entertainment Tonight, Extra, E!News, Today, Access Hollywood), presenter (Miss Universe pageant, Eurovision Song Contest), actress, bestselling author, entrepreneur, award-winning journalist, and host of the daily podcast Heal Squad.

She describes her earlier life as a whirlwind of 18-hour days, driven determination, high stress, and poor eating. Taking care of herself was not on the priority list — until her body just couldn’t keep pace any longer. Her health traumas led her to what she considers her higher purpose.

For Menounos, it took a brain tumor to open her eyes. “I knew I had to make changes; I just didn’t know how,” she tells *Real Leaders*. “I was trapped in an old dream. I wasn’t really happy anymore. I wasn’t fulfilled. But I was doing great.”

At the time, she was hosting E!News. “I was doing like 50 jobs at once,” she recalls. “The first thing I remember waking up from surgery was thinking, ‘What the f--- was I doing? I was trying to keep up with people. I don’t need this. This doesn’t define me at all.’”

Menounos describes it as “a rebirth moment.”

“I knew it was my chance to make changes in my life. My body was screaming for help for so long, and I would just shush it, like, ‘Body, be quiet. I’ve got to go back to work.’ My priorities were not in place.”

Menounos knows her story is not unique. “It’s a general issue with high performers. We must go from illiterate health kindergarteners to being CEOs of our health. Kindergarteners don’t know anything. They just do what their friends are doing. Likewise, we tend to follow what we hear about health without any research, and that’s just not serving us. With all the things happening to our air, our water, our food supply, that’s just not good enough anymore. Unfortunately, there is no health literacy, and we are farming out our health decisions to doctors without really understanding what they’re fully capable of and what their expertise is.”

Growing up, Menounos says she loved being with older people because she wanted to learn from their mistakes and avoid making the same ones. “Similarly, my goal is to affect people with what I’ve learned so they can start implementing little things in their life that will make a big difference down the road. Health trauma is so often an accumulation of poor choices. It’s trauma that takes us to the places where we are forced to learn, but I really want to help people find this message without the trauma.”

She points out that leaders hear all the time about work-life balance, but they don’t realize that the balance comes from taking care of themselves. “All we know how to do is win and succeed,” she says. “From the time we are little kids, we are taught to get good grades so that we can go to a great college, get a huge job, make a lot of money. But nowhere in that equation is anyone talking about your health and getting enough sleep, making sure your circadian rhythm is balanced, your hormones are balanced.”

“Kindergarteners don’t know anything. They just do what their friends are doing. Likewise, we tend to follow what we hear about health without any research, and that’s just not serving us.”

Health Literacy as a Business Skill

Menounos says that to be a real leader and take the best care of your people, you need to develop health literacy as one of your business skills.

“Health literacy is so important because your people need to know that you care about them,” she says. “It’s not normal to do the job of 10 people just because computers have made it possible. We’re taking in so much, and our brains are exhausted and fried. You’re not going to get the best work out of people. Health is just one of those things that you can’t delegate — not anymore.”

Menounos says real leaders show people that succeeding isn’t the only thing. “What you need is 360-degree succeeding,” she says. “It’s really feeling fulfilled — achieving, of course, and doing something meaningful — but also taking care of yourself. If leaders show their people that it is OK to prioritize their health, and other people do the same, then we have a whole new health care system.”

Menounos recalls being terrified to take a day off from work, terrified to not be at the morning

meeting. “Living like this, how are you supposed to fit health care into your life? Your employees will work so much harder for you if you give them the freedom and flexibility to take care of themselves,” she says. “Real leaders don’t say that productivity is the most important thing. This is a new area that leaders need to tackle, and they’re going to benefit from it too.”

Your Thoughts Are Your Body

One important step to being CEO of your health, she says, is to learn to manage your thoughts. “It’s a hard pill to swallow, but our thoughts become things,” she says. “As much as we want to avoid the idea that we are contributing to our health, from everything I’ve studied and everyone I’ve learned from, your brain doesn’t know the difference between perception and reality. So, you can tell the brain anything you want — good or bad — and that has a huge impact on what you’re going to experience. The relationship between mental and physical is one thousand percent real.


Changing your thinking can change your reality.”

Menounos does a great deal of work on meditation and the mind-body connection, studying people like Dr. Joe Dispenza and Gabby Bernstein. “I want full mind-body-soul healing. I realize what a massive task and undertaking I’m asking of Dream Big Maria. But I’m learning that things bubble up to the surface to be healed. Sometimes you’re trapped in an old dream, and you don’t even realize it. You’ve got to listen and follow the breadcrumbs.”

The Servant Leader Mistake

Menounos says high achievers often think of themselves as servant leaders, and to them, that means putting themselves at the bottom of the list. “But are you going to be valuable to those people you serve when you go down?” she points out. “What are your employees supposed to do — keep pumping you for information while you’re in your hospital bed?”

She recognizes that coaching your people to take care of themselves can be a delicate conversation. “The message about how to take care of yourself



Menounos pinpoints these simple steps for better health: going outside, moving throughout the day, eating before sunset, practicing naturopathy, wearing blue light glasses on her devices after dark, and removing stressors.



must be applied to the right person at the right time. If you're young and you want to succeed, you're going to have to work hard. I'm a believer in working hard. But get your sleep, eat right, wear blue light glasses. Good health is an accumulation of choices."

