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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for Your Small Business

November 10, 2020

Panelists:

Alan Wallner, President and Visionary, Conscious Branding

Dr. Aparajita (AJ) Jeedigunta, Founder and CEO, AJ Rao, LLC

Heather Nunley, Founder and CEO, Culture Fuel Group

Alan Wallner (00:14):

Hello, everyone. Welcome to Thrive!cast I'm Alan Wallner, the president and visionary of Conscious Branding. With Thrive!cast, our intention is to focus on you, your business and your success. With each episode, we discuss at a high level topics to spark new thoughts, generate ideas, and push the boundaries of what we know is familiar. And hopefully we may even frame up a new mindset to ignite your business forward and inspire action. In more ways than one, 2020 has been a year of divisiveness and conflict. Despite this, I continue to believe that people want to help one another and be more connected and to be at peace. The broader discussion about the need for diversity, equity and inclusion has sparked a deeper look at the very fabric of our lives, our beliefs, and our core values.

(01:06): It's time to freely look at and open our eyes to what is happening around us, because it's not easy, or I should say it's easy to not rock the boat, but it takes a little more to actually make some waves and to make some changes. True change can only be accomplished with transformational leadership. I'm sure that's why we're all here. We're all business owners and we're all leaders. So as business owners, we have to ask ourselves, how did diversity, equity and inclusion impact my way of being aware and present, and also the way I lead my business? In this episode, we'll discuss what you can do beyond politics. We'll look at what you can do to take action in the day-to-day business environment and sustain it, what you can do to change your world and influence your clients, employees, partners, community and followers.

(02:01): Before we get started, I'd like to welcome our panelists. We have Dr. Aparajita Jeedigunta, she's also known as AJ, and she's the founder and CEO of AJ Rao, LLC. Dr. AJ is a strategist trainer and coach for diversity, equity, inclusion, belongingness and leadership. She's also the creator of a culturally competent conversations for equity and belonging known as C3EB Summit. That's coming up here on November 19 and 20. If you get a chance, check that out; we will have a link to it on our landing page for the recording of this as well. AJ, thank you for being here today. We also have Heather Nunley. She's the founder and CEO of Culture Fuel Group. Heather works with business leaders to elevate accountability and advanced top talent. She's dedicated to creating workplaces that are more innovative, focused and engaged. Heather is passionate about helping leaders intentionally manage culture, improve results, better retain employees and deliver greater customer satisfaction. Welcome. And it's good to have you here, Heather.

(03:26): I'm looking forward to our conversation today, so let's go ahead and get started. This one's been rampant and a lot of discussions around it, but I want to start really taking a look at what we can do here, as smaller businesses, business owners, and how we can

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have an impact, but I thought I'd start with talking a little bit about both of you. You both have companies that promote, support and help implement diversity, equity and inclusion (also known as DEI), programs and policies in the workplace. What was the inspiring moment that led you to have this as a core competency in your business?

What Led You to DEI Positioning in Your Business?

Heather Nunley (04:13):

Our core purpose at Culture Fuel Group is to advance leadership, and we believe very strongly that connected cultures are what really fuels growth. We do that by building high performance leaders, teams and cultures that are focused on belonging and also on the power of individuality because this work, for me, it's always been threaded throughout the fabric of my career in retail and hospitality, prior to venturing out to become a consultant on my own, and now working with business leaders whether they're owners of very small outsource teams or those that are trying to scale and ramp up their teams in their business. Early in my career, as an HR director, I had the privilege of engaging in diversity initiatives as part of employee resource groups, which some of you may be familiar with within organizations. And with that work, I would help to reveal any relevant opportunities where we might be able to expand upon any current diversity initiatives that may have been placed to figure out how we might be able to better serve our diverse communities and customers and even employee base.

(05:30): While working with those bigger brands with strong cultures like Nordstrom and Marriott, I began to facilitate some of that diversity, equity and inclusion training myself, and also address day-to-day real-life workplace issues related to belonging at work. With that experience and that training underneath my belt, the benefits of inclusion and differentiation were really very much instilled in my own personal leadership style. It's what I know. So when I started my own business, this work seemed to be really integral and natural and necessary, quite honestly, to helping smaller companies that I work with to drive growth with inclusive leadership.

Alan Wallner (06:20):

When you were working with these companies, and they were larger companies, what seemed be their biggest challenges?

