

SportsPro CEO Playbook



CEO PLAYBOOK 2022: ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS IN A CHANGED WORLD

FOREWORD

Welcome to the CEO Playbook 2022 – a how-to guide to leading sports businesses in 2022.

Throughout the last two years, my Playbook partnership with the team at SportsPro has aimed to offer the sports industry C-suite agenda-free, pragmatic advice, learning and tools to navigate some very stormy waters. It's gone down extremely well – in fact, 2021's [CEO Playbook](#) was one of SportsPro's most popular downloads of all time.

Building on that success, last year we launched the Playbook Podcast – a series of 'how to' interviews from across the to-do list of a future-ready sports leader. From the chair of the ATP on leading change to the BBC's sports editor on managing the media; from the global inclusion lead at Vodafone to two partners from EY on smart financial management in tough times: **we've produced 24-plus hours - a whole day's worth of advice - available for you to manage your year ahead.**

The CEO Playbook 2022 you are now reading aims to complement and build on the podcast, not only to help you navigate that library of content which remains there for you, but

also to curate and pick out some of the real gems of wisdom. We've grouped the interviews by theme, and for each episode I've picked out the main messages I took away.

One of my first Playbook articles for SportsPro, written in the eye of the storm that was the summer of 2020, was titled 'The World in 2022'. In it, I suggested that: **'Successful businesses in 2022 will be purpose-led. They will have successfully fused digital and physical into one coherent proposition. They will understand their entire supply chains and be sustainably financed in a way that derives meaning for both shareholders and employees alike. They will feel markedly different to lead, support and work within.'**

Now that we are here, that prediction seems to ring true. Two calendar years has seen ten years of change. Nobody has all the answers, but hopefully this guide helps to point you in the right direction. I hope you'll be able to keep it with you and dip into it when considering how to handle a specific issue.

Good luck.

Matt
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USE THE TABS
ABOVE TO FIND
WHAT YOU'RE
LOOKING FOR



  <p>"Help people generally to get more involved in sport."</p>	  <p>"Governance will always be present. Humans will always strive for power."</p>	  <p>"Have a clear vision. Create true believers. Be flexible."</p>	  <p>"One life. Smash it. Enjoy the ride."</p>	  <p>"Plan for the future but understand a business can change."</p>	  <p>"Local heart, global pulse. With hope in your heart."</p>	  <p>"Be bold. Build trust. Stay focused."</p>
  <p>"Don't give up on yourself."</p>	 <p>SHERIDANS</p> <p>"Investment in people, investment in people, investment in people."</p>	 <p>SHERIDANS</p> <p>"Tangible relationship building leading to positive outcomes."</p>	  <p>"Success is something you attract by the person you become."</p>	  <p>"Build resilience and diversity to drive optimal impact and performance."</p>	 <p>GOODWOOD</p> <p>"Continually innovate and put yourself in the customer's shoes."</p>	  <p>"Sell on emotion, rationalise on data."</p>
  <p>"Never fear reaching outside of your comfort zone."</p>	  <p>"Be open and challenge yourself. Gather support and keep belief."</p>	  <p>"It's time to be a truly strategic CFO"</p>	  <p>"Leadership is not a title but responsibility to empower everyone."</p>	  <p>"Educate yourself. Do the work. Try to change things."</p>	  <p>"Sport has the power to change the world. Be part of it."</p>	  <p>"Hope for the best, but plan for the worst."</p>
  <p>"Have proper conversations with people you lead."</p>	  <p>"Be prepared, think green, take action, small steps."</p>	  <p>"Understand the context and stay succinct."</p>	  <p>"Talent wins games, teamwork and intelligence wins championships."</p>	  <p>"Plan properly, get inside their head, don't try to win."</p>	 <p>"Communicate well and collaborate."</p>	  <p>"Embrace change but embrace it with consideration for your team."</p>

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6

 GOVERNANCE

HOW TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE BOARD



John Dowson
Chair, English Institute of Sport

“We need someone very competent at strategy and change as well as stakeholder management.”

This podcast focused on how to build an effective board. I was joined for the conversation by the chair at the English Institute of Sport (EIS), John Dowson. The EIS provides support services to British Olympic and Paralympic sports, enabling sports and athletes to realise potential and to achieve excellence through science, medicine, technology and innovation.

I asked Dowson to join for this conversation as he has seen boards of all shapes and sizes both outside and inside sport. Prior to moving into high performance sport, Dowson's career was in finance, corporate restructuring and infrastructure investment with IBM and PwC. He has worked in over 25 countries, latterly as PwC's UK industry leader for the entire private sector (excluding financial services). In sport, prior to taking up his EIS appointment, Dowson served for six years on the board of UK Sport where he also chaired the group audit and risk committee and was the senior non-executive director. He is also a former chair of Boccia UK.

I hope our conversation provided some useful prompts not only for those already sitting on boards, but aspiring to do so in the future.

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THE BOARD MEETING IS JUST THE START

Sporting organisations are increasingly, and rightly, under public scrutiny for what happens in the boardroom as well as on the field. This is not only true for those organisations like the EIS, whose responsibility is to use public funds efficiently, but also those sports and teams which hold an emotional pull over fans. Whether government spending on Olympic and Paralympic sport, ticket pricing at Tottenham Hotspur or sustainability principles at Starbucks are the topic of conversation, newer generations expect to be able to ask why and how decisions were made.

This makes board membership quite a challenge. Time is finite, and it is important to focus on the right places. Most boards use committees to report in on areas which require a specific detail of understanding or detailed dialogue from experts – which often happens in smaller groups of six to eight. For example, as a non-executive director, I sit on the remuneration committee for the EIS, which delves deeper into people strategy and reward and reports back to our full board. The way in which these board committees operate and interrelate is fundamental to the running of an effective board.

Beyond the transactional responsibilities and processes, Dowson also referred to a [seminal article](#) by Jeffrey Sonnenfeld for Harvard Business Review which looked at the key behaviours which underpin successful boards. Sonnenfeld argues that the key attributes of any board come down to mutual respect, candour and trust. This requires any board be prepared to invest time and emotional energy in becoming a coherent unit.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Effective boards operate a set of interrelating meetings and relationships within a coherent team, not just a bi-monthly meeting. The very best can not only support and challenge the organisation in its entirety, but also get the best out of each other.



8

ROLE CLARITY IS KEY

Role clarity relates closely to the second key point we discussed on the podcast – the need for an effective working relationship between the board and the leadership team. It is hugely important that there is strong alignment between the two.

Of course, this starts with the relationship between the chair and the chief executive. We are shortly saying farewell to our EIS chief executive of 11 years, Nigel Walker. Dowson says: “The CEO is in quite a pivotal position here, dealing with more than 40 sports and all our partners. The stakeholder interaction is massive, and the employee motivation extremely high. In my view they need to be a highly competent CEO – to manage today but also develop the next wave for the next ten years. So we need someone very competent at strategy and change as well as stakeholder management and employee motivation.”

While the EIS board and leadership team work closely together (and often join together for an extended board meeting), there is very clear delineation of roles. Our executive team works within the organisation, accountable for the delivery of the strategy which we co-create. The non-executive directors sit outside of the organisation, with a remit to support and challenge against the delivery of the strategy.

We are fortunate within the EIS to be of a size that clear delineation is possible – however, often in smaller organisations this is trickier. Many executive teams are staffed by a small group of employees or even volunteers, which means that non-executive roles can inherit some management responsibilities. This can be tricky. The key is honesty from all parties at recruitment stage, and the ability of board directors to remember that their fundamental responsibility is to the governance of the organisation.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Role clarity is fundamental to a successful board and organisation.

COGNITIVE DIVERSITY IS A PREREQUISITE

One of the challenges of non-executive roles in sport, of course, is that they are often billed as voluntary positions. For that reason, they can tend to be filled by those who have time to commit, which in turn means they can often lack demographic diversity. As we heard in our pod with Vodafone’s diversity lead Claire Harvey, lack of demographic diversity often then creates an issue with the cognitive diversity of a board.

Dowson and I both value Matthew Syed’s book *Rebel Ideas*, which examines the critical importance of garnering different viewpoints on the same problem – an approach well utilised by Gareth Southgate, among others, to broaden the insights that the England men’s football team gather to improve their performance.

Sport, of course, is late to the challenges this presents in terms of the shape and make-up of its boards. Proactive action to address this is critical. Small things can be done immediately to broaden any board outlook. For example, specific committees can be set up to address certain deficiencies in board outlook with a representative of the committee offered the chance to join the board as an observer. This can be a sound interim step while re-working the blend of the board team more broadly.

Ultimately, the evidence for change is clear – and the time to change the mix of many boards is now. As Dowson says: “Within the board there need to be skills and experiences that relate not only to where the organisation is now, but also where it is going...that take it out of its comfort zone.”

IN A NUTSHELL:

Diverse boards make better decisions. Better decisions make for better businesses.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Help people generally to get more involved in sport.”



 GOVERNANCE

GOVERNANCE AND DIVERSITY: FROM THEORY TO EXECUTION



Jane Purdon

Former Chief Executive, Women in Football



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This podcast explained the basic principles behind good governance in sport, something that traditionally the industry has been a little shy to confront at times.

Our guest was the then-chief executive of Women in Football, Jane Purdon, who explained: “Don’t be scared. Read Shakespeare’s history plays or watch Game of Thrones - governance is all about power and what good or bad leadership looks like.” Gulp.

Fear not, Purdon is the perfect person to learn from. Prior to assuming her role at Women in Football, she was head of governance and leadership at UK Sport, having previously been director of governance at the Premier League. I started right at the beginning, asking: how do we even define governance?

“Very simply,” Purdon told me, “it’s who decides what. That means how checks and balances are managed, and what we take into account when making decisions. It’s never more important than when the unexpected is happening.”



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WHAT DOES GOOD GOVERNANCE LOOK LIKE?

If governance is about the checks and balances of decision making, what does 'good' actually look like? What's the standard our own organisations should be aspiring to?

Purdon outlined several components. To paraphrase those briefly...

A diverse room of decision makers... Most effective boards have between five and ten people to make the key decisions. Enough people to ensure diversity of background, thought and action but not too many that decision making can become unwieldy. Purdon sees cognitive diversity as particularly key, with gender, LBTQ+ and ethnic diversity just for example all improving a board's ability to consider key decisions from different perspectives.

Independent check and challenge... Independent non-executive directors (NEDs) can play a key role as part of that. These are mandatory in public or FTSE organisations, although still less prevalent in private companies. NEDs should offer a robust, agenda-free challenge to an executive team.

Transparency for all stakeholders... Decision making needs to be communicated clearly and openly – not only to people you impact, but also those who have an impact on you.

Strong ethics... This is not just about an organisation following the rule of law, but also having a moral compass. For example, policies on climate change, diversity policies and workers' rights also fit into this.

IN A NUTSHELL:

To understand how your organisation performs in terms of governance and where it might improve, evaluate based on the four component parts.

HOW TO ROLE MODEL GOOD GOVERNANCE AS A CEO

While a high-quality and clear roadmap for governance reform such as the above is fundamental, the rubber really hits the road in the cut and thrust of the working day. So of course, where the opportunity for power and influence exists, so do the challenges of working with people intent on seizing it.

As a chief executive herself, Purdon recognises that the "right structure and processes are no good without the people" to build and maintain the culture of her organisation. It falls to the chief executive and her or his top team to "hold tight to the values and behaviours we want". She advocates creating a listening culture which enables diverse opinion from across the organisation. Ultimately this means that strategy and delivery are both co-created. History is riddled with corporate disasters and spectacular falls from grace where employees did not feel able to raise a red flag where necessary.

Purdon, too, has to role model the ability to have the tough conversations externally where standards have slipped. Purdon says partners "won't be left unclear as to our disappointment" if her organisation feels the governance standards have not been upheld.

IN A NUTSHELL:

The active engagement of your team can make or break the success of any initiative to drive change. Governance is no different in that regard.

"Too much change too quickly brings risk."

TEN WORDS OR FEWER

"Governance will always be present. Humans will always strive for power."



LISTEN NOW

“Governance is all about power and what good or bad leadership looks like.”

BELOW:

Fifa secretary general
Fatma Samoura



HOW TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS IN GOVERNANCE HAPPEN

Driving change in governance structures in sport is easier said than done. Some sports in Britain, for example, carry many of the same legacy structures which existed 50 or even 100 years ago.

Purdon recognises the challenge of tradition, and that it “can be harder to unpick the cultures that have been around for decades”. Scale, too, can slow things down – larger organisations have “so many moveable parts” that “being transparent and consultative can take time”.

That does not necessarily mean that smaller organisations have it easy as “smaller organisations can be more agile, but if it is being run by volunteers then they might not have right skills to bring change about”. I have worked with a few organisations who fall on the wrong side of both of those questions – large, nationally distributed sports where cultures and structures are no longer fit for purpose, but which also rely on time-starved volunteers at a local level who might lack the skill to change or even the will. The pacing of change becomes critical in the equation. As Purdon mentioned, “too much change too quickly brings risk”.

Happily help is at hand – among the free resources now available to sports of all shapes and sizes Purdon particularly recommended those from [Sport England](#) and [UK Sport](#).

IN A NUTSHELL:

Be realistic about the pace of change you can expect. Don't underestimate how hard it can be for some sports to leave behind the 'status quo'

 STRATEGY

THE TRUTH ABOUT LAUNCHING A NEW BUSINESS STRATEGY



**“Having a really clear
vision and strategy
really helps us focus.”**



LimeLight.
sports

Craig Dews
Chief Executive, LimeLight Sports

Building, launching and then executing a great strategy is far from simple but made a fascinating subject of conversation for this podcast.

My guest was Craig Dews, chief executive of LimeLight Sports Group, a sports marketing agency that unlocks the power of participation sport. Dews explained the journey that he and his business had been through from the point of realising that LimeLight needed to evolve, the process of business restructuring, rights acquisitions and latterly the launch of their new athlete platform - a very different approach to maximising the potential of its sector.

We talked in practical terms about how Dews' team have made the pandemic period one of deep productivity across their business, focusing on 'accelerating their plan'. Do listen to the podcast if you can. In the meantime, I've fleshed out the three key themes that stood out to me.

CONSULT WIDELY, THEN BE DECISIVE

Dews talked candidly about the signs that change was necessary. LimeLight was just starting to experience some very rare – for them – client churn. Clients wanted more for less, while delivery costs were increasing. At the same time, digitisation and growing market demand suggested opportunity. Senior leaders consulted with team members, friends of the business and trusted clients to think through how to revisit things.

The process of engaging the team was particularly critical for LimeLight. Like many sports organisations, it hires intrinsically motivated people who, as Dews says, “have a lot on their plate. To embrace change they have to understand why you’re doing it”. LimeLight worked hard with its team on the vision, guiding principles and values of the business – not only where they were going, but also how they aimed to behave and work together in getting there.