Menounos believes her health issues were the result of an accumulation of bad choices, extreme stress, and working in a toxic environment. "Now I'm accumulating so many more good choices, and I'm trying to turn that train back," she says. "Young leaders today can start out making good choices. I thought it was cool to be a workaholic. What an idiot I was. Now, I prioritize my well-being at all costs. I don't want another brain tumor to learn this lesson all over again." ■

—*Carla Kalogeridis*

Where to Start

My message for real leaders:

"You cannot lay your care at anyone's doorstep but your own. You must become an expert who knows what each doctor you deal with is good at and what they're not good at. It's hard work to be healthy these days. But you must do this in a way that sets an example for your employees, and then allow them to follow your example."

Menounos clarifies that she is more critical of the medical system than of doctors themselves. "Doctors are amazing, but most of them are amazing at a few things," she says. "As Tony Robbins puts it, 'Doctors can be sincere, but they can be sincerely wrong.'"

She underscores that the smart play is to take charge of your own health plan. "When you get an opinion, you've got to get another opinion. Get multiple opinions until you feel good. You need to know your surgeon has done this thousands of times — not one time, not 10 times."

Menounos admits that asking questions is hard. "People come into doctors' offices with their Google stuff, and doctors get really abrasive," she says. "So now you're fighting egos when all you're wanting to do is to be an advocate for yourself. You have to ask the right questions: How many of these surgeries have you performed? How long have you been doing this? What possible things could go wrong? Their experience is the No. 1 thing, but you must ask about it in a nice way."

"Nurses and doctors are overstretched," she continues. "They're exhausted. By the time they see you, they've already dealt with a lot of cranky people who have been mean to them. So, you must find a way to massage egos and communicate and get what you want, which is a good outcome."

THE EXPERIENCE

DAY 1: FUSION laid the foundation for cosmic connections, insights, and the exploration of impactful leadership through group forming.

DAY 2: EXPLOSION provided a dynamic lineup of events designed to foster collaboration, innovation, and growth, including interactive workshops, thought-provoking panel discussions, and networking sessions as well as the celebration for 2024 Real Leaders Top Impact Companies.

DAY 3: SHINE ended strong with a focus on personal branding and step-by-step tips on storytelling and elevating your reputation, role, and results. Attendees participated in professional photo shoots and video interviews use in promoting themselves and their brand.

OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD MOMENTS FROM UNITE



Real Leaders united all-star impact leaders from around the world for its inaugural UNITE event, themed a Cosmic Collaboration, Feb. 5-7 in San Diego.



STACY KECK



OPENING PITCH EVENT

Real Leaders President Kevin Edwards, far left, sat down with stars of impact investing — from left, Village Capital CEO Allie Burns, Black Ambition CEO Felicia Hatcher, and FUBU Founder and *Shark Tank* star Daymond John — to uncover their best practices on how to prime your business to raise capital and what they each look for before investing. “A great pitch answers these questions: Why me? Why now? Why this?” John said. “Investors want to know if you can go quick and deep with one product and get that one product successful before they invest more.” (Read our cover story with John on page 36.)

SPEAKER HIGHLIGHTS

Stedman Graham, chairman and CEO of S. Graham & Associates, gave an engaging seminar on Identity Leadership. Drawing from his experience outlined in his book *Identity Leadership: To Lead Others, You Must First Lead Yourself*, he empowered leaders to leverage their authentic identities, fostering impactful and purpose-driven leadership within their organizations. “Spend time on yourself every single day,” he said. “Success doesn’t come from the outside, from the world. It comes from the inside.” Love was also a prominent theme. “Love has to be at the center of everything you do,” he said. “How organized is your day around love?” (Read Graham’s inaugural column for *Real Leaders* on page 14.)



Pharell Williams, music icon and founder of Black Ambition, recorded a special video message for UNITE. “I’m grateful to Real Leaders for having Black Ambition at the UNITE conference as they help to bring significant awareness and action to help make the world a much better place,” he said. “I’d like to honor all of the Impact Award winners and speakers.”



Lisa Bodell, CEO of FutureThink, led the seminar Kill Complexity. The globally recognized expert innovating through simplification shared practical strategies to grow impact. “Unproductive meetings, endless emails, and reports for the sake of reporting aren’t the definition of meaningful work — they’re the work of complexity,” she said. “Complexity is killing companies’ ability to innovate and adapt, and simplicity is quickly becoming the competitive advantage of our time. By killing complexity, you’ll increase customer trust and staff retention and be able to innovate faster.”

STACY KECK

THE RED CARPET



Tamara Loehr, co-founder of Beusail Academy and Concertina Team, led the workshop *Personal Branding: Uncover Your Impact Narrative*. She shared how your personal brand needs to be a lead-gen strategy. “Most people don’t invest enough in their personal brand and sharing their story,” she said. “You can do it in three hours a month. ... Get over yourself, and step up. Build your brand, tell your story.”