Heather Nunley (06:29):

A lot of the work that I would do being an HR director was very much related to interpersonal communications among staff members, leaders, teams, that sort of thing. So a lot of what became formed as it relates to different policies, they would come from real-life experiences that would actually happen on a day-to-day basis. It could be microaggressions that one employee may experience and comes in and shares feedback around that. And, quite honestly, various other things. Relatability, when we talk diversity, when we're looking at a

MIND. HEART. BRAND.

CONSCIOUS

BRANDING

younger generation versus an older generation, there are differences that arise there as well. So it really could be just about anything.

Alan Wallner (07:20):

Because culture is quite broad. AJ, what was happening in your life and what inspired you to start making this part of your business?

Aparajita Jeedigunta (07:35):

My story is the flip side of the coin of Heather's in that I was in a space of being the individual contributor and being on the receiving end in various spaces, mostly academic but also other side jobs and summer jobs and all of that in college, seeing these spaces and this was before DEI work became as normative as it is now. But even in those, seeing how people who were different were being treated, and of course I was different. Just not because of my skin color or because I'm a woman, I'm also an immigrant, an immigrant's child. Going through all of that, then I went to grad school and I was studying this social psychology group dynamics, interpersonal relationships, conflict management, all of these were sort of my cup of tea. But I always thought I ended up in academia—and then I died because of a traumatic brain injury.

(08:56): When I was brought back and I had to recover, all of a sudden, it was this really stark contrast I was seeing because things weren't making sense because I had to relearn who I was, I had to relearn about my family. I had to relearn all of that stuff, but outside of that, how diversity, equity and inclusion and more importantly, how belongingness was getting minimized, was getting rendered invisible, and how we were all internalizing those messages and rendering ourselves invisible. So it was through my personal journey of recovery, as I was figuring that out. I was also applying for corporate jobs to go back into the workforce. And that's when I really started seeing all of these societal messages and it wasn't just me, all of these societal messages that tell us we're not enough that we don't quite belong because we don't quite fit the mold that we in many ways deserve to be marginalized because we're different.

(10:11): And then again, how we internalize that and then create these stories for ourselves of, we're never going to be enough. This is our lot in life. Things are never going to change. What can I do as one person? Any of these sound familiar, because these were what was going through my mind, except I had solutions because of my training, because of my lived experiences, because of all of that. So I said, okay I know I'm smart. I get it. Corporate thinks I'm unemployable but that doesn't mean I am so the best way to break that mold, the best way to break that myth, is to break it and let's see where it goes. And that's where I started. And so our motto at AJ Rao is making the invisible, visible for better equity and belongingness. And that's where that came from.

Alan Wallner (11:07):

It is so interesting the way you're talking about that. I'd be willing to bet everything I have here that the majority of the people in the world are struggling with the same thing, the

MIND. HEART. BRAND.

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BRANDING

sense of worth, a sense of belonging. People are always trying to figure out that I'm deserving of every good thing; I don't care who you are. It doesn't matter what color; everyone goes through that in their mind. And I think it's very interesting that that's what became very obvious to you as you were reintegrating again. I hadn't had that perspective before but it actually puts us all on the same plane of being very similar. Like you said being diverse is a good thing, but also being included is a good thing. It's very interesting how the dynamics are working there.

Aparajita Jeedigunta (12:11):

Absolutely. And it doesn't take a near death or a death experience to realize this is how you're feeling, and there is this sense of powerlessness or hopelessness that comes from it, but you actually do have the agency in many ways to at least control that narrative that you're feeding yourself.

How Did Your Business Grow after DEI Positioning?

Alan Wallner (12:36):

It's just a matter of sitting down and spending some time thinking about it and getting to know it and understand it. This is good. It's going in a good direction. So how has positioning your business around DEI and also leading with your purpose helped you grow or innovate with your business?

Aparajita Jeedigunta (13:06):

So I think because of my journey, one thing that became immediately clear to me, especially after COVID-19 and even more so after the murder of Mr. George Floyd that happened back in May and the call for social justice that happened across the board. That was actually a space where at least in my network, it didn't matter, what your outside looks like. This was a moment where many of us, even though it may have been the first time we realized it, we're realizing, Oh, things are not right, and we really need to do something about it. So I and in the case of immigrants, for instance, they don't know the 450-year history because they're not taught that in their schools, which was my reality.