The result was what Dews described as LimeLight’s “boldest strategy yet”. LimeLight Sports Group was created to house an agency business and a technology practice, as well as a new entity acting as a rights owner, housing premium events. Dews himself stepped back from day-to-day operations by appointing a managing director for each business. Given the investment and change of accountabilities required, of course this entailed significant dialogue with the board and shareholders.

Ultimately, however, Dews believes that “key decisions need to be made by the leaders”. LimeLight has built a high-quality plan by blending wide consultation and co-creation with strong, decisive leadership prepared to make the tough calls.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Building a great strategy requires you to consult in three dimensions – up to shareholders, across your business and outside of it to gain an agnostic view. Blend this wide engagement with strong leadership to make the tough decisions.

LAUNCH FOR THE HEAD AND THE HEART

LimeLight thought hard about how to launch the strategy internally. Of course, the co-creation had been such that there were no big surprises for team members. Nevertheless, LimeLight saw significant value in “joining the dots” for members of them and reinforcing key priorities.

The business also created materials to cater for both heart and head, covering the initial launch, then through ongoing management. In addition to an emotive video to connect team members with the purpose and principles of the business, there were also harder documents created. More than just a business plan for the board, LimeLight also built tools to enable each individual business to track progress against the plan, as well as role profiles and performance review forms for the entire restructured team.

This process ensured that the whole business was lined up against the overall vision and business strategy from the top-down, but also from the bottom-up with regard to how every individual’s performance was measured, as well as rewarded. On the latter point, LimeLight ensured that performance reviews evaluated not only what individuals focused on, but also how they behaved to ensure they coalesced around the guiding value principles of the business.

IN A NUTSHELL:

A great strategy is only the start of the challenge. Start how you mean to go on by rolling out a suite of tools that will enable you to embed the new direction of travel.

BUILDING INTO THE MUSCLE OF THE BUSINESS (EVEN IN THE TOUGHER TIMES)

I am personally a big fan of the idea that you only know you’ve got a strategy when you can say no to things. As Dews says: “We’ve been offered so many opportunities in professional sport. But having a really clear vision and strategy really helps us focus.”

Strategic focus at a day-by-day level doesn’t just come from a job description, it needs to run through every key decision. LimeLight assembles its team weekly for half an hour to update each other on progress, as well as longer quarterly sessions. Employees work against individual business unit plans, the KPIs for which then feedback into the board reporting.

Naturally, this join-up has been seriously tested in recent months. While they did need to create a short-term ‘sprint’ to ensure survival as lockdown hit for the first time in Britain, since then Dews says that the businesses’ “strategy has accelerated”. Total clarity around priorities enabled team members to be swiftly refocused across the business, such as when LimeLight needed to speed up the development of its new membership offer. This meant tough decisions, such as furlough, could be made in the context of long-term planning rather than knee-jerk reaction. This maintained board and shareholder confidence as they could see the direction of travel remained steadfast.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Tough times challenge the delivery of any strategy. Stay focused on the long-term plan while communicating constantly with your team and key stakeholders to ensure you can navigate any short-term obstacles.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Have a clear vision. Create true believers. Be flexible.”

❖ STRATEGY

SETTING A VISION AND COMMITTING TO IT

“The team know that we have a deep level of respect for the work that they do. We are nothing without them.”

This podcast featured Paul Brown, the former pro snowboarder turned Innocent smoothies executive who started plant-based nutrition brand BOL Foods.

Brown revealed how his strategic approach of focusing on core principles inspired him to cut the company in half, the qualities he looks for in an investor, the things others see when they buy into your ideas, and why what you put into a project is as important as what you get out of it.



LISTEN NOW



Paul Brown
Founder and Chief Executive,
BOL Foods

WHEN A PURPOSE BECOMES A MISSION

There's a lot of nonsense talked about the importance of a purpose of a vision in business. As we learned from EDF Energy in the CEO Playbook, this only becomes powerful when it acts as a lens through which the whole business makes decisions, a 'strategic north star' as EDF's sales and marketing director Richard Hughes described it. I've never spoken to anyone who is as wedded to their business purpose as Paul.

BOL's purpose is: 'Inspire the world to eat more plants'. The logic seems pretty sound, not least as Brown explained: "The single biggest thing the United Nations say that any of us can do to address climate change is to adopt the principles of a plant-based diet" and the market is growing steadily as a result.

So far, it all seems pretty sensible, right? Well, what if half your revenue happens to be in meat and dairy? Brown talked candidly about why and how he shifted the purpose of his business entirely towards plant-based products, warning his team that they might not be able to survive the halving of their revenue. And yet suddenly, the business hit its stride. The emotive power of linking the purpose of the business to the future of the planet was really something to listen to.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Building a wider purpose into your business is fundamental. New generations of employees will expect more than 'business growth' and 'market share' as reasons to go the extra mile for you. You don't have to walk away from half your revenue to do this, but you do need a 'strategic north star' your entire team can get behind.

THE PASSION AND SCIENCE OF SALES

The counter-argument, of course, is that passion for your mission doesn't pay the bills. Actually, I think it does get you halfway there. In the early days of talking about the newly formed Two Circles, very few really understood our product, let alone why they needed it. It was really our energy and conviction that saw us invited to tell our story. After an early session at SportsPro Live, the chief executive of a global research firm told me: "Nobody will go for that, rights holders have no money and brands won't trust a sports agency with their data". We proved that person wrong by blending early client results with a messianic belief in what we were trying to achieve.

Similarly, Brown talked eloquently about the challenges of selling smoothies on his initial turf in Scotland and Northern England when he joined Innocent. Retailers weren't shy to tell him his product was 'overpriced' and the category would not take on. Just like in our Two Circles journey, Brown was looking for people to hear him out, and maybe take a chance on his product. As he started to approach the biggest retailers in the UK with his BOL range – Sainsbury's and co – his sell evolved to consist of both right and left-brain elements. He uses science to identify the specific customer need his products are fulfilling, but balances this with a sales team which shares his energy and belief in the product.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Successful selling as a challenger business comes from winning both hearts and minds. While we might all naturally be inclined to sell on one rather than the other, to win you need both.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

**“One life.
Smash it.
Enjoy the ride.”**

ENGAGING YOUR EXTENDED TEAM

Brown has a core team of 30, with many more working across his partner manufacturers who have responsibility for physically making the BOL product. Brown spends an awful lot of time at those partner sites, hoping to help them feel like an 'extended part of the team.' BOL use surprise and delight type gifts – water bottles, warm clothes and the like – to show empathy and care for those who have the hard yards jobs of picking vegetables in the fields or manning the largely manual production lines on their behalf, day after day. BOL work hard to link the extended workforce to the wider purpose of the business, so that they genuinely feel part of the mission. As Brown explained, "the team

know that we have a deep level of respect for the work that they do. We are nothing without them."

Sport, too, relies on an extended workforce. Whether it is a brand using agencies, rights holders using catering or security, or a mass participation race using volunteers as race marshals, the sporting economy relies on these people who are furthest away from the heart of our business, and yet ironically often have the most interactions with our customers. They can make or break the quality of the product we are delivering, and yet we do not always take sufficient time to help them feel part of the journey.

IN A NUTSHELL:

To borrow a motto from Brown's Nana: "Manners maketh the man". Treating your extended team as you would like to be treated yourself in any given role is fundamental to unlocking their discretionary care and effort. This often makes the difference between good and great customer experience.





BUSINESS PLANNING

**FUSE**

Louise Johnson
Chief Executive, Fuse

“What are we delivering not only for this commercial year but also our long-term ambition?”

Our subject for this edition of the podcast was business planning. It was December 2021, and one way or another pretty much the whole industry had part of their brain focused in that area.

If your financial year starts in January, by now you'll hopefully have set your focus across all the teams in your organisation and be ready to go on the 'B of the Bang'. If it's April, you might have run a few sessions with your team and tested the water with shareholders - maybe even submitted some initial numbers to them. It's a fluid process that often requires more than a little agility on behalf of the chief executive!

For this episode I was joined by Louise Johnson, the chief executive at Fuse, which provides marketing and commercial services to brands and rights holders in sport and entertainment.

I asked Johnson on specifically for this topic because of the scale of the business planning she has each year. Not only is she balancing the need to engage a talented, multinational employee base, but also plan in a way that works for her parent company. I know from going through the same process within WPP that's not an easy balance to strike.

**MAIN:**

Fuse works with blue-chip brands such as Japanese carmaker Nissan

STRATEGY LEADS THE NUMBERS, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND

It is very easy when you are building a business plan to start with the numbers you hope to achieve. The problem with that approach is that it can stop you considering the areas of your business – team retention, brand strength, customer conversion rates, for example – which will actually enable the financial result and may actually be more in your direct control.

Financial targets are outcome goals which should come as a result of the areas you are focusing on day in and day out – known as the process goals. Focus on the process goals and the financial outcome should take care of itself.

This framework is used widely in sports psychology – brilliantly described here by former Olympic swimmer-turned-coach Lizzie Simmonds: “Want to be the best swimmer in the world? It starts tomorrow morning with your application to your training session, your attitude towards your team mates and your interaction with your coach. It involves being smart with nutrition, developing psychological resilience and tactical experience. It comes down to

taking ownership of the choices you’re making on a day to day basis.

“It doesn’t mean just writing down on a piece of paper that you want to be the best swimmer in the world, and then hoping for the best. The process is the set of steps that will create the outcome.”

The other challenge with focusing on the numbers is it can also mean the planning process is too insular and fails to consider the changing external environment. This is very dangerous – many businesses have been caught focusing on a percentage point margin improvement while a competitor has shifted the competitive environment completely.

Neither of these are traps that Fuse falls into.

“We start in July although we don’t need to submit a plan [to Omnicom] until January,” Johnson explained. “We hold a board awayday looking at where we are as a business and where we need to get to based on market trends, what clients are asking us for and what we’re seeing from the competition as well. We also ask what’s gone well and

what hasn’t, where we’re profitable and where we aren’t.

“Ahead of that we also do a bunch of interviews with our clients as well. Just a quick phone call with five questions – things like what keeps them awake at night, what they think of Fuse as a business and where else we might be able to help. That’s such useful information for us.”

Work on the annual commercial plan begins a couple of months after the offsite, with a first cut presented to Omnicom in October. The strategy drives the numbers, rather than the other way around.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Look outside as well as inside your organisation when you plan. Think process over outcome.

TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Plan for the future but understand a business can change.”



LISTEN NOW

REAL CHANGE HAPPENS OVER MORE THAN A SINGLE YEAR

While Johnson is very focused on managing her business through the single business planning year – “we have a well-oiled machine,” she said – the fast paced and very cyclical nature of it can be both unrelenting and at risk of missing the wider opportunity.

“I always felt you got to the end of the year,” she continued, “and you think, ‘oh, thank goodness’, and then you get to 4th January and it’s ‘here we go again’. That doesn’t help longer-term strategy...or understanding what we’re trying to grow towards.”

To offset this, Johnson’s team also now build a long-term strategic plan – “where we want to be as a business in three years,” she explained – to help them see the single year’s plan in more context.

The biggest risk of big strategic plans (and I say this having been a strategy consultant in a former life!) is that they can quite quickly gather dust on a shelf. Johnson manages her own time in such a way as to ensure this doesn’t happen, scheduling “golden time” for herself to think about “what’s my long-term plan, what are we delivering not only for this commercial year but also our long-term ambition and vision? If you don’t think about that then you’re not going to evolve the business.”

That’s particularly true in areas like operational effectiveness which, as Johnson said, “can’t always happen as quickly as one year”. Really committing to long-term strategies like this this also relies on hard-wiring them into the DNA of the business and the daily lives of team members. Fuse makes sure it captures the language and spirit of the three-year strategy into the performance development plans of each employee.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Build a longer-term strategy alongside your annual plan.

CONSULTATION IS A CONSTANT

While the initial output of a business planning process might be a document to submit to shareholders or a presentation to the parent company, focusing on that output alone can mean you miss much of the opportunity involved in consultation – not only creating buy-in initially, but also continuing to vest team members, clients and so on in a deeper way with your business to last long after the plan has been submitted.

Fuse management work very hard internally to make sure that employees are vested in both the plan development and execution. For example, working with members of individual leadership teams to bring alive the board’s overall direction in their individual business pillar.

They also present back to the company every quarter around how the business is going against the plan: “What the strategy is and how we’re delivering against that – not just in terms of financials but product development, new business conversion, marketing and so on,” Johnson explained.

There is a real culture at Fuse of “trying to be as transparent as possible” across the organisation in informal settings, too. For example, Johnson shared the goals her boss holds her to with the entire business. Board members also open their diaries for weekly one-to-one sessions where team members can ask anything they wish about the business. That provides “quite useful reverse mentoring opportunities” to understand the business from the ground up, according to Johnson, who asks herself at the end of that session: “What can we be doing more for you, and what can we be doing more for the agency?”

The dialogue process also continues with clients through the year, having kick-started their planning process as part of the preparation for the July offsite.

“We find January is a good time to check in with them – how things are going for them, and to update them on the progress in our own strategy specifically as it relates to their own account team,” Johnson said.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Use the planning opportunity to vest all stakeholders in the business year-round.

 LEADERSHIP

FLEXING YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE



This episode was with Peter Moore, the former chief executive of English football giants Liverpool. Overseeing a period of major success, the club became European and Premier League champions, sweeping all before it as Moore was named Premier League CEO of the Year in 2019.

Impressive as that background in sports is, I was just as keen to understand more about Moore's time outside sport. After holding senior roles at Reebok, Microsoft and Sega, Moore was head of EA's Sports division between 2007 and 2011, thereafter becoming chief operating officer of EA until 2017 when he joined Liverpool.

Having left the club in 2020, Moore was named as an advisor to Wrexham AFC as the Welsh minnows were taken over in a high-profile move by Hollywood stars Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney. In January 2021 it was also announced that Moore was joining video games engine maker Unity as senior vice president and general manager of its sports and live entertainment division.

Put all this together, and Moore had an incredible range of experience to learn from. Moore has spent time leading the charge in video gaming from 'a cartridge sales business' to 'live services'. That's hugely relevant for the sports industry still confronting the reality that - in Moore's words - "you play twice a week 90 minutes, but your millions of fans are thinking about Liverpool Football Club around the globe 24/7...whether things are going well or not".



