



Principles & Leadership in Business

'PASSION INTO PURPOSE' ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

"Some dream and some do". Most of us have passions in our personal and professional lives – ideas about the way the world should be or how businesses should behave. But for a select few, that passion transforms into action – they turn their Passion into their professional Purpose, and it drives their focus, their motivation and their inspiration.

In June, The New P&L® 'Passion into Purpose' Virtual Roundtable Discussion brought together seven inspirational entrepreneurs to discuss their own journeys going from 'Passion' into 'Purpose'; including the challenges and how these were overcome, the highs and lows, successes and learnings - offering encouragement and insights for aspiring entrepreneurs or those already in business.



"Many businesses now have a millennial workforce who demand they work for a brand that has purpose. So those businesses need to give employees the space to see beyond just the confines of business, and ask how the business they work for can also serve their communities."

Almira Lardizabal Hussain
Co-Founder, Impactful

Brand on purpose

Most of us have things we care about deeply about but relatively few of us turn them into a business. Maybe we can't find the time. Or regard taking the plunge as too risky. Or think starting a business

is too complicated. Or we just can't see how to commercialise our passion.

Things may be about to change. The global pandemic has unleashed a form of "creative destruction" that is rewriting the commercial rules. New business models are appearing, while others previously considered unviable are now live options. In addition the jobs lost in the economic slowdown will surely create an entrepreneurial "class of 2020" who decide the time is now right to give it a go.



"The optimism and hope we see from the young people we work with is remarkable. They are helping to guide leaders in their social purpose."

Veronica Heaven MD
The Heaven Company,
Sustainability & CSR consultancy

Against this background The New P&L invited seven start-up founders to a virtual round table on the theme "Passion into Purpose". The result was a revealing insight into a variety of entrepreneurial journeys — the why and how of the process for each participant, and what they've learned that others can benefit from. A wide range of purposes were represented, from increasing people's understanding of artificial intelligence (AI), through providing good-quality recycled clothing to the homeless in Sydney, to applying the "haka" associated with All Blacks rugby to team-building.

Business — a powerful vehicle for improvement

All seven share the belief that business provides a powerful vehicle for putting personal passions to work in the service of improving the wider society. This was perfectly expressed by Almira Lardizabal Hussain, whose Impactful company



"If you've got purpose, you've got the will. If you are going on the entrepreneurial journey, you're going to get knocked the whole way, but if you have a single devoted purpose you will get through."

Chris Vagg

Co-founder, Pass It On Clothing & Co

(www.impactful.world) works with businesses to unlock their ability to contribute to lasting social change. She explained why she switched out of the charity sector and into the private sector: "As a charity we had to compete for grant support with many other organisations, all doing good work. For me, that wasn't a sustainable model for expressing my passion. The commercial private sector, on the other hand, has power and can create change through businesses, which have access to resources and the ability to innovate. It's a way to meld passion and social justice within the corporate commercial world."



"The profit model in business has not been designed to support community at a sustainable level. This needs to change."

Karl Burrows

CEO, Hakaworks

Veronica Heaven's Brief Cases scheme (www.theheavencompany.com/brief-cases1) bridges education and industry, and she recalled the "light bulb moment" when, as a young executive, she came across a report. "The title was something like 'The role of business in a changing world', and suddenly I grasped that there's more to business than increasing sales. It has a role in society."

One small step...

There's no predicting what will trigger the plunge. When Chris Vagg came home from work to find that his stylist partner Olga had ruthlessly culled his clothing collection — "My wardrobe was kaput!", he recalled — he didn't know that within months the couple would be running Pass It On and Co, recycling clothing directly to homeless in Sydney.

For Karl Burrows, pursuing his passion was a more gradual process. Since childhood he had nurtured the idea of somehow using his Maori heritage to, as Haka Works' website (www.hakaworks.com) puts it, 'connect teams to company values' but his eventual decision to swap international law for motivational speaking was one of those 'it's now or never' moments. "I realised that if I stayed on my present trajectory, I'd be doing the same thing forever. The questions I asked myself were, 'What's important in my life? What do I really want to achieve?' And I found the moment had arrived when I had the courage and confidence to go out and do it."

Interestingly, none of the participants credited particular role models with inspiring them. Ally Owen put this down to growing up in the 1960s and 1970s: "I was a swotty little ginger kid, into learning, and 'Anne of Green Gables' was hardly an entrepreneurial handbook." Which explains why mentoring is a big part of the process at her Brixton Finishing School (www.brixtonfinishingschool.org), provided by "role models that mirror people's lived experiences." It's a similar situation at Brief Cases, said Veronica Heaven: "Bringing young people and business together gives both a chance to have conversations they wouldn't have otherwise."

The role model process also works both ways in a slightly unexpected manner for Chris Vagg, founder of Sydney, Australia-based not-for-profit, Pass It On Clothing (www.facebook.com/passitonclothing) "We get high net-worth individuals to meet our homeless friends, providing role models. And these are people who benchmark themselves against other rich people by how many millions they have. It's absolutely nuts — because for some of them the benchmarking they are doing against other millionaires has become a mental health issue! So, we've found that



"Anyone can become a great leader, it's not something magical you are born with. It's created within yourself over time. It's important to teach young people that they all have the possibility to lead real change."

Ally Owen

Founder & CEO, Brixton Finishing School

our homeless friends act as role models for these millionaires, by putting their concerns in perspective.”

Staying the course

In any walk of life, overnight successes are rare and the early days of a start-up can be tough. When the company is just you there are occasional feelings of self-doubt to overcome, although Tania Duarte of We and AI (www.weandai.org) wryly recalled how she experienced “more self-doubt working for large organisations. There’s always someone who’ll tell you what can’t be done, not what can.” Her preferred remedy for self-doubt is a ‘prevention is better than cure’ approach: “I do my research and due diligence right at the start. I’ve always been heavy on the research front — I feel I need to validate before setting out on a journey. This was why I self-funded my MBA — so I could handle whatever they threw at me!”