(14:07): As I made all these realizations, I had to learn myself. So taking that time and having that intention to say, okay, I need to learn what I need to know. I need to learn what I need to learn. I need to learn the truth about these inequities, these disparities, and outside of everything that I've learned, what else am I missing; addressing those blind spots and gaps as I did that, I realized one of the big things is that in corporate or small business or whatever spaces, we in leadership development are always relegated to just those little silos. So corporate is like a nine to five, entrepreneurs have their entrepreneurial leadership, which is more than nine to five, but they still think in those terms, and I was sitting there going I get it, people wear fifteen hats a day, thirty, forty, whatever, but have we forgotten

MIND. HEART. BRAND.

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that they all go on the same head; and it's that head that we need to take care of, not the hats.

(15:24): It doesn't matter how much we put on all these hats. Let's nourish that head first. Everything I do is a whole person leadership development for bold inclusive action for leadership presence. I love working, especially with women, to help them not only increase their leadership skills, but also their leadership presence. Because those are so different; women are highly competent, but we're just not visible enough for various reasons. That's how all of these things pieced up together to create my whole person leadership development program, which you'll actually see right above my head.

Alan Wallner (16:25):

You've really taken this broad perspective of what's happening in your world and your purpose. And you've really developed a whole program and business around how to help other companies work through that and to help raise the ability for everyone to work together and flatten things a little bit more. So we don't have this extreme hierarchy happening.

Aparajita Jeedigunta (17:07):

All I want to do is break the silo cultures and then dismantle two myths. One is this work-life balance myth because work and life are not two different planets. Work is a part of life and two that there's a shortage of diverse talent. That's all I want to do is show how all of these things come together. And when you realize it, your business is going to just blow up and thrive in the best ways possible.

Heather Nunley (17:51):

When I think about ways that I've shifted some positioning this year, for me the beauty in this space in time that we're all collectively experiencing right now, but the weight of the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the social injustices that we're experiencing in the world right now specifically in America, I was called to action and felt very compelled to update the frameworks and the content for my six-month signature group coaching program that I do for entrepreneurs. That is a program that had information in there regarding diversity and belonging, but I was involved in several open forum type discussions a little earlier this year. Again, after the George Floyd murder, I was able to really gain some more insight into what's missing in terms of understanding and what is needed in terms of solutions for helping to support the entrepreneurial community.

(18:57): The overall curriculum has been upgraded and specifically modules related to diversity and belonging, which really focus on the importance of valuing diversity indifference in businesses, large and small. I'm making that the best that it can possibly be in order to meet the needs of those leaders, better seeking the support for change and for future progress, because we're at a really pivotal time right now where many have raised their hands. And I think as a member of the black community, I think we are still waiting to see that there will be some carry out of some of the change that has been communicated. And there's a willingness by me and my company, obviously, to support that change for

MIND. HEART. BRAND.

CONSCIOUS

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those that are really just trying to find their way. I know AJ just mentioned initially starting with yourself, that would be the absolute best place to start, with ourselves in terms of understanding to start filling in gaps, but then to have that knowledge and understanding to reach a broader community. That's where support like we provide is likely, where we have people who may reach out.

Alan Wallner (20:19):

You are both right, it starts with ourselves. That's key. Everyone's a leader to some degree, so we've got to start with ourselves if we need to reframe our beliefs or core values, and there's so much going on right now that we need to really open our eyes and come together as a human species; let's make it better. It doesn't have to be this way. It starts with ourselves. So let's start taking a look at that and, let's see what happens. We can only make it better.

Heather Nunley (21:03):

And I think having grace with yourself is important. You don't know what you don't know, but there's been a really huge awakening, I think in many instances, and with that comes some responsibility to just dig a little deeper.

DEI and Client Relationships

Alan Wallner (21:21):

So we've talked about some shifts. So how has all this impacted your relationships with clients and prospects? Heather, you mentioned you went back and you started upgrading and changing and refining the programs, but even putting your programs together in the first place, when you're out there selling it and same way with you, AJ, very personal experiences in your molding a program around ways to help people from something that you've been seeing. So when you're out there building these relationships with clients and prospects, do they care? Do you see companies going, you're right, we need to do something about this?