Peter Moore
Chief Executive,
Unity Games



HOW TO BUILD A FAN-FOCUSED ORGANISATION AT SCALE

Fans were at the heart of Moore's approach at the club. That's easy to say, to the extent it is almost a cliché in the sports business nowadays. But Moore's actions spoke louder than words. Not only with the investment of his own money in building a local foundation in Liverpool, his home town, but also a belief that fans have a right to understand the direction of the organisation. He presented the club strategy to 16 different fan groups around the world because "they need to hear from the CEO. You have an obligation". Just as importantly as presenting to them in a local pub, he also took questions from them, which gave him the chance to take the pulse of the organisation on a global scale.

There's more than pure benevolence at the heart of this strategy. As Moore said: "The cost of acquisition of a new fan is much higher than retaining an existing one. You have to build a substantive platform of support that is immune to winning and losing". Ultimately fan-first thinking is the only way to build a sustainable business model. As Moore remarked, "if you lose sight of that and focus on what is good for the entity rather than your fans, it's a pretty slippery slope".

So how do you combine global and local objectives? Moore describes his approach at Liverpool as building a club with a "local heart and a global pulse". It's very difficult to build a club with deep connections with fans around the world unless you're close to your homeland. In fact, Liverpool fans overseas continually told Moore they longed to visit Anfield, rather than watch Liverpool play. You cannot divorce the community from the club, the global pulse from the local heartbeat, and therein lies the magic of the club.

IN A NUTSHELL:

There is a solid business argument to build a fan-focused organisation. Great retention is the bedrock of smooth growth. To get that right, you have to start with your closest fans.

"You have to build a substantive platform of support that is immune to winning and losing."



HOW TO REBUILD A BUSINESS WITH PATIENCE AND CARE

Although success has followed throughout Moore's career, he's been involved in the odd rebuilding project. During his time at EA in 2011 and 2012, the company's stock price was less than ten per cent of what it is today. Moore cited the "massive change in the business" as it moved away from physical disks to direct-to-consumer (DTC) networks.

When at EA, Moore and his chief executive were very clear with the team they were leading around the direction the business was taking and what it was going to take to succeed. This meant being frank with shareholders and holding firm through the tough times, "building a long term strategy and sticking to it". EA decided to invest for two years in infrastructure and identified its primary customer as the gamer. This was a seismic shift for the company – since inception it had been selling to retailers, the Wal-Marts, Targets and Games of this world. It had to bite the bullet and re-work its entire model to go DTC, with all its implications.

The story of Liverpool's acquisition by Fenway Sports Group (FSG) in 2010 was very similar. Moore said of the club's owner: "[FSG] saw an organisation that was distressed and in real trouble – not too far from administration – they acquired the club and invested patient capital. They will go through the thick and thin". Investment in the infrastructure of the stadium, top class management, the UK£50 million training centre and so on has followed, with Moore claiming FSG is "never taking a penny" from the club to create a global property that fits well into its portfolio. FSG's reinvestment process is ongoing, with a focus on building the global technology platform necessary to provide the always-on, global connection between fans and their club.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Pivoting a business away from its current direction takes care and patience. Patient capital and the long-term support of stakeholders are both fundamental in successful navigation of the change.

HOW TO CREATE FOCUS AND ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN A TALENTED TEAM

When the leadership team at EA announced the change of direction to staff, they painted a realistic vision of what lay ahead. Moore recalled: "The CEO said: 'This might not be for you, this is going to be difficult...but this is what we are going to do. It's going to be choppy waters. It'll be great at the end but you've got to believe in me.' It took four years to do that."

One implication of this change was turnover in the team. As Moore explained: "A lot of people either disagreed with the direction or their skill sets weren't suitable to go to the next stage to be part of a networked company that delivered video games as its product."

Of course, this turnover of people needs doing carefully. Often the most talented find it easiest to move of their own volition. Talent in video gaming can be just as precious as that on the football pitch. "Exec producers of a gaming studio can create games that can generate US\$500 million to US\$1 billion," said Moore, "so you have to take care of those people." It takes real emotional intelligence to lead high-performing talent, according to Moore, who said "those can be interesting individuals and absolutely know what they're worth, just like players."

That doesn't mean the chief executive needs to do everything, however. Moore believes that clear accountability is fundamental between the business and on-pitch performance. "At Liverpool I was responsible for everything that made football happen until the whistle went. We were all very clear in our lanes of what we needed to do. For a CEO to get involved in managing the player side of the business, I don't believe it's a great use of their time."



IN A NUTSHELL:

Be clear with your team on what the future might hold, for good and bad. Vest them in the journey, and keep accountabilities clear.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

**"Local heart,
global pulse.
With hope in
your heart."**

 LEADERSHIP

LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

“Sometimes people need a strong motivation for change. It does require a lot of convincing.”

This episode of the podcast focused on leading through tough times. In my view, this is the most important skill of any business leader in sport in 2021. It is hard, stressful work that requires not only individual resilience, but also the ability to maintain the collective belief of a whole organisation and its stakeholders.

My guest was Andrea Gaudenzi, former top 20 tennis player, entrepreneur and now chairman of the ATP. Gaudenzi's appointment in October 2019 immediately presented a bold and unified vision for tennis, but one which required significant change from a traditionally conservative sport.



LISTEN NOW



Andrea Gaudenzi
Chairman, ATP Tour



CREATING A BOLD VISION FOR CHANGE

After his career in tennis, Gaudenzi spent time in gaming, music and financial services. Those experiences were pivotal in inspiring his creation of a very different vision for the future of tennis.

Gaudenzi took inspiration from the music industry's ability to shift its business model. "They got together and worked out how to be customer-first in their approach. When Steve Jobs said let's provide a song for US\$0.99, everyone said: 'Are you crazy?' Now nearly half a billion people pay a monthly subscription in music." Likewise in social gaming, he spent time working in a sector that excelled at customer analytics.

Those experiences framed Gaudenzi's view for the future for tennis, starting with how fans want to consume the sport, then working back to what that means for the governance and structure of the sport today. Now he is looking to build an offer "enriched by data and digital". This requires a mindset shift from the sport. "We compete with gaming, music, Netflix and Spotify. Instead of spending 90 per cent of our time fighting over the pie, let's try to grow it."

Gaudenzi's bold and different vision for tennis leant on successful shifts which have been made in related sectors. This helped him marry bold ambition with proof points to create confidence in the direction he wanted to take the sport.

IN A NUTSHELL:

When building a vision for the future, take inspiration and learning from progressive industries or businesses that have successfully navigated similar challenges.

BUILD TRUST AMONG YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

It is early days for the ATP's change agenda, yet Gaudenzi's approach to date demonstrates some key ways in which leaders can build trust.

Gaudenzi is realistic about the obstacles which he faces. The first part of his challenge is to persuade the sport to change despite the current lack of a burning platform. As he says: "Music was changed by a catalyst event that made people change when Napster started undercutting CDs. Sometimes people need a strong motivation for change. Despite our flaws, tennis is actually doing well. If [we do not change now] we will be forced to do it in ten to 16 years anyhow. It does require a lot of convincing."

This starts, of course, with trust. And trust cannot be created without full transparency in dealings with both players and tournaments. Gaudenzi very honestly admits that the problem tennis has is that the relationship between the players and tournaments "lacks trust".

Another key step in driving greater trust and empathy has been to try to enable more regular communication among all key stakeholders. For example, the ATP board alone has had a significant change of cadence from long-form meetings at the Grand Slams to shorter meetings one or two times a week.

It is no surprise that this increased meeting cadence has driven a faster pace of change. Gaudenzi says the ATP has made more changes in the last 18 months than in the previous 20 years.

Of course, convincing everyone to "let go of control for the greater good" is not easy, and Gaudenzi sees a "progressive way" to achieve it. Initially, he is looking to drive positive momentum through a change in cadence of communication coupled with increased transparency across the sport.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Look to build trust in challenging relationships by identifying opportunities to increase transparency in the way you work. Support this with an increased cadence of conversation.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

**"Be bold.
Build trust.
Stay focused."**



MANAGING YOUR FOCUS AND ENERGY WHEN TIMES GET TOUGH

Gaudenzi's chairmanship began with strategic fanfare but was soon dragged into 'day to day crisis management'. Initially, that was with the bushfires at the Australian Open, which came just three months into his tenure and thereafter the global pandemic. The ensuing months have been hugely challenging for a global tour heavily driven by ticketing revenue.

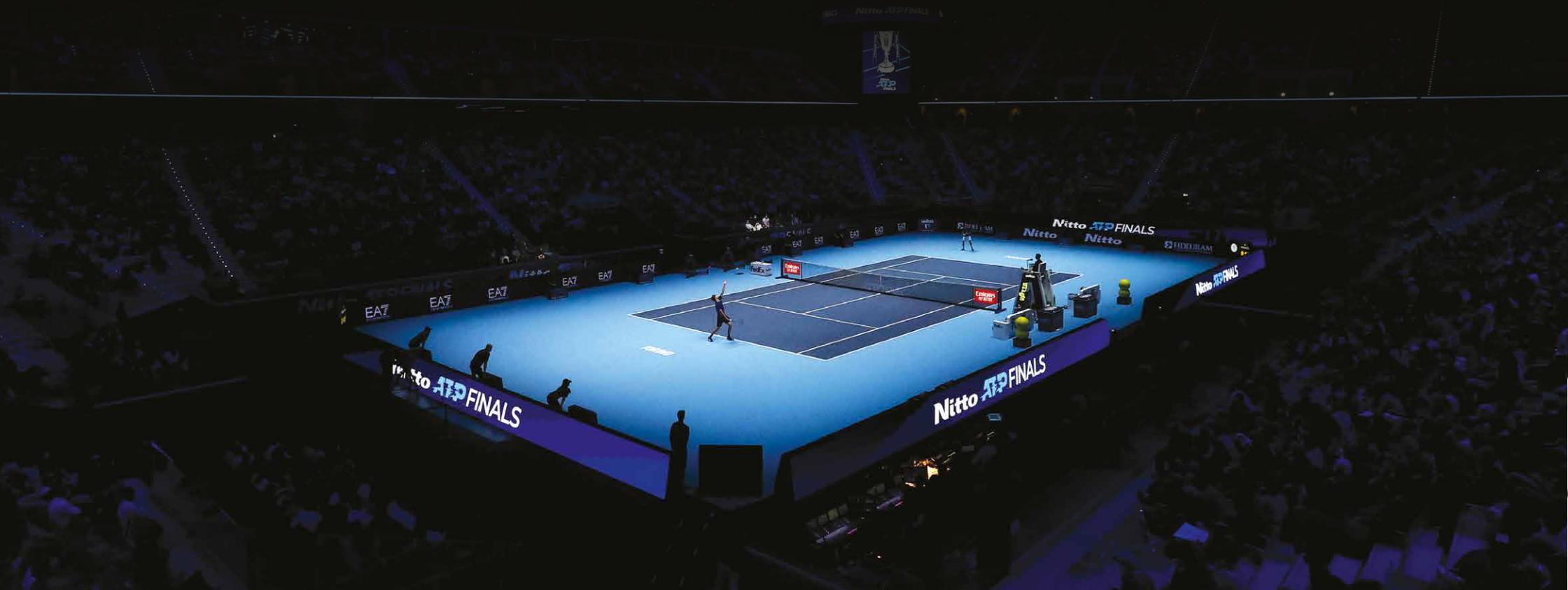
Having total clarity in his role has been fundamental for Gaudenzi to manage his focus over this time. "You have to have a clear strategy that has been signed off and believe that is the right path," he said. "Then you have to stop listening to the noise, never losing sight of the future, while managing the day-to-day – no matter

how challenging that might be." Even though progress might be incremental, belief ultimately comes by inching the organisation closer to the end game.

Exercise also plays a key role for Gaudenzi in managing himself through the stresses of change leadership. He says: "I need one hour's sport a day for my mental sanity." Personally, I find exactly the same. Exercise gives me the physical relaxation and mental clarity I need to sustain my mental energy, as well as stress management, through a tough working day. It might not be exercise that does the trick for you – but try to find another all-consuming to complement your work. A change really can be as good as a rest.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Proactively manage your own focus and energy by keeping sight of your end goal. No matter how tough today might feel, use external influences like exercise to stay balanced and productive.



 LEADERSHIP

LEADING IN AN ENTREPRENEURIAL ENVIRONMENT

“You’re you’re either being too nice or you’re being a bitch. It’s really difficult.”



LISTEN NOW



This episode of the podcast focused on how to lead in an entrepreneurial environment. My guest was Emily Frazer, the hugely impressive managing director of Matchroom Multi Sport.

During the conversation Frazer explained how Matchroom’s entrepreneurial approach runs through the DNA of the entire business, and how she has developed her own leadership style to reflect that environment.

I’ve tried to pull out three things that I found particularly useful from our conversation - but I’d really recommend you take time to listen if you can. We all need to think a little more like an entrepreneur these days as we look to build our businesses back.

Emily Frazer

Managing Director, Matchroom Multi Sport



CUTTING THROUGH (WITHOUT BETTING THE HOUSE)

Very few entrepreneurs start off life with a captive market. Many are building products or services customers don't yet know they actually need. That's not easy, because budgets are often necessarily tight when testing ideas where the probability of success is by no means guaranteed.

So it is for Matchroom Multi Sport. Pool, fishing, gymnastics and tenpin bowling do not necessarily generate huge audiences organically, as Frazer admitted. "We are niche and don't naturally draw in big crowds. So we have to make our events spectacular for a casual sports fan."

Matchroom owns and manages its events end-to-end, which enables it to test and learn, constantly adding new touches to reinvent the sports the promoter is presenting to try to reach into new mainstream audiences.

That sounds expensive, right? Well, no. My favourite example from the podcast was the 'double point buzzer' – a UK£500 last-minute brainwave that Frazer's team created to add a bit of emotion around to a new 'double point' wildcard concept in Matchroom's ping pong event. It worked – both on TV and in the arena itself – to the extent the prop has now become a staple of Matchroom's netball events as well.

Matchroom has used the same approach with the old school bats they use. This deliberately low tech move makes the rallies longer to watch, and creates clear differentiation from the Olympic form of the game. Austerity can often be the mother of invention for entrepreneurial businesses, as it forces you to think differently.

As we know from the film and entertainment industry, spend and impact are not always correlated. Early reality show Big Brother is a good example. Relative to most entertainment programming, the production cost of the content per hour was extremely low. Talent was unknown and so cheap, filming took place in a single location, often with remote cameras. Critically different content ideas in the shows themselves could be tested at will, because there was so much time to fill. Production company Endemol, just like Matchroom, could play with their format until it worked without betting the house.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Great innovation tests and learns on a budget.



USE PEOPLE YOU TRUST TO HELP YOU PROGRESS FASTER

You can get a sense from the buzzer story of the attitude which permeates Matchroom and the way in which Frazer has learned to lead. The pragmatic, no-nonsense attitude is so key in making things happen quickly. When hiring for Two Circles I used to look for people that I'd want to be on a football pitch with me at 2-0 down with 15 minutes to go, playing into a howling wind. In an entrepreneurial environment there's just no role for anything else.

