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like this."—Dan Bigger*

LEADING
BEYOND A
CRISIS

*A Conversation
About What's Next*

BEN BAKER & CLAIRE CHANDLER

LEADING BEYOND A CRISIS

A Conversation About What's Next

Ben Baker
&
Claire Chandler

Leading Beyond A Crisis
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Table of Contents

Foreword	A Leader’s Reflections On <i>Leading Beyond A Crisis</i>	v
Introduction	Welcome To The New World	vii
Episode 1	Time To Get “Stupid Simple”	1
Episode 2	Leaders Being Vulnerable	9
Episode 3	Clarifying Your Mission	19
Episode 4	Thinking Bigger	29
Episode 5	Building For The Long Term	59
Episode 6	Building Teams Around The Intangibles.....	71
Episode 7	The Importance Of Your Brand Story.....	83
Episode 8	Are You Truly Disruptive?.....	95
Episode 9	The Customer Experience.....	107
Episode 10	The Sprint VS. The Marathon Mentally.....	137
Episode 11	Communication VS. Connection	149
Episode 12	Reverting VS. Reinventing.....	161
What’s Next?		175
About The Authors		176

Foreword

A LEADER'S REFLECTIONS ON *LEADING BEYOND A CRISIS*

What I love about *Leading Beyond A Crisis* is that it's a conversation between Ben and Claire. Their backgrounds, exchange of ideas and real-world experiences really help to deliver the message, and the examples they use help readers visualize what leadership is meant to be.

I have never seen or been a part of leadership that does any of the things that this book promotes. Frankly, I don't know if I am ever going to see this in my working life. I'd love to be part of an organization that uses these principles as its backbone. In my almost 30-year work history, I have only dealt with "leaders" who are on a power trip and have huge egos that need to be stroked by their employees. They all want "yes men" and do not want to see or look outside of that box—as if they are the only ones who can generate, develop or implement new ideas. I have never been empowered to make decisions—and I ran two companies for 10-plus years. After reading this, I now realize that they do not have the ability to lead. They use their position to have their employees serve them, not the other way around. They want to be in control, and in most cases, they do not trust their employees, which begs the question: Why did they hire them in the first place? I think it's sad, and I think it needs to change.

I really believe that leaders should be leading in the way that Ben and Claire describe. Getting the most out of your

employees means getting them involved. They must have a say, or there will never be any buy-in at any level.

I'd love to be able to lead like this. I do what I can to implement these principles into my daily work and communication habits. I don't know what difference I will ultimately make, but I still try to lead this way. I'm committed to continue to learn, and to inspire others. I'll do my best.

—Dan Bigger, Director Sales & Marketing

Introduction

WELCOME TO THE NEW WORLD

Welcome to *Leading Beyond A Crisis: A Conversation About What's Next*.

This book is an adaptation of a series of video conversations that took place in the spring of 2020. These conversations were designed to help leaders look beyond the serious, near-term challenges they were facing because of the global pandemic, and create business environments that thrive over the long term; to lead people beyond the anxiety and stress; and to bring them through the tunnel toward the light, so they can ask, “What’s next?”

Part of what we wanted to accomplish was to get people to pick their heads up and start looking toward the horizon once again. Unfortunately, it is so easy for everyone to put their heads down in the muck and worry so much about the current state that they forget to build for the future. This was the reason we wanted to have that conversation: to bring people out of the muck and toward the light.

“We started these conversations to help leaders pull themselves and their people through this time of unprecedented crisis, and to remind them that there is a future to build.”

We are facing a new reality. The way we did business in the past is changing. How we communicate with our people, interact with our vendors, and engage with our clients will all change—probably for the better. We are going to be more

creative and more innovative and find different ways to add value. That is what this conversation is all about.

What's your story? What are the conversations you need to be having, with whom, how and why? At the end of each chapter, we offer questions to help you guide those conversations.

Be the leader you are meant to be.

Start the conversation here.

—Ben Baker [BB] and Claire Chandler [CC]

EPISODE 2

LEADERS BEING VULNERABLE

BB: We are absolutely in a new normal, and we need to talk about it. We need to know how we are going to survive and how we're going to thrive as leaders, as businesses, as people going forward. Because this is not going to last forever. This is not the first crisis the world has been in. We've been in many crises before; we're going to be in lots of crises moving forward. It's the companies that understand how to move forward through this, and understand how to build the best practices to be able to put themselves in the position to succeed, that are going to succeed. In our last episode, Claire, you ended off talking about vulnerability, and I think that's a great place to start.