Heather Nunley (22:15):

In response to the question, do they care? I will have to say that some do; not all, it's just really not a strategic priority for some, but there are many that do care. And I think we have witnessed that over the last several months, just in terms of people raising their hand to say, I've got to make some change for me. The overall impact of client relationships this year has been quite positive. I think it's related to the nature of my role as a coach and as a consultant is that people trust me as a sounding board. So through those conversations, through inquiry, I help them to see themselves without judgment and I think that's a key piece of this. It's almost a topic where there's a lot of shame that exists there with some people around it.

MIND. HEART. BRAND.

CONSCIOUS

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(23:12): And I think having the opportunity of a trusted advisor to be able to open up those conversations is really key. When I look at what some of the challenges might be regarding diversity, equity and inclusion and initiatives with companies it runs the gamut. There are ethnic and cultural differences. As I had mentioned earlier, there's some generational and age differences. And one of the big things is also a very important issue of emotional discomfort. People tend to resist this, even the conversations around it, even if you somehow know that you want to do better. There is that resistance there that I think is actually quite normal when it comes to engaging in change as it relates to it. But when we look at the racial spectrum of the United States it's changing every single year.

(24:14): And when we look at the statistics within our workplaces in order to be relevant and to be inclusive business leaders, we really have a lot of work that we have to do to keep up with the pace of change in our families and our communities, and then the world. I was actually looking at a statistic from the consulting firm, Deloitte and diversity and inclusion, they say, it's not at a human resources strategy. It is a business strategy, and it does have bottom line impact. AJ mentioned how important it is to diversify the workforce and to increase higher level positions as it relates to that diversity. And it's really necessary at this time. If you want to remain relevant as a company; research also shows that teams that operate within that inclusive cult within an inclusive culture, outperform their peers by 80 percent. So that's huge. So I think that not only is the world shifting, but if we really take a closer look at our teams, and like I said, for those companies that don't necessarily have large teams, you might outsource to one person that you work with, it's really having that be a top of mind.

Alan Wallner (25:36):

I think it's very interesting; you're saying it's more of a business strategy, and I think when you put it in that perspective, there might be companies or there are leaders in companies who don't necessarily want to admit that they don't understand or know something about it because then there's vulnerability. And maybe I haven't done my homework as a good leader and all of that. So suddenly it starts putting some very interesting tension around this in terms of, should I get vulnerable here as a leader and say I don't know. So we're going to bring in some people who can help make this happen. I think that's very interesting. That's a big part of what you're doing there is you're building that trust with these leaders and letting them know that they can confide in you and basically you'll work with them to make it happen. AJ, you run into clients who might have a little bit of resistance and do they care?

Aparajita Jeedigunta (26:40):

Yes. I want to answer that very briefly, but then I want to reframe that question too. One is, do I run into problems and do they care? The care part I'll get to it later. When I reframe, do they, do I run into problems? Absolutely. Just this year, if I had a single dollar for every time I've heard either, Oh yeah. I'd love to focus on DEI, but our budget given unprecedented times or again, I'd love to focus on DEI, but given the shortage of diverse talent I could retire by next year, just a dollar for every time. Now, does that mean that people don't care? No, I think Heather was absolutely spot on and the stats are absolutely spot on. The majority of

MIND. HEART. BRAND.

CONSCIOUS

BRANDING

the companies are still only looking at this as a business case instead of as a human imperative.

(27:46): And so this is where I'm going to reframe your question of, do they care too? Should you care as a business owner? Absolutely. Because everything that Heather said. The racial constructs, the gender constructs, the class constructs, age, generational differences, all of those, they all play into it because it's all interconnected. So what we know is that, if you think about it, something like transgender people, right? Transgender people have always existed since the beginning of humanity, but it's only now that we're starting to think about full human rights for them. So diversity has always existed. It's the equity and inclusion that have been a problem. Now, keeping that in mind, let's consider that as business owners and as aspiring leaders or leaders as we get older and become these role models and pillars in our communities.

(29:02): Our kids are going into a much more diverse environment in terms of the language, in terms of the communication, in terms of the labels we put. We have a dozen more labels. Now, what labels are they going to be part of? And do we want them to be discriminated against? Do we want them to have equitable opportunities that meet their needs as leaders and as entrepreneurs, we already know, we run the economy. Like the entire U.S. economy is actually on the shoulders of small business owners and entrepreneurs. Society is as well because we get to shape our future together. And why would we not want a future that bottom line opens us up to new markets while allowing us to connect on a human level?