Frazer told a story about couriering Covid tests to labs herself in order to ensure an event continued when the courier company let her team down. That's the mindset that's needed in an entrepreneurial business – and it starts with the boss.

Frazer learned those ropes from Matchroom's director of programming Katie Hearn, who has acted as a mentor for her for the 11 years she has been at Matchroom. When a business is taking off, having someone to offer honest, timely feedback can be so critical to learning quickly as you go.

For Frazer, one of the toughest areas to get her head around was balancing her own leadership style. "When I was growing in this role, you're not sure how to deal with some situations because you're either being too nice or you're being a bitch. It's really difficult, it takes a long time to learn."

She's now happy to pay it forward and help other women experiencing the same challenges break "through the glass ceiling together".

In order to break through any glass ceiling you often need others to lend you few power tools. In my experience, timely feedback from someone you trust is the most powerful of those.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Leaning on others is a sign of strength.

BUILD BELIEF THROUGH SELF-TALK

Leading an entrepreneurial business is a major test. If you need one thing, it's belief – not only in your business, but also in yourself. As an entrepreneur, you're often doing things for the first-time day after day, in particular if the business is growing quickly. A former boss of mine, Olympic gold medallist Adrian Moorhouse, shared his favourite quote with me from his training days: "If you follow in the footsteps of somebody, you'll never overtake them." But making your own path isn't easy, particularly if you're not completely sure where you're heading.

When most people hit a level in business, imposter syndrome bites. I've had mild versions several times in my career, as has Frazer. She recommended having "a few words with yourself in the mirror", often going with "you're a badass bitch and you've got this". They're not exactly the words I use, but the sentiment is the same. As Frazer said: "What's the worst that can happen?"

IN A NUTSHELL:

Actively build your own belief.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

"Don't give up on yourself."



❖ LEADERSHIP

LEADING AND MANAGING A SERVICE BUSINESS

“We’re looking for a few core traits that mean people embrace the freedom and the opportunity.”

As an industry we spend an awful lot of time examining the inner workings of rights holders, and brands too. But very rarely do we ask ourselves what goes on underneath the bonnet of an agency or service firm.

I figured it would be useful for all of us to know a bit more - after all, we either work in businesses like these or rely on them. So for this podcast, I chatted to Daniel Geey and Andrew Nixon of Sheridans, a technology, media and sport-based law firm.



LISTEN NOW

Daniel Geey & Andrew Nixon
Sheridans Sports

SHERIDANS





“You have to be able to think beyond the confines of your technical delivery.”

THE CHALLENGE OF WORKING ON AND IN THE BUSINESS

Running a service firm is a dual responsibility. Unless your business is extremely mature you need to work in the business as a very senior client-facing person. However, you also have to work on it. After all, a service firm or agency needs just as much care and attention in terms of strategy, operations, team leadership, financial management and marketing as any other.

“As a leader you are constantly juggling fee earning with the need of driving the business forward,” said Nixon. “Whether that be through business development or working on existing relationships. Striking that balance is never easy and rarely achieved, particularly when you’re often the first port of call for the client but at the same time you also have broader responsibilities.”

This is not an easy balance. As the most senior lawyers in the firm, partners inevitably have the thorniest client problems land on their desk. However, they also have to be blue sky thinkers and business builders. As Nixon explained: “You have to be able to think beyond the confines of your technical delivery if you’re going to build any kind of successful practice.”

Becoming “comfortable with juggling” is not easy, as I know from personal experience. Geey recommended [the work of Paul Graham](#). Graham writes about the fact he ‘wouldn’t want to do something that he wouldn’t want to spend all his time doing’, which is just as well when, as Nixon said, “sport is 24/7, constant and forever”.

On the one hand, Geey recognises the “slight obsessiveness” and passion for sport that creates the intrinsic desire to confront the challenge. On the other, you have to be able to switch off somehow.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Leading a service firm is an unavoidable juggling act. You have to love the journey, and make sure you’re getting sufficient downtime.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

Nixon:

“Investment in people, investment in people, investment in people.”

DEVOLVING LEADERSHIP TO SHARE THE LOAD

So is there anything you can do to manage this? Well, Sheridans have had real success with an empowering form of leadership that looks to provide safe opportunities for team members to stretch themselves into working on the business, too. As Nixon explained: "Everyone here has a leadership role. What that means is that those coming through will be well equipped to take the business forward and do the things we weren't necessarily trained to do when the business started out."

This approach complements the increasing desire among newer generations to explore new avenues and develop skills as they work. The industry has had to evolve as a result. "The mindset used to be of a binary route to partnership," said Nixon. "The industry has changed and needed to change. That should open up different avenues for talented people to explore."

Of course, you cannot develop leaders unless you get the recruitment right in the first place. Sheridans has put an incredible amount of time into getting the blend of its team right in terms of attitude and preferences, not just core skill sets. Geey explained that Sheridans went through a "really extensive process" around the personality types in its team to figure out who the firm wanted to bring into the group.

"They have to buy into our vision and be a certain type of personality," said Geey. "We have to be confident to be ready to use the platform and responsibility they will get. We're not looking for a Sheridans type, we're looking for a few core traits that mean people embrace the freedom and the opportunity."

IN A NUTSHELL:

One route out of the daily juggle is to devolve leadership. It takes time and careful recruitment, but can create an entire team of business leaders, business developers as well as excellent client advisors.

GROWTH THROUGH QUALITY

We also had a fascinating conversation about business development vs delivery. As I said in the pod, in nine years leading Two Circles I think there were only three or four months where we had exactly the right amount of work for people in the company. Geey finds that a common issue: "You're never on balance, the best you can hope for is that you're covering your bases both ways."

Geey's approach to driving growth is extremely structured. "I try to have ten or 15 meetings, calls and follow-ups every week regardless of what my billable hours look like. I use a piece of software that allows me to track and measure that. I have to ask myself: 'What am I doing with these relationships?'"

"We also want to be business partners – 'thinking about you and the opportunities and networks we can connect you with' – so when things crop up, we're in their vicinity. The best things happen when you've listened hard, understood the business model and made a connection which works right."

Of course, the best way to drive business forward is to deliver consistently world class work, not least because client retention is fundamental in service businesses. Starting the month with the overheads and salaries already covered by booked work is a far less stressful way to live and gives a prospect of growth. The kind of client intimacy Geey describes is fundamental to being able to see down the tracks and head off any issues before they become retention risks, or indeed capitalise on any opportunities that might be emerging.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Business development needs preparation, structure and planning. The best way to start is ensuring the quality of delivery and care for current clients is excellent.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

Geey:

"Tangible relationship building leading to positive outcomes"

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❖ PEOPLE & TALENT

BUILDING TALENT SYSTEMS



John Deadman
Director of Sport
and C-Curricular,
Dr. Challoner's
Grammar School

“If you look after the masses, the trophies will look after themselves.”

If there was ever a tired adage that needed consigning to history it is 'those who can't do, teach'. Anyone who has ever observed closely knows that educators, especially in the public sector, do more with less than virtually any other profession.

This episode was with John Deadman, director of sport and co-curricular activity at the UK state-funded Dr Challoner's Grammar School, Amersham. I asked him to join me on the podcast as I've watched him achieve miracles in recent years against the backdrop of tight budgets, generational shifts and so much more.

Deadman has overseen a revolution in the provision of sport at Dr Challoner's, which teaches ages 11 to 16 for boys and is co-ed thereafter. During his tenure, the school has dramatically increased the number of students participating in sport and the performance of its senior teams. The work put in by Deadman, and the rest of the staff, culminated in Dr Challoner's being voted the best state school for sport in the UK last year and ranking inside the top ten for all schools - alongside independent schools with significantly more resources and facilities than those that he has at his disposal.

So how has he done all that?

SUSTAIN SUCCESS BY FOCUSING ON THE PROCESS OVER THE OUTCOME

Being voted the best in the UK doesn't happen overnight, in particular when your most 'senior' sporting role models in the school move on to pastures new at the end of each year. In actual fact reaching number one was never Deadman's objective particularly. He told me he was prouder of the system which underpinned that outcome.

He has focused on driving participation across the school, counting the number of 'C' team players representing the school each year rather than the trophies delivered by the highest performers. Ultimately Deadman believes that: "If you look after the masses, the trophies will look after themselves. You need mass participation to encourage excellence amongst your top performers and teams. We may not even make the 'Top 200' schools nationwide next year but that doesn't mean we'll have lowered our drive and energy levels; nor the expectation of high standards amongst every student through sport at DCGS."

Deadman's focus is on the process goals – mass participation, the engagement of his team and so on – rather than the outcome goal of a great ranking for the school. Outcome goals are the result you'd like to achieve, and process goals as the processes you aim to follow to achieve that result. As leaders we often say our job is to control the

"You need mass participation to encourage excellence amongst your top performers and teams."

controllable – the processes that (more often than not) will lead to success. Focusing on process over the outcome is often attributed with greater levels of sustained success on and off the pitch, as [this blog](#) by Lizzie Simmonds, former European champion and Olympic swimmer, explains in more detail.

This is not just an approach that works on the pitch. At Two Circles we build our business plans on a balanced scorecard process, setting ourselves process goals for our team, clients, internal structures and market innovation. Just like Deadman, we took the view that if we focused on those four components, our financial results would look after themselves.

IN A NUTSHELL:

To drive sustained performance improvements, deliver on your process goals and let the end results take care of themselves.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

"Success is something you attract by the person you become."

DOING MORE WITH LESS: BUILDING FOLLOWERSHIP AND A CULTURAL CODE

Providing a constant diet of sport and exercise to 1,300 students is no mean feat when budgets stretch to six full-time PE teachers. Let alone running more than 100 extra-curricular teams across the school in a diverse range of sports. That's where Deadman's ability to drive followership and discretionary effort among teachers and parents alike to support his vision has become so critical.

Deadman managed to inspire a number of teachers and parents to give up their time to support the efforts of his permanent team. He makes sure that if they're going to give time up, they feel like their effort is valued. So, for example, he might get them a North Face jacket to keep them warm and dry while they coach a team through the winter. A jacket is a relatively small investment but it conveys the message that the volunteer's time is highly valued.

Deadman also focused on empowerment. His mindset is that "unless someone has fundamentally told you not to do something, get on with it.....work with what you have, don't worry about what you don't". In combination, this creates a culture where Deadman has an extended workforce of over 20 not only feeling valued, but also encouraged to take ownership.

Of course, the risk with this is that enthusiastic volunteers can run off in any direction. That's where having some clear cultural signposts comes in. Deadman has a firm idea of the culture he wants to create – a common process and approach for staff, volunteers and students alike. He describes this as one of "respect, resilience, confidence, humility and absolutely no arrogance". Having visited Deadman at school and watched some of the training sessions for students, this culture is signposted throughout the department...and called out when any outliers are noticed.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Build followership in an extended team who buy into a common cultural code, but then give them space to make things happen.

LISTEN BEFORE YOU TALK TO LEAD NEXT GENERATIONS

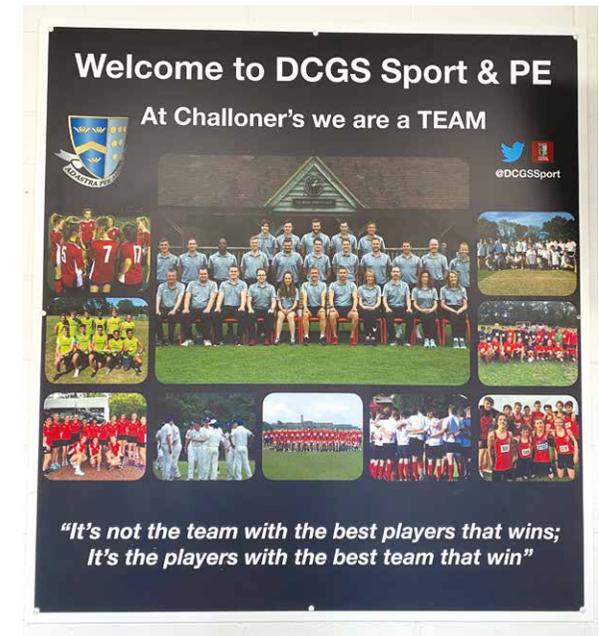
April 2021 was an interesting time to talk to Deadman about the school's sports department, as like all schools it had been stretched to the extremes of its capability by the Covid-19 pandemic. Challoner's is an academic school. Deadman believes this means sport and exercise is all the more important for students as exercise increases productivity. As they have become co-ed their range of sports offered has broadened to include, for example, netball and yoga, but the philosophy is identical. Activity enables academic productivity.

Deadman talked very interestingly about the new generations of students he is engaging with. Rather than rail against phone-based downtime (whether for his students or his own two teenage daughters) he encourages those in his care to be thoughtful around how they structure their work and relaxation in order to be at their best in either setting.

Deadman's philosophy leading these new generations is based on 'three Ls': looking, listening and learning. He does not look to assert either authority or experience, rather he looks to coach by aiming to tap into the intrinsic motivation of those who he leads. He doesn't tell his sixth form yoga class they have to do the session on any given day, rather he asks them to imagine how they'll feel afterwards.

IN A NUTSHELL:

If you create a culture where people can discover exercise on their own terms, you can be confident that their productivity and performance will speak for itself. New generations need you to listen before you talk.



❖ PEOPLE & TALENT

HOW TO SHAPE AND INFLUENCE CULTURE



LISTEN NOW

 OliverWyman

Tony Simpson

Partner, Oliver Wyman



Our subject for this episode was building a high performance culture. It's quite a hot topic at the moment, so what actually is it?

Well, I can tell you how it feels. I think you can sense a high performance culture the minute you meet a company. You can feel the collective energy. You can sense it's one team playing a match, not 11 individuals doing their thing in silos. There's pressure, but not stress. A good level of focus, but also plenty of smiles.

But can we make it any more tangible than that? Let's see. Previously we talked to John Deadman, director of sport at Dr Challoner's Grammar School, on what it takes to build this kind of culture. Deadman talked about building cultural codes and a listening culture, valuing attitude as well as aptitude.

Building on those thoughts, this podcast looked at the subject from the perspective of one of the world's leading international management consulting firms, Oliver Wyman. I spoke to Tony Simpson, a partner in the communications, media and technology, and organisational effectiveness practices. Simpson has held a variety of leadership and board roles in sports and media businesses in Europe and the Middle East, advising corporates and governments on business transformation, corporate structure and executive alignment.

OPTIMALLY PERFORMING BUSINESSES ARE DIVERSE, CHALLENGING PLACES

Rather than 'high performance organisations', Simpson prefers the phrase 'optimally performing'. That's not just semantics but relates to the fact that 'performance' is really the outcome of a number of related enablers. As Simpson described it, "good organisational effectiveness drives effective culture. Good culture drives performance. Performance drives success, fiscal or otherwise."