CC: We talked about how important it is for business leaders to make the right turn at that fork in the road, between showing hubris and showing vulnerability. Leaders have so much pressure from the outside, and so much pressure from the voices in their own head, that they have to have all the answers, that they have to have all the solutions, whether it is a crisis or whether it's smooth sailing. But in a global pandemic like we are going through right now, NO ONE has all the answers, because none of us has ever been through something exactly like this. That is the

reality. We are all learning as we go, and we are adapting as we go—at least the businesses and the leaders who are truly open to learning as they go. Learning to me is a key component as well. It’s the companies, the businesses, but specifically the leaders who both learn and lean through this, who will come through the other side. I’ll go a little bit deeper on that. Learning through this crisis how to do the job more efficiently—we talked last time about doing the necessary things to keep the lights on, the bills paid, your employees paid, etc.—but also learning as you go: What does this mean for the future of our company—not for the “now,” but for the FUTURE of our company? What have we gone without since shifting to remote work, limiting travel and downsizing group interactions? Were any of those shifts truly sacrifices? And learning from that and saying, “When we get through this crisis”—and let me end the suspense for you: we will get through this crisis—but at the end of it, is any truly forward-thinking business going to revert to business as usual? If you are, I think that’s a huge mistake. But it’s completely unrealistic to think any business is NOT going to learn from this and just go back to business as usual. First of all, it’s not going to be so easy to flip that switch backwards.

BB: It’s that genie back in the bottle—it just doesn’t go in that easily.

CC: Absolutely! She’s got a big, full skirt that does not go back in the bottle the way it popped out. So there’s that learning component. And the LEANING component comes back to this vulnerability that we spoke of. Vulnerability is not the same as weakness. I think leaders hear that word and

they say, “If I show vulnerability, my people will think I’m weak.” The reality is the complete opposite. If you show vulnerability, you show that you are human. You invite compassion. You foster the collaboration you have so desperately been demanding for decades. You draw from that equity that you have been building up as a leader in your community—your internal community being your workplace culture, and your external community being the clients and the customers that you serve.

“If you show vulnerability, you show that you are human. You invite compassion. You foster the collaboration you have so desperately been demanding for decades. You draw from that equity that you have been building up as a leader.”

BB: It comes down to establishing trust and building trust. Those are two different things. This is the problem with most leaders. Being a leader can be extremely lonely, because you feel like, “Who can I talk to? Who can I confide in? Who’s going to understand what I’m going through?” Most business owners find it very difficult to have conversations with your spouse about a lot of different things—unless you work together—because there isn’t the context. Or employees, because there are certain conversations you just can’t have. But it’s really important for those conversations to build a cadre of like-minded people. I was on a call the other day. The conversation was about building CEO forums, leader forums, manager forums, where people can talk amongst themselves about the issues that they’re having and say, “I’m scared. I don’t know which way to go. I just laid off 500 people. Where do we go from here?” I guarantee

you, there's going to be someone within that group of people who either has gone through a similar situation or has gone through something or knows somebody who's gone through a situation and knows a way out of the hole. There's a joke about two people at the bottom of a deep dark hole, with no idea how to get out. All of a sudden, somebody up top starts pouring water into the hole. "Listen, what are you doing?" He says, "I'm getting you out." "What? You're pouring water!" And he pours more and more water down the hole, and the water rises and lifts them to the top of the hole. That's a great lesson. There are people who have a different viewpoint, different experiences, different thought processes than you do. And the more we can lean on each other—and it doesn't just have to be other leaders; it's also leaning on the people within your company. There are people within your company—and I don't care who they are—who have brilliant ideas about how to move forward. They see things that you don't see. They're talking to customers that you're not talking to. They're talking to vendors that you're not talking to. They're looking at processes or they're looking at data that you're not looking at. And the more you can ask, "Who's got some ideas? Let's throw some things against the wall. No idea is a dumb idea." Let's talk to each other and come up with different ideas and be open to that. Let's say, "As a leader, I don't have to have every single answer to every single problem. I'm going to lean on the people I know, like and trust to help me work through this." Because we're so much stronger together. We have a far better view of what the current scenario is and where the future lies. That's where we need to be looking.

“There are people within your company who have brilliant ideas about how to move forward.”