“Every big idea started with a small idea, if somebody didn’t have the confidence to go out there and make a change, make a start; many of the big innovations we see wouldn’t have happened at all.”

Arif Hussein
Co-Founder, Klyk

Arif Hussein’s and his partners started Klyk (www.helloklyk.com) just as the UK lockdown began, but it hasn’t been a lonely journey so far. “Once you start talking about an idea you find there are likeminded people out there moving in the same direction. An entrepreneurial journey isn’t a solo one.” Almira Lardizabal Hussain agreed, seeing the same phenomenon in movements such as Black Lives Matter and Climate Emergency: “These are the result of a lot of local, grassroots groups coming together to create global movements.”

Making mistakes comes with the territory, all agreed, and is an essential component of leadership. “My leadership journey is made up of hundreds of mistakes,” said Ally Owen, “although I prefer to call them ‘learning opportunities.’” Chris Vagg agreed, adding that, “so long as you have a clear, strong purpose, then you’ll have the will — the capacity to get up every time you’re knocked down.” For Tania Duarte, leadership “isn’t necessarily about being at the front



“As an entrepreneur, start by building an eco-system around your business. You can’t do it alone and so much energy comes from like-minded people and there is so much to learn from them.”

Tania Duarte
Co-Founder, We and AI

all the time. Sometimes it’s about knowing when to get out of the way. You shouldn’t try to be the smartest person in the room, either, because there are usually people who are smarter than you in some areas.”

Several participants argued forcefully that leaders shouldn’t be afraid to ask for help. “It’s not a weakness,” said Arif Hussein, “because you’ll only get where you’re going through collaboration.” Karl Burrows wished he’d asked for help more often in the past: “You think you’re the only one on the journey, fighting all your own demons, but that won’t get you ahead. Let your ego go and reach out to other to get their buy-in to your vision.”

Taking the workers with you

You can start a business with passion and purpose, but to be truly successful you have to get the people who work for you to buy into the vision and values. Arif Hussein establishes at interview whether important sustainability is to prospective employees. “Of course, you can instil principles in someone, but ideally you want it there from the start, so that they’ll show belief when they’re talking to people. We don’t want to impose beliefs on them. It’s also important to share information with employees, so that they understand the problems we’re working on — not just the size of it, but what was as a business can do to help businesses fix it.”

Karl Burrows learned the hard way that employee buy-in isn’t automatic. “I just assumed everybody else would subscribe to my values. I was working with fellow Maoris and expected them to behave in a certain way. It also didn’t help that I wanted to be everybody’s friend! But I soon realised that the purpose of the business is the most important thing, and that people need to accept that it coincides with their own personal purpose if they’re to come on the journey with you.”

Bringing the workforce along with you is a challenge for well-established, bigger businesses too, said Almira Lardizabal Hussain. “A lot of business leaders are coming to us because they have a millennial workforce that only wants to work for companies that have a purpose. Recruitment is expensive, and they want to retain staff. We encourage them to listen to the workforce, giving them space to express what they see for the business over the next 20 years. The focus is on the company’s role beyond business, on what it can do for the community.”

Through her work to increase public awareness of AI Tania Duarte has an interesting take on the attitude of this same millennial workforce to technology. This is a generation that has grown up at a time when technology has penetrated almost every aspect of life, yet despite this she doesn’t see that it has any greater knowledge of the impact of technology than older generations. “Most young people’s interactions with technology come from using it, not learning about it at a societal level. A lot of AI is invisible — you don’t know it’s been used to make a decision, so you can’t question it. I’m surprised how shocked — and excited too — they are when we

show them how AI dominates their lives. We have a responsibility to give them information, not leave them to work it out for themselves.

Future in good hands

Future success depends on future generations carrying on the good work, and all seven are very optimistic about what’s ahead. Ally Owen expressed “real pride in the generation coming through. Take the narrative around Black Lives Matter as an example — they’re a powerful force, talented, articulate, and unwilling to put up with the crap we did. They care about communities. They make decisions about where’s a good place to work, what’s a good brand, what reflects their personal values. They’re much more intelligent about ‘the bigger system’ than I was growing up.” Veronica Heaven echoed the sentiment: “What we, the older generation, have done has got us into a sticky situation, and we need a new way of thinking. In the current time of renewal and change, it’s an opportunity for us to think about how we create space for people find new ways to listen and take on some of the big issues in society.”

The New P&L® - Principles & Leadership in business Podcast Series and Institute

We believe business needs a ‘New P&L’: one that is focused as much on ‘Principles and Leadership’ as it is on ‘Profit and Loss’, because we know that if a business’s Principles are right and aligned with its purpose, and its Leadership has clarity of vision and is strong, focused and empathetic, then it will be in profit and not in loss in so many ways.

Our aim is to challenge leaders, entrepreneurs and industry influencers to bring their most intelligent, inspiring and insightful observations and opinions to the conversations on principles & leadership in business.

We do our research thoroughly, ask the deeper questions and aim to give our audiences real tangible insights and examples they can use to help further focus their principles, enhance their leadership and work towards building more ethical, productive, collaborative and ultimately, successful and principled businesses – those that encourage great, inspirational leaders and high performing, motivated teams.

For more information go to www.principlesandleadership.com



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'PASSION INTO PURPOSE'

VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION



Karl Burrows
CEO,
Hakaworks



Ally Owen
Founder & CEO,
Brixton
Finishing School



Chris Vagg
Co-founder,
Pass It On
Clothing & Co



Veronica Heaven MD
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