For that reason, we focused much of our conversation on the enablers to high performance – organisational effectiveness and culture. Simpson described optimal cultures as being inclusive places, where teams perform together recognising that a diverse set of skills and backgrounds are needed for success – much like a cricket team, for example. They are also psychologically safe places, where leaders can take risks and challenge each other. For that reason, they're also not necessarily comfortable places to be, in particular at board level. As Simpson explained: "Diversity of thought can be abrasive – it does require board members to trust each other."

The abrasion is very necessary because of the change journey that sport is on.

"The biggest challenge organisations like Oliver Wyman have with their clients is to create inclusive, meritocratic organisations that will enable everyone to have a voice," Simpson explained. "That's important because sport now is a content business. If you don't understand what sport is going to want or need, you'll be out of business very quickly."

The stark challenge is to make sure that the talent mix reflects where the sport is going, not where it has been – and to do so at pace.

Simpson described several focus areas for companies to quickly develop the diverse mix of talent required to drive efficiency and effectiveness of thought. He has seen several organisations increase the number of independent non-executive directors permitted in their organisations to broaden access to the board, as well as focus on welcoming younger board members with a better understanding of the future direction of the organisation.

After all, as Simpson said: "Any organisation that doesn't do that kind of thing has a huge problem coming down the tracks. Guess what? 50 per cent of the world's population is under 25! Mark Zuckerberg was quite capable of running Facebook at that age."

Simpson also advocates using technology to make sure that board meetings can be conducted in a way that suits a wider group of potential members. Not everyone can be in London for a three-hour meeting starting at 9am every two months.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Start with the enablers – efficient and diverse thinkers across your organisation.

"Diversity of thought can be abrasive – it does require board members to trust each other."



UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR SUCCESS AND SKILLS MAY DATE FROM ANOTHER ERA

The challenge with an industry moving so quickly is that leaders who have reached senior roles have probably done so by virtue of having success in a very different era. Hard as it may be for some of us to hear, Simpson pulled no punches.

"Some of the best performing sport organisations - whether they are federations, media groups or media houses - are run by people who grew up in the industry when it was chinos and Oxford shirts," he said. "Even though many of those people have been hugely successful, times have changed."

Whisper it quietly, but some of our skills may be out of date. That's not necessarily terminal, however.

I managed to run Two Circles without being able to code. That's because, in Simpson's mind, by the time you reach chief executive, "great leaders in business aren't hired on skills, they're hired on attributes - how you behave under stress, how you can perform through change, how you manage people and how you handle failure. There are no right or wrong attributes - but those you have are inherent."

Simpson believes that for senior leaders who might be slightly longer in the tooth, it's "time to de-learn some of the things you've learned so far."

"Lean on your attributes and trust your gut," he added. "It's a really hard thing to do and you need to be psychologically safe to do it. We talk about learning and failing fast. As a leader, pick a team to try new approaches. Keep going and trying until you're confident enough."

Developing yourself in this way is also not a test - just being naturally curious about the work your team is doing is half the battle. Simple things - like walking through an office asking team members what they're working on - can really help. Tony's view is that "curiosity aligned with leadership aligned with high EQ will keep you running a company for as long as you like."

IN A NUTSHELL:

You may need to be the first to change!

PROACTIVELY THINK THROUGH HOW TO MOVE THE OIL TANKER

The change required from sporting organisations - to move from administrators to content houses - is significant. There's no hiding from that.

"Some organisations we know are trying to grapple with how they move the tanker round," Simpson told me. "It has to happen. You have to be prepared to be vulnerable as a business in order to harness and ride the change that's happening."

Leaders need to be strategic in the way that they communicate and cascade the need for change, which Simpson said often requires them to "use their EQ as much as their IQ".

"It's about 150 people that you as a leader can personally have an influence on," he added. "The trick is how you keep that core essence and scale without losing what got you there in the first place. That's about your own behaviour, trust and using allies."

One thing that sport has in its favour versus other industries is the pace of change versus, for example, financial services or healthcare.

"In sport we can fail fast and learn from it," Simpson said. "You can't do that if you're running a challenger bank."

Innovation and taking calculated risks is therefore key.

"One thing people need to have coming into a content driven organisation is to make sure everyone has a voice, and recognise everything won't be right first time," Simpson pointed out. "Otherwise you'll strangle the creativity. Learning from mistakes often creates the new product in the organisation going forward."

IN A NUTSHELL:

Driving change requires you to win hearts as well as minds.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

"Build resilience and diversity to drive optimal impact and performance."

❖ INNOVATION & GROWTH

INNOVATING AN ORGANISATION STEEPED IN TRADITION

GOODWOOD

Tracey Greaves

Chief Commercial Officer, Goodwood;
Chief Executive, Kinrara



LISTEN NOW

For those of you who don't know, Goodwood it is an iconic English estate, home to six sports - horse racing (including the Glorious Goodwood meeting), motorsport (with the Festival of Speed, Members' Meeting and Revival Festival topping the bill), golf, aviation, cricket and shooting.

That's not all, however. The 12,000-acre estate also includes a hotel, health club, restaurants, a private members' club, an organic farm and an awful lot more. In fact, there are 27 different businesses with their own P&L operating within the Goodwood Group.

This podcast was with Tracey Greaves, Goodwood's chief commercial officer and the chief executive of Kinrara at the Goodwood Group. All those strands create quite the management challenge for Greaves, so I wanted to understand how she balances her time between these divergent priorities. Additionally, I wanted to hear how she has managed to develop Goodwood's reputation for innovation while staying true to its heritage and values.



YOU NEED BOTH CUSTOMER OBSESSION AND FINANCIAL SMARTS TO DRIVE SUCCESSFUL INNOVATION

Goodwood has long maintained a privileged position of influence in terms of the sports it hosts. Events like the Festival of Speed are well known for pushing the boundaries on innovation. In 2017, for example, the team launched FOS Future Lab, which looked into the future far beyond the realms of motorsport.

This is typical of Goodwood's approach to innovation. As Greaves said: "As long as you stay true to your brand values, I don't think you can go far wrong. Push to innovate as far as you can...you can always rein it in a bit."

That is not to say that innovation is in any way reckless. Greaves described to me how it needs to be deep-rooted in an understanding of the current and potential audience (they "agonise about the customer journey"). The trick is to balance this with intensive financial interrogation and modelling. This is no time for innovation for innovation's sake – as Greaves said: "Post Covid, there is even more rigour there".

Goodwood is rolling out this customer and finance-led approach to innovation by launching a new business, Kinrara, to industrialise its innovation efforts outside of Goodwood. Encouraged by inbound enquiries from existing clients, Greaves is leading the new organisation to co-create innovative new businesses that sit off-site. Her team blend right and left brain, brand and balance sheet, to co-create experiences just as innovative as the Future Lab at Festival of Speed. They're not passion projects, they're profit centres.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Successful innovation in a post-Covid era comes down to satisfying not only current and future customers, but also the bank manager. This is a learned skill, not something to leave to chance.

"As long as you stay true to your brand values, I don't think you can go far wrong."



GET THE BEST OUT OF INTERDEPENDENT BUSINESSES BY FOCUSING ON THE COMMONALITIES

Of course, many sports businesses consist of several different business models in one, but I've never heard of 27 P&Ls in one rights holder. As Greaves said, she's "never worked in a more complicated business".

While the businesses are managed via separate P&Ls, in practice Goodwood's magic depends on the give and take between them as they "work as one all year round". For example, the farm has to manage its crop schedules around the dates motor racing events will need to use fields for customer parking.

This significant prioritisation process starts with the customer. Greaves wants guests to "feel a certain way when they come to Goodwood" – whatever experience they are joining for. This means that as many areas as possible of the detail behind the experience are utterly consistent. For example, the coffee beans, machinery and barista training that goes into delivering a consistently excellent cup of coffee is hugely important, whether a guest is at breakfast in the hotel or watching the motor racing.

The risk, of course, is that a focus on consistency of quality can take away the personal touch. This is where Goodwood enable their team to be themselves and show their respective passions. Customer-focused flexibility on consistent foundations, if you like.

IN A NUTSHELL:

When your business is made up of several interdependent revenue lines, focus on the consistencies which must underpin the quality of the customer experience. When your hygiene factors are exceptional, the super serving comes from providing the personal touch.

GO THE EXTRA MILE TO SUSTAIN GROWTH IN PREMIUM EXPERIENCE

Premium experience products like all those Goodwood has to offer were changing fast even before the pandemic. Greaves sees those trends amplified in recent months and feels that "Covid has proved there is a lot of life to live, and that people want to dive in and experience things".

Greaves feels that premium experiences are becoming "more relaxed but also more content driven". However, "a more relaxed experience does not mean that the attention to detail is any lower". Brands still need to "tell great stories". Goodwood's view is that, "if it is not perfect, we are simply not doing it."

Greaves believes digital has a key role to play in amplifying and perhaps lengthening the enjoyment of a premium experience, but it will not replace the chance to experience something in person. Digital can offer a great Petri dish for testing new premium experiences before committing to the expense and exposure of a physical event, as well as playing a pivotal role in selling premium experiences where the challenge to drive repeat purchase year-on-year is particularly stark.

I certainly recognise the changes that Greaves identifies in the conversations I have with rights holders. After the pandemic, I think we can expect to see a polarisation of the event market into economic value-based packages and very premium offers, which will remain robust. Many sectors find that when times get tough the market polarises in this way – holidays, clothing, food and so on.

In order to push your premium products into the safe zone, Greaves' advice is to "try to add in something different that the customer does not expect – it might seem small to you but will be really big to the customer – they will notice it."

IN A NUTSHELL:

Premium experience is changing. To make the cut, you have to constantly reinvest in a buyer who will have the means to pay, but will require a unique experience each and every year.

TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Continually innovate and put yourself in the customer’s shoes.”



LISTEN NOW

❖ INNOVATION & GROWTH

BUILDING AND SCALING A FEMALE AUDIENCE



LISTEN NOW

“Culturally we’ve developed – we opened with a women’s match.”



Beth Barrett-Wild

Head of Women’s Hundred and Female Engagement, ECB

This podcast focused on driving female sport and welcomed Beth Barrett-Wild, head of The Hundred women’s competition and female engagement at the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB).

This is a challenge facing the entire sports industry, built as it is on the flaky foundations of a fundamentally male-led society. I wanted to ask Barrett-Wild what she’d learned about how to catch up at pace on decades of under-investment.

While our conversation was based in cricket, it has far-reaching implications for any senior leader looking to make their sport more representative of the society we all live in. While we focused on gender, there are clear applications and learning points for widening access to other under-represented groups, too. If these topics are front of mind for you, you’ll likely also enjoy the episode with Vodafone’s Claire Harvey.

Here are three things that really struck me from our conversation. They are by no means the only things you need to do in order to scale female sport. After all, as Barrett-Wild says, there are “a multitude of things that need to work in unison”. Instead, I’ve chosen three areas I think can often get missed in the discussion.

INVEST WITH PURPOSE

The Hundred represented a significant innovation for cricket – not only in terms of the game format, but also its marketing, presentation and the equal representation of both female and male competitions. As Barrett-Wild readily admitted, a year's hiatus enabled the ECB to double down on its commitments to both competitions – for example, scheduling double headers at large grounds as the default format.

The Hundred in general – and women's competition in particular – represented a significant commitment, not only to put on the events, but also to back it with a significant marketing budget. Barrett-Wild described the ECB as seizing a “unique second chance to make a first impression”.

It's a hard truth of any business that accessing new growth markets costs money. However, the ECB had sized and understood the market – the success of the home ICC Women's World Cup win in 2017 having first suggested that “the market was there”. The governing body did a lot of work to quantify the potential upside from building ongoing products for those new audiences it observed attending games at that event. The organisation was acutely aware of the moral need to provide further commitment to women's cricket, of course, but it didn't shy away from explicitly commercial analysis because of this. Left and right brain in unison.

Sometimes in emotive areas such as diversity we can give insufficient time to what is often a very clear rational business case. If you ever talk to a private equity professional, they will talk about understanding your ‘total addressable market’ from your business. Investing in women's sport equates to doubling the size of your total addressable market for both participation and commercial engagement. Assuming that investment is well managed, how can women's sport not make sense as a mid-term investment?

IN A NUTSHELL:

You don't have to win on emotion and ethics alone. 99.9 per cent of times you can win minds as well as hearts on a mid-term investment horizon.

LINK THE GRASSROOTS TO THE PODIUM

So what really made the women's Hundred a success? I agree with Barrett-Wild that it was the quality of the product. Tickets started to fly for the event when people watched the opening game and could see how entertaining it really was.

In truth, this fast-track improvement should come as no surprise. After all, the first professional contracts for women's cricket in England were only given out in 2014 for the first wave of 18 women. In 2021, there were 41 professional domestic cricketers in England and Wales.

The additional impetus goes right down to the grassroots of the game. As one example, young cricketers who arrived at my cricket club on a Friday night to try either All Stars or Dynamos, the ECB's introductory programmes for kids, were given free packs of Topps' Cricket Attax cards featuring stars from The Hundred. Among the stars featured were many of the 41 domestic female professionals as well as the international star female names in the competition. This normalised professional women's cricket for young girls right from the start.

The ECB did a terrific job of linking both platform and podium together. Once The Hundred began, the female share of registrations for the All Stars and Dynamos programmes immediately increased by ten per cent to 40 per cent. Among them will no doubt be some talents who will reinforce the standard of The Hundred itself in years to come, girls who will have picked up from their first exposure to the sport that aspiring to be a professional is entirely possible. As Barrett-Wild said: “Proximity to the top end of the game is really important. If you create those visible moments where women are put on a big stage, then girls can see a future for themselves in the sport.”

IN A NUTSHELL:

The success of women's sport – like all business – ultimately comes down to the quality of the product. Ensuring this requires simultaneous investment in both the talent of today and also tomorrow.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Sell on emotion, rationalise on data.”



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RESILIENCE UNDER FIRE

Anyone who has followed the story of The Hundred knows that it hasn't been universally popular among the traditional core audience for the sport. Change never is. Barrett-Wild admitted that "thick skin" has been a key attribute over the last couple of years – not only against criticism, but also to reframe the pandemic as an opportunity to deliver on the promise of equal representation.

There have inevitably been times when Barrett-Wild has had to push for the female agenda specifically in decision making – from game scheduling to the seemingly innocuous but nonetheless controversial switch from the use of the word 'batsman' to 'batter' in the rules of the game. "I would be lying if I said I didn't have to have quite a thick skin to a few things," she admitted. I watched closely on the day the MCC announced the latter change, which gave me a sense of the level of nonsense that she deals with daily from those who are less attuned to the need to make cricket more welcoming to females. The professionalism required to keep pushing on despite that is admirable – and ultimately stems from believing in the cause.