Geoff Davis, CEO of Sorenson Impact, keynoted the Real Leaders Impact Awards Celebration with his inspiring and vulnerable personal story that gave attendees hope but also challenged them. “A healthy ecosystem gives more than it takes,” he said. He emphasized how small moves add up, and people need to take responsibility for their actions.

Shadi Bakour, founder of PATH Water, closed out UNITE with his talk, *The New Age of Business: The Power of Collaboration and Making a Larger Impact (And a Bigger Business) Together*. He shared his expertise on the intersection of technology and humanitarian efforts, detailing how he pioneered transformative solutions to leverage innovation for social impact. “Putting our ego aside has been a big learning lesson for me and something I wanted to share,” he said.



Two entrepreneurs pitched their businesses and received feedback from the panelists and audience. First-place winner Chloe Cheyenne, founder and CEO of COMMUNITYx, a mission-driven social media company, received \$15,000; and second-place winner Elikem Tettey-Tamaklo, co-founder and COO of Therapeutic Innovations, a medical interventions developer for emerging economies, received \$10,000.

Learn more and apply for UNITE 2025 at real-leaders.com/unite



1 From left, back row: Real Leaders Founder Mark Van Ness, Clearinghouse CDFI President/CEO Douglas Bystry, RSF Social Finance CEO Jasper van Brakel; front row: Social Impact Now Founder/CEO Y. Elaine Rasmussen, Village Capital CEO Allie Burns, Advantage Capital Managing Director/Chief Impact Officer Sandra Moore **2** Real Leaders President Kevin Edwards with Chris Sullens, CEO of CentralReach, a UNITE sponsor **3** Real Leaders CEO Julie Van Ness and Founder Mark Van Ness **4** Real Leaders magazine Managing Editor Kathryn Deen interviews Mackey McNeill, founder and CEO of MACKEY. (See the full list of winners at real-leaders.com/top-impact-companies.)

Outdoor Adventure Innovated

Tree-Mendous Aerial Adventures is helping people of all ages disconnect from their smartphones and connect with nature in playful ways. Tree-Mendous designs and builds custom aerial attractions including adventure parks, tree houses, zip lines, canopy tours and walks, and netted attractions in a variety of spaces, from forests to skyscrapers, from the East Coast to the West Coast of the U.S.

Gerhard Komenda combined his experience as a bio-dynamic forester and a social therapist to

found the company in 2011. He notes that outdoor play and experiential learning in nature help nurture independence, self-confidence, creativity, coordination, resilience, improved cognitive function, and physical health. “My goal is to motivate people to be outdoors and enable them to have non-virtual experiences, safely leaving their comfort zone and fostering personal growth,” he says. “A return to nature is an instinctive need in our modern world, creating an increasing demand for healthy outdoor activities. Tree-Mendous is perfectly poised to feed this new market.” ■

GERHARD KOMENDA, FOUNDER AND CEO



LISTEN UP
Listen to our full conversation with Tree-Mendous on the *Real Leaders Podcast*.





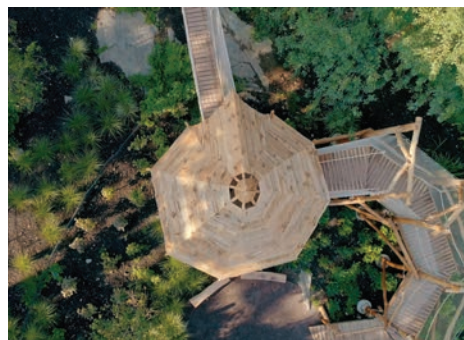
→ **One With Nature**

The certified B Corporation utilizes low-impact building methods and environmentally sustainable materials such as locally harvested and naturally rot-resistant lumber, avoiding toxic pressure-treated wood. Its patented friction lock-and-wrap system avoids damaging the trees by forgoing screws or drills during installation.



→ **On the Map**

The company's portfolio includes a canopy walk in the California Redwoods, indoor adventure trails in Oregon, an Americans with Disabilities Act-accessible nature trek in New York City, and a 150-foot-long suspension bridge in the Berkshire Mountains. Tree-Mendous plans to break ground on several large projects this year, including elevated netted bridge structures at the Detroit Zoo and the U.S. National Arboretum.



INSPIRATION FOR IMPACT

LIVING

Be More
Than
a Tourist

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Reimagining Advertising

Defying a profit-obsessed industry to tackle the nation’s most important health topics.

By *Kristin Carroll*

As a teen, my bedroom walls were lined with Nike ads: “Too often we are scared. Scared of what we might not be able to do. Scared of what people might think if we tried.” “Just do it,” they declared, offering inspiration and encouragement. The ads sparked my lifelong passion for advertising.

My journey took me not only deep into the inner workings of the marketing and advertising industry but also into the heartbeat of corporations themselves. My college honors thesis, *Nike: The Role of Advertising in Global Corporate Responsibility*, explored ads championing girls by proclaiming, “If you let me play ... I will have more self-confidence, [and] I will be less likely to get pregnant before I want to.” At the same time, headlines exposed the outsourcing of labor to sweatshops that hired children overseas.