Alan Wallner (30:01):

There's a huge opportunity here to start shifting and they say small businesses are the backbone of the country. So why can't it start with small businesses? It's the way we think, the way we work, our messaging, even the photographs that we have on our websites. Let's really pay attention to what's going on. You can have an impact in more ways than one. It doesn't have to be by just going to rallies and things of that nature. You can do it, you can say it, show it and do it with the way you run your business.

Aparajita Jeedigunta (30:42):

Exactly. And I just want to add one little example here. When we talk about diversity, equity and inclusion somehow the white American population is this weird baseline as if it's the standard, which I don't mean weird in a judgmental way. I mean, weird in a completely scientific way, because if you think about it and I'm going to use myself as an example here, the first time I saw a white person in my life was when I was 14 years old. That wasn't my majority. That was not my baseline. Now imagine that our kids and their kids are going to be growing into that reality as well, especially as globalization increases, they could be anywhere. Do we want to set them up for success so that they can get along with everybody and actually communicate and be leaders wherever they are? Or are we going to restrict them to our little pockets?

MIND. HEART. BRAND.

CONSCIOUS

BRANDING

Business Success Stories

Alan Wallner (31:43):

It's not regionalized anymore. This is a global world now, especially with all of the social media and the internet. People see things globally regularly. It's a different world and we need to act accordingly. We were talking a little bit about the negative. So we seem to only hear about the struggles in these roadblocks about creating positive change around the DEI. And that also in a same sense makes it seem very daunting to even attempt to do something about it. So for our listeners today, I'd like to hear about some of the successes you have had that show that things can be done, you can make a difference, and it doesn't have to be a massive, huge move. It can be just taking small steps every day.

Heather Nunley (32:57):

There is one that comes to mind for me. So I have a long-term client that I have an executive coaching relationship with. This is someone who happens to manage a team. My client is a white woman and she manages a team of all black employees. And needless to say this year, when this whole situation arose after the George Floyd murder, in one of the coaching sessions that I have with her she was telling me about what was going on with the team and what she felt like they were experiencing, but just really felt disconnected from what that experience may have been for them. So with that said, we shifted the engagement that we had to where I offered up some facilitated discussion with her as the team leader who was struggling with this relate-ability with her team and what their true day-to-day experience was and going through that.

(34:04): So we did a series of round table discussions that I was able to facilitate and help support bridging the gap. She is an awesome leader and continues to want to serve her team and do really well by them. And she opened up to that offer that I had put on the table, as let's go a little bit deeper here in ensure that the transparency and the connectedness remains intact over time just based on how it is that you're feeling. So with that said, we had quite a few conversations and there were many things that were brought up that were relevant for them as individuals and their needs alongside the broader company initiatives that were in place within that organization.

(34:59): And the overall result was these really in-depth honest conversations. And it brought about a more cohesive and engaged team. And I attribute all of that to her willingness to get uncomfortable. Because she told me in the beginning, she said this is not necessarily a place that I feel like I can do this. And with raising her hand to say, Hey, I would like to have some support moving through this, it turned out to be really ideal for her and also for her team. And they continue to move forward at this point. So that was one

(35:38): Of the great successes I would say of this year, it was eye opening to see this type of a conversation. I felt like it was a forced conversation based on what was going on in the world, but also voluntary. And that she said, no, I want to go a step further with this and really remain connected with my people and even go deeper.

MIND. HEART. BRAND.

CONSCIOUS

BRANDING

Alan Wallner (36:01):

So what you were saying earlier, the small step was her making a shift in herself and her thinking and her comfort level. It wasn't some big major thing. It was her making that shift inside.

Aparajita Jeedigunta (36:34):

I had goosebumps when you were telling me about this story, because as I was hearing it, I don't know if you saw the smile on my face, but I was like, Oh, she shifted her perspective. And she took responsibility and she held herself accountable and that's what caused it because for me, that's what it boils down to. We actually can hold ourselves accountable to whatever expectations we set for ourselves. And the impact of that gets so amplified when we're intentional about it. So some huge, some success stories for me; success is always about the impact. I know that when COVID first started, I just felt this like the fear that everybody was feeling.