Fortunately, Barrett-Wild has very few battles to fight internally. "Culturally we've developed – we opened with a women's match but that wasn't my idea, that came from Sanjay [Patel, the managing director for The Hundred] and set the tone for the whole competition. Now I'm in a position where I'm pushing on a lot of open doors."

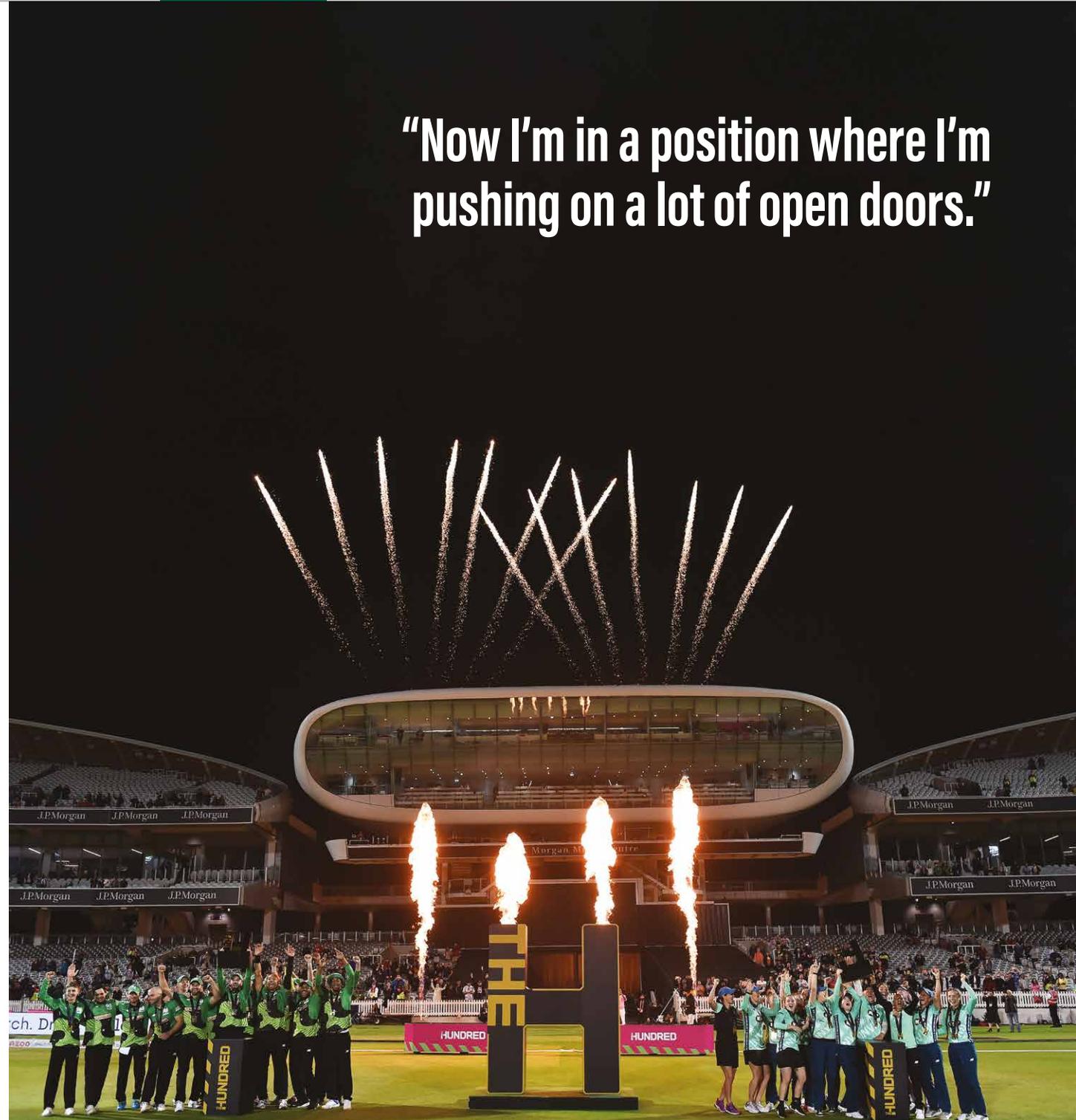
Being resilient means being able to quickly reframe challenges that arise. One example of that for Barrett-Wild was that the lockdown period enabled her more time at home with her young family in advance of a summer on the road in 2021.

Sometimes, however, more time with the family can take a little time to adjust to. Barrett-Wild talked about coming back from the finals of the event and starting to plan The Hundred in 2022 perhaps a little earlier than she should have done, instead of taking a little more time to decompress.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Keep the faith in your direction, look after yourself during the hard yards and proactively plan some space once the dust has settled.

"Now I'm in a position where I'm pushing on a lot of open doors."



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❖ INNOVATION & GROWTH

JUGGLING DIVERGENT PRIORITIES IN A FAST-GROWTH BUSINESS



Emma Barraclough
Product Owner, Chelsea Football Club



LISTEN NOW



Rather than delving into a single subject area for this episode, I thought that it might instead be helpful to take a look at how a business leader manages the sheer breadth of responsibilities which fall to them.

In my experience this is particularly challenging to manage when a business is in its early stages of growth. It's not possible to afford specialists to lead in every single area of your organisation, so you have to find time to work in the business, as well as work on it.

My guest for this conversation was Emma Barraclough, who leads elite sports nutrition company **Blue Fuel** within **Chelsea Digital Ventures**, a 'digital-first, consumer product business' spun out from the Premier League club. Blue Fuel itself offers a range of nutrition products developed and used by Chelsea to help their elite players perform. This is supported by an app which 'aims to fulfil the role that our nutritionist plays' at the club.

From launching during a pandemic to scaling both a B2B and B2C business simultaneously, I found our conversation to be a really candid reflection on the highs and lows of leading and juggling divergent priorities.

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“The worst thing you can do to a creative is weigh them down in some kind of process.”



BE COLLEGIATE IN YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

Barraclough said her working day is “really diverse”.

“Through the build-up, for example, we could be doing factory visits, going up to our developers in Manchester, down to the training ground in Cobham then to Stamford Bridge to report financially to reassure everyone we were on track,” she added. “Now our work tends to be quite a cyclical process – we go through rounds of pitching for funding and then product development, marketing and sales. Marketing never drops away, with matches giving us a calendar of tie-in opportunities.”

The biggest shift for Barraclough in stepping up to lead a product has been “the really diversified specialisms in this role”. That, she added, has “been quite challenging”.

“I’m leading a team of mid-to-senior people in everything from nutrition and science to design and app building – that’s really quite different,” Barraclough continued. “Leadership empathy across all of these specialisms is important. This means operating as a democracy in that environment as opposed to being at all autocratic in the way you work.”

Fast-growth businesses are also not always naturally prone to process and governance, but this of course is fundamental to the long-term health of the business. Barraclough explained that “we can use some of the services within the club which has been helpful... procurement, legal and finance for example. It might not always be the quickest route to get something done but there are experts there we can turn to.”

Barraclough also has to flex her leadership style to enable her to manage the breadth of responsibilities she has.

“It’s key to understand each audience we work with,” she said. “The worst thing you can do to a creative is weigh them down in some kind of process, whereas developers might work well to an agile/ scrum type methodology.”

IN A NUTSHELL:

Understand the preferences and needs of each team you lead.

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BALANCE FLEXIBILITY WITH ACCOUNTABILITY

Launching any business during the pandemic would have been a challenge, not least one which is predicated on team sports participation which necessarily fell away during lockdown. Barraclough's team have therefore evolved their strategy.

"The intention at launch was that the offer would be B2C, but we do have B2B relationships as well – with teams in rugby and hockey, for example," she explained. "We were looking at this as a subscription business initially, but that's a difficult proposition to launch with... in particular in a sector where [a subscription business is] not very familiar. In time we'd like to develop the app so that one-to-one nutritional support becomes part of the offer."

As well as iterating the product itself, Barraclough also believes the makeup of the customer base will also likely evolve – for example, from a 30 per cent female customer share currently to a more equal distribution, as well as to a younger demographic with a far better understanding of the benefits of nutrition on performance than, for instance, my generation.

It helps in that regard to have live feedback from B2C marketing channels on a daily basis. But the ability for Blue Fuel to stay agile ultimately comes down to Chelsea Digital Ventures' trust in Barraclough's skill as a leader.

"We've a lot of trust," Barraclough stated. "The trust has grown and we've been able to educate as we've gone along." Part of that has been persuading the club not to grow too quickly, in particular internationally, and not to "spread things too thin".

Barraclough had a terrific tip for this kind of stakeholder management. She advocates "taking time to listen and go on the second conversation, not what they tell you first... what they go on to repeat and then what is really important to them."

IN A NUTSHELL:

Balancing flexibility with accountability entails listening closely to customers, team and stakeholders and then acting quickly on what you learn.

KEEP LEARNING – BUT DON'T TAKE IT HOME WITH YOU

Barraclough has long been very focused on her own learning, blending ongoing academic study with a real focus on observing industry trends the world relates to and yet sit outside the sports nutrition bubble.

"Pre Covid," she said, "I attended a lot of things like trade shows to become more aware in different sectors. For example, what's going on in food, ecommerce or retail?"

That doesn't mean she's become an expert on all the new areas of her responsibility overnight. That's where a very open leadership style is key. "Coming into this space I need to be brave enough to put my hand up and say, 'sorry I don't understand that. Can you explain why that's better than what we talked about last week?'"

I recall having this same challenge at Two Circles – I found some of the developers' conversations very hard to follow – but ultimately asking the right question is the only way you learn. That's a very important skill to drive through the team as well. Or, as Barraclough put it, "making an environment where it's OK to ask questions".

It's particularly important when you have a business full of specialists in their own spaces. Barraclough said she will "try to role model putting my hand up and asking a daft question". It's not just an important skill within the business, either. "Sometimes there's also an assumption on the club's side we know how to work to their preferences, so we have to ask them, too," she explained.

Barraclough works hard to manage herself through the bad days. "When I was younger I'd take it really personally," she said. "Not taking that home or worrying about it is really important. That was a big learning from early on." Now she compartmentalises by "trying to get out for a run. Work life and family is bigger... but exercise is still there for me. Seeing the cheeky grin on my little girl's face makes it worth it as well."

IN A NUTSHELL:

Role modelling asking questions builds an open culture. Try to actively decompress however works best for you.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

"Never fear reaching outside of your comfort zone."



 FINANCE

THE ART OF ACQUISITIONS



LISTEN NOW



Jonathan Perelman
President,
ICM Stellar Sports



This episode focused on gaining insights into one of the 'dark arts' of the sports industry - acquisitions. On the pages of the Financial Times (FT) and Wall Street Journal (WSJ) there is a host of knowledge to gather around how deals actually work - and a perfect topic for the SportsPro Playbook.

The athlete representation market has all the hallmarks of a consolidating industry. Customers (the customers being athletes) are shifting in a socially conscious, direct-to-audience era. Legacy market leading agencies are starting to come under threat. From James Milner to Jay Z, the talent is now entering the fray as agents. There is also a ready supply of private capital. Put all that together, and consolidation in the market is somewhat inevitable.

Jonathan Perelman is the president of ICM Stellar Sports. He has been heavily involved in the building of the sports practice and now presides over some of the businesses he was involved in acquiring.

- **In 2020** ICM acquired London-based football and sports agency Stellar Group, which represents over 800 athletes with contracts totalling almost US\$4 billion. This provided a leadership position in football, operating in ten countries globally.
- Perelman also played a key role in ICM's **July 2021 acquisition** of leading National Football League (NFL) agency Select Sports, which has represented more than 50 Super Bowl Champions, 35 first round draft picks and 35 Pro Bowl players, among many others.

These deals have given ICM foundational assets at a pace that organic growth could never have provided to them. Sounds easy? Well, as I know from my time at Two Circles any deal has its ups and downs, and Perelman shared his candid learnings in our conversation.

TAKE TIME TO PREPARE BOTH YOUR BUSINESS AND YOURSELF

It is critical to understand quite what you are getting yourself into when looking to acquire a business – or opening yourself to being acquired. It takes a significant amount of blood, sweat and tears. As Perelman explained: “A deal for UK£1 is almost the same amount of work as a deal for UK£100 million”. One of the challenges at the smaller end of the spectrum is that neither buyer nor seller can readily afford the support network they might need to handle the additional workload a prospective deal creates.

Whatever your size, there is a practical side to preparing to sell a business. At Two Circles our chief financial officer Claire Rogan reminded us regularly that “good businesses attract investment”. We put rigorous financial and process management into the business from very early on, which enabled us to stay on the front foot during our due diligence processes, and second guess the questions we would receive from those who dug into our business. Naturally, these processes took time to embed but in truth everything we put in to make us due diligence ready materially improved the quality of our business.

There is also a process of emotional preparation to go through. Perelman's advice was to “be prepared for ups and downs, within a week but also within an hour”. Even the successful deals are a minimum of six months (and often nearer nine to 12) of an emotional rollercoaster. It's important to expect a lively journey.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Pre-empt whatever bumps in the road you can, but then expect plenty more.

RIGHT:

The art of deal-making - from company acquisitions to player transfers - boils down to trust in people, says Perelman

“There is no balance sheet that says, 'I trust this person'. You just have to feel it.”



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Be open and challenge yourself. Gather support and keep belief.”



LISTEN NOW

BROADEN YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

Unless you work in an organisation big enough to have its own corporate development team, then it is likely that if you are working on a deal, you are doing it as an additional role. In my case, that meant it often became a weekend and evenings endeavour. Never believe that the deal is done when the MOU is signed – in fact, that might represent as little as five to ten per cent of the total work to get a deal actually complete.

Perelman said that it is “critical” to have a support network and to “have confidants who can help to push your thinking” as they also make sense of the ups and downs of the process but also “take some of the deal strain while you’re still having to manage the day job”.

Post deal, of course, your support network will broaden to include those you are trying to do a deal with. The process of completing a deal represents the first opportunity to see each other under pressure and start to visualise how a future working relationship might feel. This is the softer side of the deal where the heart can rule the head. Perelman explained that “there is no balance sheet that says, ‘I trust this person’. You just have to feel it.”

IN A NUTSHELL:

Try to use the twists and turns as a positive – building an extended support network which can survive the deal itself.

COMPLETION IS JUST THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Now for the next tough message. I am afraid that even when you sign the deal, the tough stuff has only just begun. You’ll be tired, maybe even a bit emotional. But as Perelman said: “Just when you think you’re there, you’re really just starting”. There are shareholders to brief, new team members to meet, customers to inform, press to brief and new ways of working to adopt.