Working at a top-tier New York City ad agency on a coveted car account, I saw how creative egos were satiated with big ad budgets. And working at a tech startup, I experienced the thrill of going public on the New York Stock Exchange only to be sold to private equity, which would “operationalize the business,” translating our vision into no more than a payment processing platform.

These were normal business practices. Yet, I couldn’t ignore the dichotomy between the vision and the forced reality of making short-term, exclusively profit-driven decisions. In each case, increasing value for shareholders — the very *raison d’être* of a company — came at the expense of employees, customers, and the communities in which we live.

I wondered if there was a different way.

A Positive Pivot

That brought me to Rescue Agency, a full-service marketing agency that focuses exclusively on creating health-behavior-change marketing campaigns. I joined over a decade ago when Rescue was a 30-person organization that had successfully launched a few state-focused tobacco control campaigns testing approaches to make smoking less desirable, despite decades of image-focused advertising. Today, we’re home to over 275 people with \$100 million in billings.

Soon after I joined, we began campaign implementation for the Food and Drug Administration to develop the very first national tobacco prevention campaigns for multicultural teens and LGBTQ+ young adults. These campaigns (in the years that preceded electronic cigarette company JUUL) did something no other health campaign had done before: We specifically communicated to the highest-risk and highest-use subcultures and created environments that made it more normal not to smoke. We were the first health campaign to spend more on digital, social, and experiential media than traditional advertising and the first to target smaller audiences. In late



2017, after two-and-a-half years of our campaigns (in conjunction with other efforts), smoking among high-risk teens was at its lowest levels ever recorded. We were using cutting-edge advertising tactics to change social norms and behaviors.

Expanding the Fight

Every day at Rescue, we harness the power of marketing and communications to help people live healthier lives. We've since applied our behavior change models and messaging frameworks to the most important health topics facing our nation today, from substance use prevention to mental health treatment promotion, from early childhood education to nutrition assistance, and much more.

Over time, we've been able to measure the impact of these campaigns. Our work with the nation's largest tobacco cessation service providers led to triple-digit increases in adult quitline enrollments. 81% of teens who saw our Behind the Haze vaping prevention campaign (currently running in 17 states) reported an intention to quit. We've urgently educated young people about the fentanyl crisis and accidental overdose risks and helped thousands gain access to life-saving naloxone.

Yet, our work not only allows us to address crises but promotes health too. We've increased nutrition assistance benefits enrollment among college students, immigrants, and families. And, we're in a unique position to see how mental health challenges contribute to nearly every other health issue. 96% of those aware of our very targeted mental health stigma reduction campaigns have taken action to find out more about mental health concerns.

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Creating a business that delivered more than results against the bottom line fueled my pursuit of our certified B Corp status within the first few months of taking the helm at Rescue in 2014. We transitioned to a public benefit corporation in 2017, cementing our mission of making healthy behaviors easier and more appealing into the legal charter of our company. And as of Jan. 1, we transitioned to being a 100% employee-owned company through an employee stock ownership plan. When we grow, we deliver improved health results in more communities at the county, state, and national levels. At the same time, Rescue's profits go back into a retirement plan to support employees' long-term financial health.

Challenging Industry Norms

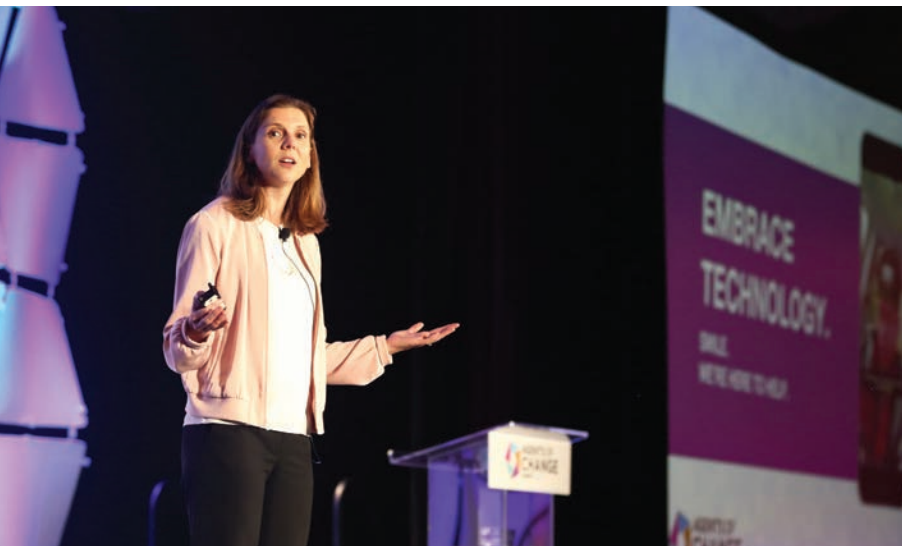
With these important steps, we've reimaged how an advertising agency can work. Instead of promoting products or angling to create purpose-driven brands, we are delivering improved measurable impact outcomes and are poised to contribute to the long-term financial success of our team. For me, building this type of company that channels business for good on so many levels has been an incredible learning journey. Almost every part of our corporate structure and economic engine works against the inertia of a traditional corporation — let alone typical marketing practices.