CC: It’s amazing what happens when a leader, a true leader, acknowledges that he or she does not have all the answers. What better excuse than a global crisis—one that is unprecedented in any time in history—to admit that you don’t have all the answers? There’s not one person on the planet who has all of this figured out. So if you’ve been waiting for an excuse, finally, to admit that you don’t have all the answers, meet COVID-19. Something amazing does happen when you sit with employees who are closer to the processes, closer to the customers, closer to the data, closer to the real-world problems and opportunities that exist within your company, and you ask, “What would make your job simpler, easier, more effective, safer?” When you invite that granular of a conversation, you’ll be amazed at the feedback you get. Again, when we were riding this wave of prosperity and there was little that you could do as a leader to screw that up, leaders stopped asking their employees for suggestions on how to be more efficient, effective or innovative. So workers stopped being as effective, stopped being as efficient, and certainly didn’t raise their hand and say, “I’ve got this amazing idea, this breakthrough innovation that is going to vault our business into the next stratosphere.” That’s part of why we started these conversations. How can leaders look through this crisis—not overlook it, but look THROUGH this crisis—and say, “How can we leverage what we have, who we are, why we exist, to get through this crisis as

a stronger, more unified, more competitive, and more sustainably successful business?” It’s through leaning, and it’s through learning.

“What better excuse than a global crisis—one that is unprecedented in any time in history—to admit that you don’t have all the answers?”

BB: You talked about the fact that over the last number of years, leaders have just assumed, and moved forward with those false assumptions, which has led to record amounts of disengagement. I think it’s *Inc. Magazine* that found that 70% of employees are disengaged at work. *Forbes* says if 50% of people were out there looking for work—and all these stats are pre-COVID-19, so take it in context—but that this was costing the US economy about half a trillion dollars a year. That every employee you lost cost you \$100,000 to replace. Think about that. If you listen to your people, understand and value them—and the key words are listening, understanding, value—if we can do that, it’s amazing the insights we’re going to learn about our own company. Because everybody’s been dashboarding everything. Everybody says, “The managers create a report that goes up to the director, that goes up to the VP, that goes up to the senior VP, that goes up to the C-Suite.” Well, every single step along the way, that report has been whitewashed. And so, by the time the information gets to the CEO’s or CFO’s desk, it’s a sanitized version of what the people who are actually seeing the issue actually said. If we can bypass that, and get back to a point where we’re actually listening to our people and giving them the voice and allowing them to say things unfiltered, and say, “Hey, look, we have a

problem here; if we don't pay attention to this, we're going to be in trouble." A lot of people are afraid to put that information forward as managers, because they don't want to speak truth to power. But if we don't do that, if we don't have a true pulse of what's going on in our company—and our people have a far better pulse of what's going on our company than we do—then we're going to lose insight and the ability to act, react and move forward. So I'm with you: We need to go back to having that internal communication and actually talk to each other, and stop dashboarding and stop assuming that analytics are absolute truth. Analytics and data are important, but data interpreted, communicated and understood is what we need. That comes through effective communication, both internally and externally.

“If we don't have a true pulse of what's going on in our company... then we're going to lose insight and the ability to act, react and move forward.”

CC: Boy, that journey you just took us through—from employee suggestion at the ground level, all the way to the ultimate decision-maker—was exhausting. But so true to life. Think about how diluted and inefficient that process has traditionally been. So now we're in crisis mode, and we don't have as many people on the ground or hierarchically as we did even a few months ago, because of the world in which we are operating currently. Think about how much more efficient businesses could be if the leaders go straight to that worker who is closest to the issue, challenge or opportunity, and say, "What do you need to make this better?" He tells you what he needs; you decide on the spot, "Yes, go and run with it" —

and just like that, you've implemented an innovation, a simpler process, a cheaper process. The fewer steps a process has to touch, the less time and money it's going to cost you. Just the simplification that a crisis of this magnitude forces companies to go through is such a lesson for leaders who are paying attention.

BB: And empowering those people to make decisions. That's the problem. It's that too many companies—especially as the companies get larger and larger—have lost the ability to empower their people to make decisions, to help their customers, to support their vendors, to make decisions that are going to impact a local group or small team of people. They can't even make a decision on something that's going to impact just their team, because it has to be run up the food chain. That's a problem that leads to so much inefficiency, so much bureaucracy, so much lag time, that it frustrates not only the people inside the company. So, therefore, you're right: They just don't care anymore. Frustrated employees just stop caring. The phrase I use is, "Your brand is only as strong as your unhappiest employee on their worst day." If your employees are unhappy in aggregate, what does that do to your brand? What does that do to your customers? How do your vendors, how does the world see you? How do they engage with you if, all of a sudden, every single time they're reached with an employee that just knows how to say no, and just follows this linear line without any interpretation whatsoever?