(37:35): And all stereotypes aside, I do have a lot of friends who are medical doctors as much as we joke about that, I do. There was this palpable sense of fear for me because here were my friends risking their lives to make sure we were all okay. And it was that moment; it doesn't matter how empowered we are. We all have those imposter syndrome, flare ups that come up. And I was saying that moment of, yeah, are we important enough? Are we doing enough? Are we serving well enough? Look at my friends, they're risking their lives. And I'm a coach; those kinds of things. So I decided to create free coaching for all frontline healthcare workers. And I had no idea where it was going to go, but this is not therapy.

(38:34): It's a coaching thing, it's very action oriented. It's very future oriented. All I want to do is help ground you in your purpose of why you're doing this and take a moment to personally thank you for your work. Because I get to do that when it's one-on-one and it was mind blowing. I ended up coaching doctors from all across the country and getting to hear their stories and getting to remind them that they're heroes. And it would fill my cup so much every day. I'm not on the front line, but this is great. Then the C3EB Summit got created out of it, which is coming up next week. And Alan, you're sharing your story there next week too.

(39:29): But the entire C3EB Summit shines the spotlight on voices that have been historically marginalized. All of it came out of everything that we went through this year. And then I ended up winning an award from it. I ended up being on a few magazine covers and all of those kinds of like extra accessories. But when you think about it, all of this came from me just saying, I have to be able to do something. What can I do if I take personal responsibility? I have some privilege and I don't have some privilege. Okay. How can I channel the privilege? I do have to make something happen. That's all it was, I dreamt it, I set an intention and then I went at it and then the impact kept amplifying. I mean that inaugural C3RB Summit had over 11,000 views. So people liked it.

MIND. HEART. BRAND.

CONSCIOUS

BRANDING

Alan Wallner (40:36):

I like the whole notion of leveraging that privilege to help make the change and use that as the lever, and to help more people as a result of that take the privilege that you have, and pay it forward, so to speak. You both have examples of almost following your heart and allowing other people to start engaging with what you're doing to help make that change happen. And by doing that, you start creating that change within each person. And that's really where it starts. You both started with your internal change and shift, and we inspired that in others. And that is really cool. It shows people that it's not a huge effort, just like you did earlier of reframe it so that you can start moving forward and people catch on. And if they like what you're doing and see what you're doing, they'll say, what do you have going on here? Tell me more. And then it'll just keep growing. I liked that you've proven that it doesn't take a huge initiative to make a change.

Recommendations for Today's Leaders

Alan Wallner(41:39):

I see 2021 as the year of change and transition and as leaders, we have the opportunity to create this change in and through our businesses and which ultimately can impact the world. So what are the top three things you would recommend leaders of organizations do to make this lasting change and to have the impact that they would love to have around diversity, equity and inclusion?

Heather Nunley (42:34):

The three things that come to mind for me are what we focus on in our work. One is shifting from diversity to inclusion. And with that the diversity, meaning what's the makeup of your workforce versus inclusion; answering the question, how do we create a work environment and a culture that enables all employees to participate and thrive? AJ spoke about that whole person being able to come to work is really what's key right now. So going from diversity to inclusion as it relates to how you move forward from here would be going from taking a look at what your brand identity is; that is very key and needs to be strong, but you also want to shift that to individual identities or I would say elevate that along with that brand identity, because we don't want the company to come first at the expense of the individuals that work there so there's where we really do have work to do as leaders, as it relates to integrating that overall.

(43:54): The way that we're set up culturally in America is that the company over individual is very deeply embedded into our workforce. That's how we operate. So we need to take a look at what's really going to modernize that for all of us going forward is going to be knowing our employees, they want to demonstrate ownership. Those standardized ways of doing things are now taking a back seat. Having that awareness of not only elevating your brand identity, but the individual identity of those that work within your company. And then lastly I would say looking at both mission and contribution. Leaders today, they really know

MIND. HEART. BRAND.

CONSCIOUS

BRANDING

what it is that they stand for. They know what they stand for and what they really want. Studies have shown they want purpose and meaning in their work.

(44:51): So when people don't know who they are, that is something that keeps them up at night. I spoke about this whole work-life integration thing and how key that is and especially now with so many people, working from home, it's all become one big thing, work and home. And quite honestly, I think it always was; we like to think there was this big separation between the two, but again, we're humans first. So with that said, we want to be able to express ourselves wholeheartedly at home and at work. People really want to be self-directed with whatever those differences are that they have. They want to be able to bring that to an autonomous type of a work environment so that they can contribute as best as they can.