It's not easy to be impact-driven. Trade-offs are real, and the pull toward profitability over doing the right thing creates tension almost every day. Whether it's saying no to an attractive new contract that doesn't fit our mission or adding 12-week paid parental leave for all our new parents, Rescue is proving that doing the hard work is worth it.

Our work is deployed at the national level as well as across 27 U.S. states, sharing life-changing and life-saving messages where more than half of the U.S. population lives. We know our model can positively impact value-driven health care models as well.

I know young Kristin would be proud of our work, and I know our incredible team is always pushing to create those unskippable ads that will end up in someone's Instagram story or even on their bedroom wall propelling other young people to create new, better realities for themselves and the world in which they live, work, and play. ■

Kristin Carroll is CEO of Rescue Agency. She has over 25 years of experience as a business and marketing executive in diverse sectors.





Playing Detective with Anxiety

Here's how leaders can transform anxiety from a harmful impediment to a helpful ingredient.

By Morra Aarons-Mele

Anxiety is often baked into the heart of effective leadership. When you're out-front enacting a vision, setting the tone, managing people, and ensuring outcomes, much depends on you, and your self-image and effectiveness are reflected in the job you do. If you care about your job and are personally invested in it, you will likely experience some anxiety.

But instead of a harmful impediment to leadership, anxiety can be a helpful ingredient. The key is learning how to manage it so you can experience just enough of it that it can serve you,

while leaving behind the kind of debilitating anxiety that undermines leadership and inhibits growth.

Understanding how your anxiety plays out at work is valuable for any leader, even though identifying and facing anxieties can be difficult and even painful.

Have faith, though. Decades of research have shown that those who understand their emotions have higher job satisfaction, stronger job performance, and better relationships. They're more innovative and can synthesize diverse opinions and de-escalate conflict. Their self-awareness makes them knowledgeable about what gets to them, enabling them to prevent

anxious situations at work. They're able to respond to anxiety and stressors in a far more effective manner, leading to better outcomes for everyone. Why? They understand themselves and what triggers their anxieties. They have created strategies to manage anxiety instead of just coping and pushing through. They are no longer trapped by acting out automatic behaviors that punish themselves and their team.

It's really quite simple: Leaders who understand how anxiety motivates their behavior and who have developed the skills to manage their reactions are better leaders who deliver better outcomes for their organizations.

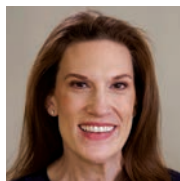
Play Detective

Getting to know your anxiety will require you to tune in and take an honest look at yourself and your behavior. Approach this exercise with as little judgment and as much compassion as you can. You may have an obvious form of anxiety, such as panic disorder or glossophobia (fear of public speaking). Or maybe you wake up every morning with a pit in your stomach and an undefined sense of dread about starting the day. You may have a fear of death or personal loss that impacts your business leadership. Like me, there may be a meeting or even a person whose very existence causes a flip in your stomach. Whatever your experience, start right there in the moment, and play detective with your own experience.

Rebecca Harley, a psychologist at Massachusetts General Hospital and assistant professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, suggests starting with turning inward and noticing what's happening in the present moment. Like a detective who is simply observing and gathering facts, tune in to whatever is happening in the moment and see what you discover. Playing detective is a fact-finding mission. Your job isn't to judge what's happening or do anything about it at all. It's to observe impartially.

Then, see if you can put some words to the most prominent experience. It may

“
LEADERS WHO UNDERSTAND HOW ANXIETY MOTIVATES THEIR BEHAVIOR AND WHO HAVE DEVELOPED THE SKILLS TO MANAGE THEIR REACTIONS ARE BETTER LEADERS WHO DELIVER BETTER OUTCOMES FOR THEIR ORGANIZATIONS.”



be a thought (This presentation is going to be a disaster); a physical sensation (dizziness, nausea, dry mouth, racing heart, excessive sweating); or a behavior you automatically turned to (mindless scrolling or snacking, for example).

Note how you react when anxiety is present. I call this reaction a “tell,” and it can take many forms — from tightness in the chest or a stomach flip, to impatience and irritability, to insomnia and indigestion, and all the way to a bout of depression (a loss of interest in life, for example). Your anxiety “tells” may not always be negative behaviors with harmful consequences. For instance, many of us connect more often with friends and family during stressful times, or we exercise.

A physical experience is often the first “tell” for many people. This is because our body will register anxiety even if our conscious mind isn't yet aware of it, or if we simply aren't ready to admit our anxiety to ourselves. One of the first signs that my anxiety is ramping up is that my shoulders are bunched up under my ears. Much of the time, I won't even notice that it's happening until I stop and check in. If I don't, my neck and shoulders will eventually tell me in the form of pain and tension.

If you don't know where to start, tune into your body for a workday, and monitor how you feel in your body and mind.