“Your brand is only as strong as your unhappiest employee on their worst day.”

CC: If in good times, on that wave of prosperity we keep referring to, there is a significant percentage of your workforce who are disengaged, who don't care, who have stopped innovating, who have stopped going above and beyond—who do “just enough not to get fired”—think about now. You're in times of crisis. Those same people, and those around them, are so distracted by and concerned about this pandemic, that what else gets sacrificed? Well, safety takes a huge hit. I don't care if you are an office-based business or primarily out in the field working around dangerous equipment: Safety gets sacrificed when people take their eye off the ball, and people take their eye off the ball if they are worried about anything beyond their job. You used such a key word earlier: “empower.” When we simplify the decision-making process, and we empower people to make those decisions down the line—especially in times of crisis, when there is so much beyond our control and leaders are anxious, leaders feel like “Because I don't have all the answers, I'm feeling some anxiety too”—when you go farther down that hierarchy, think about your people, who have little to no control over how COVID-19 will impact their families, how the decisions of the leaders up the chain will impact their job, IF they're going to have a job either during the crisis or after, because the decisions of the leaders who don't take their opinions and feelings and contributions into account may in fact bury the business. So not only am I furloughed, but now I'm completely out of a job in the future. If you give them some empowerment—the core of that being “power”—to make decisions that will improve the job they do and

About The Authors

Ben Baker

I help brands tell engaging stories that compel their customers to take action.

For the last 25 years, I have been helping companies communicate with and engage, retain and grow employees. My focus on employee engagement consulting. It is about building leaders, better communication strategies, your brand story and engaging your people in relevant and meaningful ways.

I am a father, a husband, a believer in community, and a passionate teller of the stories of brands. As the founder of Your Brand Marketing, author of *Powerful Personal Brands: a hands-on guide to understanding your* and the host of the three year syndicated YourLIVINGBrand.live show, I work hand in hand with my clients to understand what makes them special and unique in a crowded space. It is by understanding the nuances of a brand, the special things they do that others do not, that unique stories can be told, and audiences engaged.

I am available to consult, provide workshops, and speak on brand, message, market, vision, and value. My goal is always to tell the right story, to the right people, in the right way, so that the intended audience listens, understands, internalizes, engages, and is motivated towards action.

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Claire Chandler

I help complex, growing businesses build sustainable, profitable organizations.

I show those organizations how to scale without the growing pains, by finding and fixing the performance bottlenecks that are stifling their growth.

I am the proud wife of a US Marine Corps veteran, and the proud mom of a chinchilla with his own YouTube channel. I believe that the greatest impact on a company's culture is the behavior of its leaders. Drawing on more than 25 years of experience as a people leader, business owner, HR executive and communications strategist, I build leaders who are worthy of being followed.

I work with C-level executives who are ambitious, self-aware and open, and turn them into magnets for the right talent to achieve their mission. If you are ready to become a magnetic leader, reach out.

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Leading Beyond A Crisis:

A Conversation About What's Next

Crises happen.

While the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has impacted the entire world, it is not the first crisis leaders have had to face, nor will it be the last. True leaders know how to stay focused on “what’s next,” so they can not only pull their people through today’s crisis, but also adapt and evolve as necessary to futureproof their business.

Through a series of conversations, the authors of *Leading Beyond A Crisis* explore how the best leaders remain a voice of reason amid the chaos and continue to move their companies forward. The book is the culmination of dozens of hours of conversations, 12 podcast episodes, and more than 50 years of combined expertise in developing leaders and enhancing their ability to grow their people and their companies.

Designed for both current and aspiring leaders, this book is a vital part of the toolkit you need to “get to next” as a leader.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION.

“Ben and Claire invite us into their conversation as if we’re their best friends sitting in their living room. This uniquely written book conveys the importance of successfully navigating the Next Normal for leaders of organizations. A MUST read for those seeking to traverse the tumultuous and unpredictable times we’re living in and lead their companies with clarity of vision and employee empowerment.

Beautifully written, practical and applicable advice!

— Elia Gourgouris, PH.D.

#1 best-selling author of *7 Paths to Lasting Happiness*.