Alan Wallner (45:47):

Those are good points. I think they can all be chipped away at, and seem like very realistic things to bring into a culture of a business and to start to elaborate the brand foundation so that it has more depth. It's not just a mission and a vision and core values; it starts becoming more human; and having a brand become more human attracts more people to it. You've brought a lot of good things that it could be invaluable for a business to start rethinking how they are going to incorporate it at that level.

Aparajita Jeedigunta (46:29):

If I nodded my head anymore at Heather, what everything I had there was saying my head would have fallen off. I felt like a bubble head because I agree with everything. I was just like, yeah, Oh, my neck hurts now a hundred percent everything that Heather said. I mean, those are such astute observations. I think for us to move forward into 2021, I'm going to go back to piggyback and jump off of what Heather said and use my own language around it. One, making your own invisible, visible to be a better leader; what are the blind spots that you may have unintentionally ignored, but more importantly, what are the blind spots that you're ignoring? Because you just feel uncomfortable about it, because growth is painful. Growth is uncomfortable. That's why it's called growing pains.

(47:30): They didn't call it growing Candyland for a reason. So if you're not experiencing growing pains, what are you not addressing? What about yourself as a leader? Do you need to make visible to yourself so that then you can think about how it is showing up in the world, around you as a business owner, as an entrepreneur, as a family person, as a friend, whatever, because again, it's about you as a person at the end of the day, all those hats go on your head. And then the second one is we all know change is constant, especially as entrepreneurs who have gone through 2020 and all of the pivots we've had to go through. I think that part's obvious, but how much time do we take to acknowledge our learning from those moments? What is the self-talk happening there; are we lamenting everything that's happened and all my gosh, my business could have made a quarter million, but I lost this or are we actually, as Heather said earlier, giving ourself grace acknowledging our roles in our contributions. So that those learnings that have happened are actually sustainable because

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we get it that we're imperfect. All of us are. And then the third one I'd say is how can you reclaim your inner power so that you can give it away?

(49:16): Part of that comes back to that privilege. Part of it comes back to acknowledging the privilege. But part of it is also that because of all of these external messages and imposter syndrome and all of that, we let other people in some ways take away our power, that doesn't belong to them when we can reclaim that, especially as entrepreneurs, because as entrepreneurs we're our personal brand, right? So if we're not showing up in that, what are people seeing about us? What are our employees seeing about us? And if we have to empower them, we have to be empowered. So how can we reclaim all of these power leaks so that we can give it away freely and amplify the impact we have with that?

Alan Wallner (50:12):

I liked that very much. And I think there's a lot to that reclaiming because I think just what's going on is my personal perspective here. I think a lot of things that are going on in society, it just sucks that all out of us and we all want to be part of something so bad that we're willing to give up who we really are inside to be part of that. And as a result, we actually start creating the separation between one another. Both of you had some very good insights things that we can start taking a look at. I know for me, there's a lot here I can walk away with and start making changes already with my business. Actually it will start with me because you need to do some journaling and some shadow work, things like that to really take a look at what's happening here with me. And what's being reflected out there in the world through me and start fixing that, start reclaiming who I am. So I can go out there and share that with other people. I really like what both of you had to bring to the table today. And I think that it is highly doable for everyone on this call, anyone who listens to this, and I appreciate everything that you're bringing today.

Closing Remarks

Alan Wallner (51:14):

In closing, I'd like to thank you for being here today and sharing all of your insights and wisdom. I'd like to thank everyone for attending. I hope that you enjoyed this conversation. There is a lot of stuff going on here. A lot of things that were talked about, and I think it's taken this craziness in the world and really brought it down to a nice doable self-adjustment that can be done.

(52:07): We can all go out there and make a difference, have an impact. And so if anyone has any follow-up questions, please send them to info@consciousbranding.com and we will respond to you. We'll be sending you a follow-up link to the recording of this episode, along with some bonus materials. So feel free to share this with other business owners you think would be interested. Our next Thrive!cast episode is on December 8. It's about keeping yourself energized while leading your business. I look forward to seeing everyone in

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December and, remember, you create your world. So believe in your vision, drive it with purpose and above all take action. So until next time be remarkable.

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