Understanding and managing anxiety isn't just a personal journey — it's a cornerstone of effective leadership. By embracing and deciphering the signals anxiety sends, leaders can not only navigate challenges but also foster better relationships, innovate, and steer their teams toward success. Take that first step of observation, listen to your body, and let self-awareness guide you toward transforming anxiety from a harmful impediment to a helpful ingredient. ■

Morra Aarons-Mele is an global speaker, entrepreneur, podcast host, former political consultant, mom of three, and author who manages Bipolar II, anxiety, and depression.



Environmental Expeditions

Participate in hands-on science while visiting some of the world's most astounding places.

Earthwatch is an international environmental nonprofit that invites travelers to be more than tourists. Founded in 1971, the organization connects volunteers with scientists worldwide to address some of the world's most pressing environmental challenges. Visitors conduct research and are empowered with knowledge to conserve the planet. Opportunities abound for teens and adults, and no prior experience is needed. Choose from more than 40 field research expeditions spanning six continents with varying accommodations and activity types and levels.

CUBA

Map Forest Biodiversity

Document birds and bats, survey forest trees, and connect with the rural and neighboring communities at Lomas de Banao Ecological Reserve. It's home to species only found in the Caribbean, including the vulnerable Cuban Parakeet and the near-threatened Cuban Amazon Parrot. While long-term political complexities stymied collaborative international research, international relations are improving, making this a critical moment to take stock of Cuba's wildlife to inform management and conservation plans as the island becomes increasingly developed.



INDONESIA

Monitor Coral Reefs

Snorkel or scuba dive in a marine-protected area over natural and artificial reefs on the island of Bali. It lies within the coral triangle, a global center of marine biodiversity. Over the last several decades, some of Bali's reef ecosystems have been heavily degraded by destructive fishing practices, warming ocean temperatures, pollution, and other human activities. You'll conduct reef surveys, deploy video units, and analyze project data, helping determine how closely fish communities, carbon cycling, and predator populations on artificial reefs match those on natural reefs.



SOUTH AFRICA

Protect Penguins

Help scientists monitor penguin nests, assess chick body conditions, assist injured birds, and reduce the impact of various threats to the fragile environment of Robben Island. This hotspot for seabird biodiversity includes endangered cape cormorants, bank cormorants, and 2,900 African penguins. About 90% of the island's penguin population disappeared in the past century in part due to oil spills, as Robben Island is in the middle of major shipping lanes.

PERU

Explore by Riverboat

Board a riverboat in the heart of Peru's flooded Amazon region and disembark to hike the rainforest. Log sightings of pink dolphins, caimans, fish, wading birds, macaws, and fishing bats, and even record vocalizations. The wildlife in northeastern Peru's Amazonian forests is declining due to recent intense climate fluctuations that have caused floods and droughts. You'll gather information about the health of the ecosystem and the sustainability of traditional hunting and fishing to help researchers develop conservation strategies to protect wildlife and the needs of indigenous people.



DOCUMENTARY

Watch and Learn

Tune in to tune up your knowledge of key impact issues.



Jane Goodall – Reasons for Hope (2023)

Drawing on decades of work by world-renowned ethnologist and environmentalist Jane Goodall, this documentary takes an uplifting journey around the globe. Inspiring stories of hope are highlighted, including the northern bald ibis' migration over the Alps, the reintroduction of the American bison by the Blackfeet Nation, the world-renowned Sudbury greening story, and youth-led initiatives involved in Goodall's Roots & Shoots program. Plus, see historical footage of Goodall's beginnings as a chimpanzee researcher.

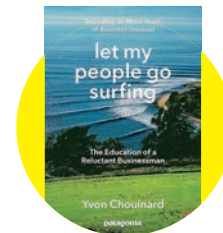
COMIC RELIEF



BOOKS

Influential Reads

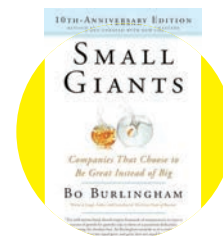
CEOs from 2024 Real Leaders Top Impact Companies share what book shaped them most.



Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman (2006)

Yvon Chouinard – climber, businessman, environmentalist, and founder of Patagonia – shares the persistence and courage that have gone into being head of one of the most respected and environmentally responsible companies on earth.

Recommended by Michael Stausholm, CEO and founder, SproutWorld, No. 111



Small Giants: Companies That Choose to Be Great Instead of Big (2016)

Veteran journalist Bo Burlingham takes readers inside 14 companies that rejected the pressure of endless growth to focus on more satisfying business goals. Burlingham shows how the leaders of these small giants recognized their full range of choices and how we can all benefit by questioning the usual definitions of business success.

Recommended by Adam Ryznar, CEO, Intex Solutions, No. 184



PODCAST

Must-Listen Episodes

The *Real Leaders Podcast* is your No. 1 source for impact leaders who harness capitalism to sustain planet, people, and profit.



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Ep. 431

Paola Telfer, Founder and CEO, Sens.ai

"The impetus for Sens.ai was really when I had a dire need to train my mind and come out of a fight-or-flight mode that I was stuck in due to a motor vehicle accident, and I needed to reconnect with my body and tell it that it was safe when the accident was over."



