

1

Leadership in the Age of Disruption

GOOD LEADERSHIP HAS NEVER BEEN more important, but for too long we have imagined leaders as visionaries and risk takers—those out front, with their backs turned. We think about leadership as being “ahead of the game,” but we can’t effectively lead others without connection and awareness. When we turn our backs to the audience, employees, or fans behind us, we lose the opportunity to truly improve not only ourselves but our products, content, and companies. For the past 15 years, we’ve written about business in the age of disruption, sharing stories and best practices, what to do and what not to do, in marketing, sales, and branding. Our answer has always been relationships, that if you believe business is built on relationships, you need to make building them your business. The lightning speed of technological innovation, the proliferation and evolution of social media, and a global pandemic have impacted everything, every person, every company, every industry. Everything has changed and nothing is different—people still buy from those they like, know, and trust. In business, relationships matter more than ever. Adding the prefix UN to leadership means putting relationships at the heart of your leadership. You can’t effectively

lead others without connection; in fact, without relationships, you aren't leading at all.

None of you need a fancy study to know that the majority of people are not thriving and engaged at work (See fancy study: Gallup 2023). Employee stress is at a record high. Even when we are physically present or virtually connected, disengagement (or quiet quitting as the kids old folks say) is leaving our teams unmotivated. One in 10 workers consider their workplace toxic, and even companies with relatively healthy cultures can have pockets of toxicity within teams. The pandemic revealed disparities, and today many managers and executives have the flexibility to continue work remotely, as they call employees back to the office. Employees are fighting back, giving less, and looking for work someplace else. At the same time, there has been an increase in available jobs, meaning employers have to work harder to retain talented employees. With disruption becoming the norm, leaders need to be agile, able to move, connect, and motivate in an increasingly fluid work environment.

Adding the prefix UN to marketing, sales, and branding was also about thinking beyond silos, and leadership is no different. Regardless of title or position, leadership can happen from anywhere. UnLeaders recognize that no company's success is a one-person job. It is about motivation, both the kind that keeps us on our paths and the kind we give to others, our teams, companies, and communities. Leadership is a verb, not a title; it is embodied in our decisions and our relationships. It is a balance between confidently communicating your vision and remaining open to transformation. It's sturdy and nimble, dependable, and flexible. It's navigating uncertainty guided by values, knowing when to hang on and when to let go. Leadership requires connection and awareness because without them, you have no idea what it's like to work for you.