Personally, I found taking a short break while the ink dried was hugely important. That helped me gather my own thoughts and prepare for the next stage of the process. At Two Circles we focused hard on making engagement with customers and team members as personal as we possibly could.

“People have to feel a part of something,” Perelman said. “There has to be a motivation separate from the financial.”

Hard as it might be to look at yet another project plan when the ink is dry, how you manage the first 100 days is critical to setting the deal up for success.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Don’t overlook what happens after the deal is signed. Give that part due consideration and you’ll generate real confidence both inside and outside HQ.

“People have to feel part of something. There has to be a motivation separate from the financial.”

 FINANCE

FINANCIAL PRIORITIES FOR LEADERS IN SPORT

**LISTEN NOW**

Eva Garcia de la Fuente & Anna Faelten
Partners, EY



Our subject for this episode of the podcast was financial management. It's an area that many business leaders can find intimidating, not least with the current context of Covid, supply chain issues, labour shortages and potential rises to interest rates and inflation. That's a heady cocktail for even the most experienced chief executive to handle.

The current landscape is neither pretty, nor avoidable. Smart businesses can, and will, plan their way through, but only with sound financial management at the heart of their operation.

To unpick this, I was joined by Anna Faelten and Eva Garcia de la Fuente of global services firm EY. Faelten is a partner and head of EY's telecommunications, media and technology corporate finance team based in the UK. She is also the author of 'Why Deals Fail and How to Rescue Them: M&A lessons for business success' and has herself invested in several startup businesses including in data, analytics and retail.

Garcia de la Fuente is a partner in EY's transaction advisory services private equity team based in London and has 20 years of experience advising clients on transactions, ranging from sell-side to buy-side auction processes. She has worked across a wide range of sectors including tech, business services, healthcare, consumer products and retail.

THIS IS A TIME FOR AGILITY

As mentioned, this is no time for the faint-hearted. The heady period of inexorable revenue growth during which I cut my teeth in the industry is long gone. During times of uncertainty like this, it is key to empower your financial leaders to play a key role in both managing through the current reality as well as planning for the future.

As Garcia de la Fuente explained: "In the next 12 months the focus is on cash management and the balance sheet, not only looking at the P&L. That means taking care of seasonality, business planning and revisiting your long-term strategy and making sure cash conversion is in line with what you expect."

Given the long-term and regulated nature of several revenue streams in sport, not least broadcast revenues, we talked in some detail about managing cost bases.

"Uncertainty in the wider market is causing increases in cost prices," Garcia de la Fuente told me. "It's not easy to simply pass these through to your clients in sport given how regulated some TV rights are, for example."

Large fixed cost bases in particular are common within many rights holders, sports agencies and professional service firms alike. Faelten gave examples of ways in which EY is trying to create some flexibility in its own cost lines.

"Parts of our business face a squeeze around pricing, so we are trying to be more flexible and agile in our fixed cost base," she said. "The outcome of that is we try to use both nearshore and offshore talent. We need to do a better job collectively of using skills in different places."

With regards to managing the fixed costs of a finance function, Faelten notices some early-stage businesses using senior advisor or interim roles in securing high quality finance guidance. This enables the right quality thinking in the business without the long-term commitment of making a permanent hire. Faelten also recommended being slightly more cautious in the amount of liquidity you hold in your business – for example, holding more cash than you might traditionally have done.

"We are living in uncertain times which seems to be the new normal," she said. "That does mean you need to have a proper cushion."

IN A NUTSHELL:

Think about how you can mitigate risks in your cost base and cash flows.

THE CEO IS A CONDUIT TO A GREAT FINANCE FUNCTION

In order to enable some of the recommendations I mention above, it's unsurprising that Faelten and EY advocate using the chief financial officer in a direction-setting role as opposed to simply running the day-to-day financials of the organisation.

"In my mind a great CFO should be more strategically driven as opposed to the old school CFOs that we still see in some industries," says Garcia de la Fuente. "The CFO should be visible, conduct proper strategic planning and support innovation, finding ways to fund that. In my experience that only happens in very professional leadership teams."

At Two Circles we were lucky to have my wife Claire Rogan as our chief financial officer from day one. This meant we always looked at big decisions – significant hiring, new products, geographical expansion, employee incentive structures, for example – through a financial lens before making the no/no go decision. If having a strategy is knowing what you are going to say 'no' to, then embedding finance at the top table is about using the right data to enable you to stick to a robust plan.

Interestingly, Garcia de la Fuente warned against the temptation of having a strong chief executive who leads the line on all significant decision making, in particular when investment is on the cards.

"You can't imagine the number of teams we see with excellent CEOs covering all the bases where the rest of the team are not so strong," she observes. "When we have meetings with businesses with a strong CEO covering every area, we get a bit uncomfortable because the business depends way too much on the CEO."

"If you have a strong CFO or finance function, then the conversation is completely different. You focus on the strategic items because you are comfortable with the numbers and how the business is managed. But if that's not the case then the whole business starts to feel unsure, which isn't the right message for an investor."

IN A NUTSHELL:

A great CFO needs to play a key role on the team, not merely keep the score.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

Garcia de la Fuente:
"It's time to be a truly strategic CFO"

Faelten:
"Hope for the best, but plan for the worst."



SECURING FINANCE TAKES TIME

Some of the biggest decisions we made at Two Circles were about securing the right investment at the right time. On the first occasion that meant a trade investor, thereafter private equity.

There are any number of reasons that businesses might seek investment. Currently Faelten notices a predisposition to mergers and acquisitions and feels “that’s very much a reflection of our time”.

“Strategies are constantly changing; industries are being disrupted and it just takes too long to build it yourself or hire people in,” she added. “Acquisitions are often the way to unlock execute new strategies in the time it is needed.”

Whatever your reason, the key is to be playful in your approach.

“If you ask investors for money, that doesn’t come for free,” Faelten continued. “It’s a weird thing but it’s true – capital is always the most expensive when you need it most.”

At Two Circles it took us 18 months to prepare and execute each transaction in a way that we and our investors felt comfortable with. What would that mean for you if you worked to the same timeline?

I’d suggest working back from a potential date that you believe finance will become key. How does that change some of the key decisions you will need to make in the next few months? Always remember: last minute money is expensive money.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Give yourself 18 months to secure finance on the right terms.

“It’s a weird thing but it’s true – capital is always the most expensive when you need it most.”

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❖ SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

FOSTERING A CULTURE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

This podcast looked at the responsibility for leaders to foster a culture of diversity and inclusion. It's a complex and sensitive area, which I knew I personally needed to learn a lot more about. It's a good job then, that I was able to be joined for this show by a genuine expert: Paralympian and global inclusion lead at Vodafone, Claire Harvey.

I learned so much through our conversation that I struggled to sum up the richness of our conversation in my usual three action points. Instead, I've gone straight to the heart of the matter with the very best of Claire's advice...

"We've created a society where the starting point is moral outrage."



LISTEN NOW



Claire Harvey
Global Inclusion Lead,
Vodafone



“Inclusion is the culture we create to ensure that people feel visible, valued and able to be themselves.”



To start out, can you help me define the terms here?

Diversity is the things we all have that make us unique – not only demographic things such as gay versus straight, but also things ‘under the ground’ in the way we think such as whether we are introvert or extrovert, our values and thinking styles.

Inclusion is the culture we create around us to ensure that people feel visible, valued and able to be themselves. Inclusion and culture are intrinsically the same thing.

Think of diversity as a fact, inclusion as a choice. I encourage people to move away from managing diversity to practising inclusion, which is something we are all in control of.

Got it. So how has thinking evolved in this space?

We used to talk about equal opportunities. Equal meaning ‘treating everyone the same way’. But that doesn’t ever work, in the end very few people ultimately get what they need. Now we talk about equity – where people have the same opportunities. And also social justice – how we unpick the inequalities that are baked into our systems and ways of society.

So is sport improving in this area?

The trouble with a structure like sport is that the equality standards are based on demonstrating inputs rather than outcomes. That means people go towards the easy solutions to demonstrate they tick boxes rather than tackling the systemic problems.

So what does the end state culture look like?

In a utopian world, every opportunity would be open to everyone. Realistically, sport can’t work outside of wider society, tough. A great place would be that every sport has this mindset embedded into its strategic priorities in everything they do, not as an add on. That every sport looks critically at itself to make incremental nudges to identify and appeal to those who are not participating.

How do leaders start to understand the issues here, outside of their echo chamber?

Leaders in sport often come from a point of thinking, ‘I have to

TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Leadership is not a title but responsibility to empower everyone.”



LISTEN NOW

know the answer'. Sitting with the discomfort of a complex problem without an easy answer is really difficult. The answers are there - people can tell you what will make things better, leaders have just got to put the time in to listen and be vulnerable enough to hear it.

It can be terrifying to get things wrong.

The trouble is that we've created a society where the starting point is moral outrage. That's never a great way to keep people engaged. Start conversations with people who are really different to you so you can begin to understand with empathy and without judgement.

So how about the structure of boards? I sit on several wrestling with these areas at the moment. Should people like me be coming off to enable more representative voices to be heard?

Sport is very insular. It would do well to have in their boardroom people who have really different views and see that as a positive challenge rather than something that's slowing down the process.

There are lots of things you can do to mean one person doesn't have to lose for another to win. Be a bit creative - have an authentic shadow board while you think about the wider issue of succession planning.

At the point where you're scurrying around trying to find the black gay disabled woman to tick all the boxes for your Board - that's too late. Go back and look at your pipeline, at how you are engaging people in the sport so you are engaging a really diverse group of people. That will ensure you are not scurrying around when you need to find a position.'

What other sensible and practical things can we do quickly to move things forward?

Always remember that what gets measured gets treasured. Build some metrics around what a good culture would look like. That helps embed inclusion rather than manage diversity. Spend as much time on the story and what you're doing it as the compliance aspects.

Embed this into your values and what you reward. At Vodafone we don't reward people who get the job done but leave a trail of

devastation behind them. What you find is people move towards the behaviours they're going to get rewarded for.

Remember that the lowest behaviour we accept is our culture. If people want to participate in sport, we need to be clear about the values and behaviours people need to abide by.....and ensure there is a consequence if you don't. That's what starts to help people thrive and want to be part of that organisation.'

With regards recruitment, I talk to so many people who say, 'oh, we just can't find anyone with this background'. But we're not talking about unicorns - those people do exist, they just don't want to come to an organisation like yours. The question isn't 'how do we hunt them down?'.....it's 'how do we change the way we appear to the outside world to be more attractive?'

There are some other really tangible areas for recruitment like considering the skills that you really need to have for the role, versus what can be taught. We then need to stop thinking about culture fit, and start thinking about culture add.

We also need to give flexibility in order to get to the outcome. Vodafone is a global company and so we have footprints where it is illegal to be LGBT, where disabled people are considered social outcasts. That means we need to be sensitive to those things, and enable people to get to the outcome in a way that makes sense for them. To translate this to sport, too often we push things out from a big governing body with expectations that don't work for a small club.

So if, as you say, 'what gets measured, gets treasured', what should we actually be measuring?'

Principally there are three things.

Belonging - to be sure people feel they're engaged

Wellbeing - to understand whether people are genuinely thriving rather than burning out

Engagement - Talent is everywhere, opportunity is not. Have metrics and a process for really interrogating attrition, seeing where the issues are and then you can unpick those barriers.

As a management team you don't need to have all the answers, you just need to be courageous enough to ask the questions.

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❖ SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

BUILDING A RACIALLY DIVERSE SPORT

This episode looked at the relationship between sport and race. Now, I'll happily put my hand up and say that this is an area I'm no expert in. I'm white, middle aged, grew up on the outskirts of London and live in the Home Counties. While I've worked in and around some sports whose participants are ethnically very diverse, until relatively recently I've not thought deeply enough about the relationship between sport and equality of access, let alone how I might be able to help balance that equation.

What that means is that I'm not writing this article because I think I have all the answers. Quite the opposite. But I am sharing some areas that hit me between the eyes when I talked to Sonny Peart, co-founder of the charity Black Trail Runners. Sonny was kind enough to spend time with me when I wrote my book, *All to Play For*, and has his own book coming out later this year. His story is one that needs sharing, hence why I invited him onto the podcast.

"We're not here to get people off the hook, do stuff for people, or be the token gesture."



LISTEN NOW



Sonny Peart

Founder,
Black Trail Runners



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USE DATA TO DRIVE CHANGE

The challenge in discussing such an emotive subject as race is that tangible improvements can often get lost in the emotion of the discussion. Data helps cut through opinions to get to facts.

From the moment he prepared for a very first interview on the subject of race in trail running, Sonny put hard data evidence at the heart of his narrative around why things had to change. "I did some research into the marketing of trail running," he told me. "A very basic part was to look at the imagery of events I had run myself. I looked at the marketing of those and couldn't find an image of a single non-white person." This told him immediately that there was a material issue.

He carried on with this approach as Black Trail Runners launched on the back of that first podcast. "The very first thing that we did was ask people to start collecting ethnicity data on their race entrants," he said. "From the data it became clear that less than one per cent of runners are Black, even though we make up more than 4.5 per cent of the British population. Focusing on data meant we could have the conversations with real confidence. We weren't guessing, we had the numbers."

Sonny noticed immediately that this approach "demonstrates you're serious and closes down the conversation that might be there to sidetrack you. That's just gone – now we can focus on talking about what we can do about this."

Of course, there are watch-outs with this approach. "It's very easy to interpret data in a way that makes it look like you haven't got a problem. For example, you have to unpick BAME characterisation to understand the detail underneath. Black people have a different experience to Asian people and other ethnic minorities. The issues are not the same."

IN A NUTSHELL:

Use data and evidence responsibly to quickly break down any preconceptions.

LEAD ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT RATHER THAN PASSIVE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Sonny and his team have been steadfast in their desire to make a tangible difference and look for the same conviction from their partners. While the significant increase in awareness around implicit (as well as explicit) racial prejudice in the sports industry has increased, in Sonny's experience there remains a significant number of stakeholders who are prone to go the 'low cost and easy' approach to support.

Sonny told stories of people approaching the charity for photos of Black people they could use in their marketing rather than try to solve the root problem. Or offering some free race places (the marginal cost of which is next to nothing).

The charity is careful to steer clear of any partnership they feel might represent gesture politics rather than committed action. As Sonny explained: "We have a conviction and awareness of our value. What we aren't willing to do was be the sticking plaster for other organisations. We're not here to get people off the hook, do stuff for people, or be the token gesture."

That's not to say that taking a stance like this is easy. "It's hard to turn away free stuff and opportunities to represent and get your view across - but we've had to. Rather than ask us for photos, work with us to sort out the fundamental issues with your own events."