Ep. 405

Jacob Arlein, CEO, Stok

"You want to ensure that you're designing a space to maximize the happiness of the employees who are going to occupy it. The real estate industry has oftentimes not thought about that. But speaking to your users and designing a space to align with them and to the organization is critical."



Ep. 427

Lisa Hennessy, Founder and Creative Director, Fernweh

"You're selling to someone, but is there another way to do this interaction? Can we maybe do this in a mindful way, in a way that's enriching someone's life instead of just saying, 'Hey buy this or you're not good enough?'"



Ep. 433

Sabrina Williams, Founder and CEO, SEED – Sustainable Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Development

"We go into the communities, hear what people are saying, pay attention, think beyond ourselves – and that has to be forefront. It's taking cues from the people around you to achieve a goal that everybody wants – or at least everyone benefits from. I think being quiet and listening is key."



Ep. 411

Brendan P. Keegan, Chairman, CEO, and President, Merchants Fleet

"I try to focus in the here and now for half the time and in the future for half the time, and it's actually worked. It's hard though. It takes discipline. I physically block time on my calendar. It's something that has served me better in the second half of my career."



Ep. 415

Eunice Lin Nichols, Co-CEO, CoGenerate

"When you bring and help all generations to see each other as necessary in each other's lives, you can create much stronger collective impact. If you're a changemaker trying to bring older and younger together to make great things happen, we have fellowship programs and other work that will be of interest."



Olympic Wins for People and Planet

Paris 2024 set ambitious goals for its most united, sustainable Games yet.

The Paris 2024 organizing committee has set out to establish a new model for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, pledging to deliver an ambitious, universal event that is more responsible, sustainable, united, and inclusive.

“We are collectively building a new model for the Games to ensure they control their impact on their surroundings as well as the entire planet, bring people together and are inclusive, frugal and sustainable,” says Tony Estanguet, president of the Paris 2024 Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

From the bidding phase, the committee put legacy and sustainability at the center. Signing a social charter with social partners, aligning with the Paris Agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and organizing the Olympic and Paralympic Week are a few examples of steps it took starting in 2017, seven years out.

“Our ambition is clear — to demonstrate that environmental and social excellence is not only

PARIS 2024 ENDEAVORS TO IDENTIFY, TRIAL, AND DEVELOP INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS WORKING WITH EVERYONE INVOLVED TO DELIVER RESPONSIBLE GAMES.

necessary, but also a source of strength,” says Marie Barsacq, impact and legacy director of the organizing committee for the Games.

Paris 2024 is the first Games in history to devote such attention to climate and environmental considerations so early on. Using 95% existing or temporary venues minimizes its environmental impact. Reducing the number of new build projects means significantly restricts the carbon footprint and gives center stage to French architecture by transforming Paris’ landmarks into sporting arenas.

“We decided to seize the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games as an opportunity to combat and adapt to climate change and address the urgent need to protect and regenerate biodiversity,” says Georgina Grenon, environmental excellence director of the organizing committee. “This sincere, firm commitment has guided us and united everyone involved in the Games and the sporting movement since the bid phase.”



Where emissions cannot be avoided, Paris 2024 is implementing a voluntary compensation plan across a wide scope that includes the international impact of spectator travel. The projects chosen meet stringent international certification requirements. Beginning in 2021, these efforts involve carbon capture projects to restore and protect forests and oceans, as well as avoidance projects that, for example, install more environmentally friendly wood burners in homes that still rely on rudimentary cooking equipment. The committee pledges to offset even more emissions than the Games generate by supporting additional projects in France, boosting biodiversity and improving quality of life.

To halve the emissions arising in relation to the Games, Paris 2024 will leverage frugality, efficiency and innovation. Paris 2024 endeavors to identify, trial, and develop innovative solutions working with everyone involved to deliver responsible Games. Such initiatives include using 100% renewable energy during the Games, the circular economy, sustainable food sourcing, responsible digital technology, clean mobility solutions for the Olympic fleet, public transport and environmentally friendly means of transport for spectators, biodiversity protection, and water management.

The organizing committee goes on to say, “Sport brings together 3.5 million volunteers in France, evokes a range of unique emotions with 2.5 million

events taking place every year, and showcases its positive impact on society day in, day out across the 180,000 sports clubs nationwide that promote education, integration, gender equality, and cohesion. However, the world of sport — like all other spheres of human activity and parts of society — needs to undergo an environmental transformation.

“Moreover, we firmly believe that sport can be harnessed to build a more sustainable society in which people demonstrate greater solidarity and are more mindful of nature and biodiversity. Sport enables us to take in the beauty of our surroundings and understand why we need to protect the environment; it offers an excellent pollution-free mode of transport; it uses the food we eat as a source of fuel; it makes us realize the importance of getting fresh air; and it is a form of entertainment that enables people to create memories around a common experience rather than limitless consumption.

“By ensuring we set our own benchmark, accelerating the roll-out of innovative solutions for spectacular and sustainable events, as well as working with everybody in the Paris 2024 family so that our methods and achievements leave a tangible and intangible legacy. This plan is the result of the work undertaken by everyone involved in Paris 2024 since the bid phase and highlights the distance we still have to travel together.” ■

Left: Eiffel tower stadium **Center:** South Paris Arena **Right:** The Athletes’ Village is energy efficient, carbon neutral and protective of biodiversity. Once the Games are over, the athletes’ accommodation will be transformed into a dynamic mixed-use neighborhood open to all. The Village will then be home to families and students (with 25–40% social housing, depending on the town), offering economic activity as well as new premises for shops and services on the ground floor of the buildings.

Sunny Shopping

We have plenty of bright ideas for your shopping cart this summer. All of these products are made by 2024 Real Leaders Top Impact Companies, so you can rest assured — preferably poolside — knowing that your purchases are making a splash for good.

Beat the Heat

Righteous Gelato

Righteous Gelato makes flavorful small-batch gelato and sorbet without artificial ingredients. The cherry on top? It's giving back along the way by donating 1% of its revenue to charity, using sustainable packaging, and diverting 95% of its waste away from landfills. Cool off with a refreshing scoop of Raspberry Lime or Blueberry Limeade sorbet, pictured. righteousgelato.com



Get One, Give One

Soap with Hope

Smell sweet and feel even sweeter about the mission you're supporting with Soapbox's naturally derived bath and body products. For every item sold, the company donates a bar of soap to someone in need. Plus, products are made with 100% recyclable packaging. Try the coconut oil shampoo and conditioner, pictured, after a day in the sun. soapboxsoaps.com



Getaway for Good

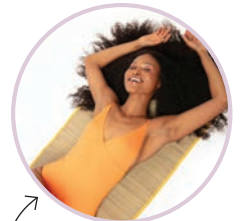
Better Leather Bags

Parker Clay sells quality handmade sustainable leather bags, wallets, and other accessories. Premium, full-grade Ethiopian leather is ethically sourced from food animals and is crafted with the environment in mind. The company employees at-risk Ethiopian women, paying living wages and providing benefits. Take the San Ysidro Weekender, pictured, on your next trip. parkerclay.com



Sustainable Sipping
Finer Wine

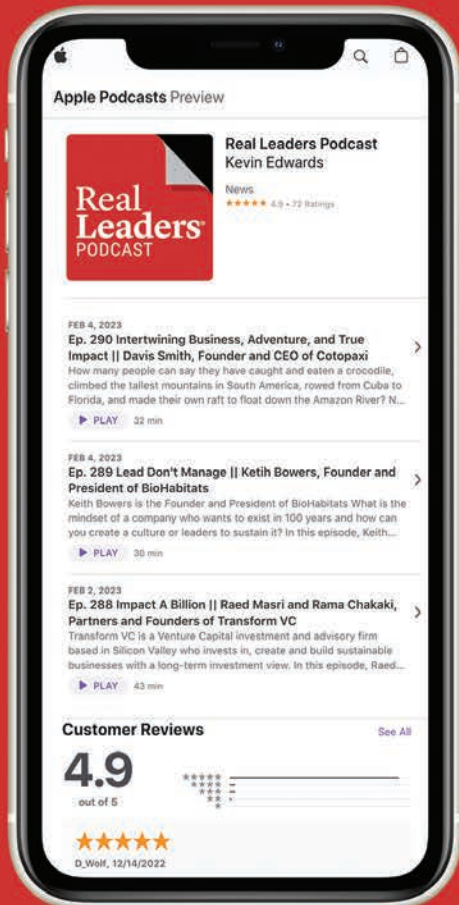
In the Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley, California, Trefethen Family Vineyards is among the first wineries to use carbon capture technology as well as to fully offset its electricity usage with on-site solar power, earning the 2022 California Green Medal Environmental Award. Pour a glass of S.I.N. Summer in Napa Rosé, pictured, and kick back with a good book. trefethen.com



Poolside for the Planet
Swimmingly Good Suits

Period underwear company Pantys offers stylish swimsuits for comfortable, sustainable, leak-proof protection in the water. Bonus: Pantys' products minimize environmental impact, so they're carbon-neutral and made with biodegradable fabrics that decompose in three years. Take the Triangle One-Piece, pictured, for a swim. pantys.com

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IMAGINE

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→ About 20 people die every day in the U.S. waiting for an organ transplant, and more than 100,000 Americans are currently on the waitlist. But what if scientists could end this crisis by manufacturing an unlimited supply of organs on demand? Recent breakthrough innovations by biotechnology companies provide hope, including eGenesis growing organoids from stem cells to imitate certain organs and United Therapeutics 3D-printing human lung scaffolds. These technologies could become widespread realities in 10 to 15 years, perhaps ending the desperation for organ donation and prolonging thousands of lives. ■



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ENSURING
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DECREASING
GHG Emissions



WE ARE **POWERING POSITIVE CHANGE**

In 2022, Priority Power officially launched Priority Impact Foundation, a registered 501(c)(3) organization focused on creating positive value for others and making an impact in our communities.



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Our World*



*Supporting
Our Veterans*



*Educating
Our Future*



Empowering a sustainable future requires a collective commitment to innovation, integrity, and positive impact. At Priority Power, we're illuminating the path to a cleaner, brighter tomorrow for generations to come.

BRANDON SCHWERTNER
CEO, Priority Power