This took me back to the words of Claire Harvey, Vodafone's diversity and inclusion lead, in an earlier pod: "You're not looking for unicorns, you just need to try harder."

IN A NUTSHELL:

Improve your own organisation by doing the work - not riding on coattails.



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Educate yourself. Do the work. Try to change things.”



LISTEN NOW

“You need to do the work and that involves education of yourself.”



ROLE MODEL PERSONAL OWNERSHIP

The role of the CEO in leading any sporting organisation to a better place is absolutely pivotal. As Sonny explained: “Doing nothing is not an option because things aren’t as good as they could be. So you have to do something. Talk to your employees by all means, but those organisations most in need of this discussion have very few people of colour...or at least not enough.

“If you do have people of that background, you need to strike a balance. It’s not their responsibility to fix the problem. You need to respect any reluctance to talk about it. Just because they’re Black doesn’t mean they’re experts.”

Ultimately the responsibility starts with the leader – not only at an organisational level but also at an individual one. “You need to do the work, and that involves education of yourself. It’s quite clear many sporting organisations’ senior management don’t understand the issues. That’s not to lay blame, but the stuff is out there now for you to educate yourself. There are organisations out there who will work with you to help you address the problems.”

Sonny also described the importance of every individual being on an equal footing within that as they make sense of this area. It’s important, he believes, for the CEO to be as open about his or her deficiencies as anyone else in the room. “Take part in the sessions yourself,” was his advice. “Start to understand what’s driving your behaviour, or lack of action...and how things are perceived by other people. It’s a safe space but also a brave space.”

What you find in those is the number one reaction is ‘I just feel confused and uncertain. I’m not qualified to talk about this stuff.’ That’s where the education process begins.

IN A NUTSHELL:

As a senior leader you can create the conditions to educate yourself and others.

❖ SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

BUILDING YOUR BUSINESS WITH SOCIAL IMPACT AT THE CORE

“Start with the need, with what’s happening on the ground at the heart of the community.”



Adam Fraser
Chief Executive,
Laureus Sport for
Good Foundation



This podcast covered a very topical area of the chief executive's remit - namely the increasing expectation of sport to use its potency to drive social change. A clear and present agenda item for all leaders in sport as we look to readjust to this increasingly explicit addition to our to-do lists.

I was joined for the podcast by Adam Fraser, the chief executive of the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation. “Laureus exists to use the power of sport to drive social change,” he told me, “not only celebrating the inspirational power of athletes via the World Sports Awards, but also through the work we do with the Laureus Sport For Good Foundation, which has raised over €200 million to support programmes around the world that are using sport to achieve outcomes in education, employability, gender justice, inclusion, peacebuilding and so on.”

Laureus works through more than 200 sports-based community programmes in more than 50 countries around the world. Fraser explained that during the pandemic “they have all had huge restrictions placed on their ability to do that work.”

In the UK, for instance, the social divide has increased during the pandemic period. For example, many public leisure centres remain shut while private gyms have reopened. This increases the onus on sports to become more proactively involved.

“In the last decade there has been a significant increase in the understanding of the role sport can play,” Fraser explained, “and a staggering shift in consumers wanting to see the organisations they support contribute to their local communities.”

All very well, of course, but where on earth to start as a chief executive for whom social contribution has long been lauded, but never treated as business critical?

FACILITATE, DON'T REINVENT

Whenever there's a new project of any sort in business, it's so tempting (and, to be honest, a rare luxury!) to start with a blank sheet of paper. However, that's definitely not the way for a sporting organisation to maximise its social impact. The hard truth is that if you are leading a sports organisation, it's highly unlikely you're the most in tune with the reality of social problems – let alone solutions. Fraser told me that your thinking should “start with the need, with what's happening on the ground at the heart of the community and where the gaps are in supporting young people.”

“There is great work going on that will connect to your business, consumers and employees,” he added. “Look for that. When we at Laureus are getting it right is when we don't try to reinvent the wheel each time. [It's] very likely there are already people doing that work and doing it really well. Our duty with stakeholders in this space is to support them in what they already know best how to do.”

The best solutions in Fraser's mind are “collectively agreed and locally driven by communities who know what the best solutions are.” This stage of the process is all about asking the right people the right questions.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Resist the temptation to build an initiative – go find the people who are doing it already but need your support to take it to the next level.



OFFER MORE THAN A CHEQUEBOOK

Once you find the project(s) that you'd like to support, it's critical to have an honest conversation around the areas in which you can support. Capacity building is a really key part of Laureus' support. “We don't just write a cheque,” said Fraser, who added that Laureus will also look for areas it can help develop the capability as well as capacity of its investee programmes.

For example, Laureus often help its partner organisations think through how to improve and optimise their impact measurement. As Fraser said: “There is so much evidence around the social return on investment that sport provides. Systemisation of that can be hugely powerful.”

Sometimes the best support can also lie in areas that sports can take for granted. Fraser feels that “there is something incredibly powerful about the real estate of a stadium as a community hub. So many of the programmes [Laureus] deliver are constantly struggling to find physical space to deliver programmes for young people, whether that's a pitch to play sport, a classroom or a medical centre.”

IN A NUTSHELL:

Think about the knowledge and assets that you have within your organisation – how can they help?

“There is so much evidence around the social return on investment that sport provides.”

TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Sport has the power to change the world. Be part of it.”



LISTEN NOW



BRING YOUR INFLUENCE TO THE TABLE

Just because you're not starting with a blank sheet of paper doesn't mean that you can't be creative. In fact, if your organisation can't inject much value beyond financial support and the odd bit of venue access, then arguably you've perhaps picked the wrong project to support.

“Don't be afraid to test things,” Fraser suggested. “Run lots of pilot projects.”

This can particularly be the case when trying to reach very new audiences. Laureus has run a pilot esports project in Harlem as part of its innovation fund, connecting with people who are traditionally missed by 'regular' sports programmes. This is where systemisation of measurement comes in, so you can quickly establish which of the innovations are working.

Sometimes this innovation can reach beyond isolated projects. Laureus is also increasingly trying to extend the impact and reach of its support by reaching out to others working in similar environments in what it calls its “model cities”.

“In some cases – London, New York, Chicago, Cape Town and New Delhi – that can mean multiple programmes in a city,” Fraser explained. “With our Sport for Good Cities programme, we try to work on a hub model. What if we can create a coalition with other local programmes – be it local sports teams, mayor's offices or the education system they serve directly? The whole really can be greater than the sum of its parts. In Chicago there is a collaborative effort across the young community. Together we can assess the overall impact and then use that to lobby for more change.”

Sporting organisations can open doors and bring partners together to a level that social enterprises alone often cannot.

This is a hugely valuable area of support that you can bring to your communities – to the extent the model has now been endorsed and cited by the World Health Organisation.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Remember the doors that your involvement in professional sports can open. Use them well.

❖ SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

MOUNTING A MEANINGFUL CLIMATE FIGHTBACK

For this podcast I was joined by Dr Tom Tanner - director of a research and teaching centre at SOAS University of London, and author of *Climate Change and Development* and *Resilience Reset: Creating Resilient Cities in the Global South*. As with all of the Playbook episodes, we tried to have a really focused and pragmatic conversation.

Of course, this is not easy when the subject matter is so wide-ranging and challenging. However, this was a positive conversation - building on Tanner's expertise in building resilience to the changes ahead. He describes this as "anticipating those changes and adapting our systems or even transforming them to make sure they can cope better in the future with those future conditions."

"Just as we can't all drink orange juice in the morning, so we can't all fly around all the time."



LISTEN NOW



Professor Tom Tanner
Director, Centre for
Development, Environment
& Policy, SOAS University
of London



PREPARE FOR UNPREDICTABILITY

We kicked off by identifying the main challenges for sport to address, which are namely heat, increased rainfall and rising sea levels. Each has its own set of implications to work through.

Heat, for example, isn't just an issue for those playing the sport. Tanner explained: "I would really like to see clubs think about the ability of fans to get to the ground during...extreme heat. Paris did that well after their 2003 heatwave. They said, 'this isn't going to happen again, what is the early warning system for this, how do we link to the weather forecasts and what do we mobilise?' Clubs can work with the wider authorities and businesses on issues like that."

Sea level rise can be far harder for many of us who live inland to get our heads around, not least as the issue receives far less press than heatwaves or flooding. Tanner describes it as a "creeping change, but just as critical" – not least as so many human resources (and therefore people and sports teams) are on the coast. Take a look, for example, at quite how many of the football clubs in most major European leagues are in coastal towns.

The key challenge here is that it's not just a case of preparing for heat, or flooding, or sea level rises – but all of them, hitting us at unpredictable times. So, for example, a cricket club will need to be able to harvest rainwater to be able to keep their pitch in condition during increasingly long dry spells, but also work hard on the drainage of the square for when that rainwater causes significant flooding. The challenge is not knowing which of these efforts will prove more useful than the other on any given matchday. Not only that, but even increased attention may not alone be enough to preserve the game. This means we need to consider game changers (in all senses of the word) like artificial wickets in cricket, for example.

IN A NUTSHELL:

There are three key changes to understand, each with knock-ons for your organisation.

THINK THROUGH YOUR WHOLE SUPPLY CHAIN

Tanner also helped me understand how important it is for sports to think through the wider implications of climate change far beyond gameday. Much like the Covid pandemic, implications will be felt right along the supply chain. Flood risk for a football club goes far beyond the stadium.

"It's not just about the clubs," Tanner said. "I worked in Bangladesh and you look at the garment factories there. You can protect them all you like, but if the workers can't get to the factories then there's still a problem."

We're likely to see some early examples of system-wide implications on supply chains with sportswear in early 2022 as factories in Asia have been shut for significant periods this year.

Tanner's advice is to break down your supply chain piece-by-piece and think it through: "What's the chain here, what systems are we engaged with and what could be the indirect effects of climate change as well? A hurricane that closes a garment factory for three weeks – that has a knock-on for your suppliers and being prepared for that is key."

IN A NUTSHELL:

Think long and hard about the resilience of your whole supply chain.



“What if your ticket prices varied depending on how you got to the ground?”

FOCUS YOUR EFFORTS ACROSS THREE KEY AREAS

On the subject of breaking down the implications in detail, Tanner recommended focusing on three key areas of your organisation, as the much-praised English Football League (EFL) team Forest Green Rovers (owned by sustainable energy businessman Dale Vince) have done.

"Forest Green Rovers in the UK have looked at three main areas – implications for energy, transport and food," Tanner said. "If you just take those three, you're covering 80 to 90 per cent of your emissions and probably of your environmental damage as well. I loved the work the EFL did as recommendations for their clubs building on the Forest Green template...really easily doable steps."

Tanner said the lesson from Forest Green Rovers has been to "start small with your stadium. So to look at energy, for example." He added: "Are you ready for a situation if there is no water? How much water are you using for the pitch? How many UV lights are you using? What are you using to power that? How reliable is it?"

"You can then build in the way you're helping fans get to the ground, and the food you're providing. I think the elephant in the room is that way fans travel to matches. Transporting a team on one small jet is nothing compared to 50,000 fans getting to the ground. It would take more thought, but what if your ticket prices varied depending on how you got to the ground? Could tickets be cheaper if you'd taken the train to the stadium, for example?"

With the benefit of quick wins in some of these areas, there are plenty of opportunities to seize the impetus for the benefit of all.

Tanner pointed towards the example of fans co-investing with their team in solar panels for energy production which then pays back to both parties over a longer time horizon. Retention is far easier if you are co-investing with your customer!

That doesn't mean all 'feel-good' initiatives are equally as impactful, according to Tanner.

"With zero net carbon games," he said, "the question is what [the provider of the pledge] is doing to help the match be zero net carbon. I'm a sceptic of carbon offsetting both practically and ethically – but it's positive that they want to engage."

This isn't just about teams or events. Practical steps can apply to any business in sports. The energy, transport, food triad remains the best filter to view this through.

"If you haven't got your own renewable power," Tanner said, "then buy from a renewable power supplier. Can you make your office red meat – or all meat – free? Focus on those steps, then think about that wider chain that you're involved with."

Transport for all of us in a global industry is clearly pivotal here. Tanner continued: "What incentives can you provide for your employees to come to work differently? Just as we can't all drink orange juice in the morning – because there isn't enough land – so we can't all fly around all the time." Which brings implications for those of us who have tended to consider the airport as a second home.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Whatever your role or sector of the industry, make changes in energy, food and transport.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

"Be prepared, think green, take action, small steps."



❖ MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

HOW STORYTELLING IN SPORT HAS CHANGED



LISTEN NOW

“The governing bodies that have impressed me didn’t just wait until a crisis.”

The BBC logo, consisting of the letters 'B', 'B', and 'C' in white, each inside a black square, which are then arranged in a row within a white rounded rectangle.

BBC

Dan Roan
Sports Editor, BBC News

This podcast focused on how to develop a productive relationship with the media and welcomed Dan Roan, BBC News’ sports editor, on to the show.

Roan takes what he describes as a broad focus on the news, politics, business, legacy and law of sport, appearing very regularly across the BBC’s TV and radio channels. He also writes for BBC platforms online and appears regularly on [The Sports Desk](#), BBC Sport’s newest - and excellent - podcast investigating in detail the biggest sports news stories and human issues behind them.

Roan’s interviewed a who’s who of global sporting names, including Tiger Woods, Lance Armstrong and Cristiano Ronaldo, as well as some of the biggest names in the administration of sport - not least Bernie Ecclestone and Thomas Bach. While I have tried to sum up Roan’s advice for leaders looking to build a constructive relationship with the media, it was a very wide ranging conversation - from Emma Raducanu to Lauren Hubbard; Sepp Blatter to Marcus Rashford; social change to political divides - it is well worth a listen.



RIGHT:
Roan interviews England
men's soccer team manager
Gareth Southgate

**“Sport is an entry point
for us to have some of
the debates that we
tussle with around
gender, race, the
health of the nation.”**

INVEST IN DIALOGUE

Journalists are busy people. They also can't possibly be an expert on every story. When a story breaks, they have to share news quickly. So if you want them to understand your challenges and unique context, you need to have done that long before you're the subject of their enquiry.

By his own admission, Roan doesn't have time to be an expert in every sport just in case a story will land. That means he is very receptive to sports helping him to develop his knowledge. He talked about the proactivity of British Cycling to help him develop his learning of the work they were doing after some difficult years.

“The governing bodies that have impressed me didn't just wait until a crisis,” he said. “They were willing to have a conversation with someone like me when there wasn't necessarily a reason to. British Cycling said: ‘Let's have a coffee and educate you on some of the things that we're doing to make sure mistakes of the past aren't repeated.’ That's brilliant for us – it's as much educating us as the rest of the public. Over the course of time that will pay dividends.”

IN A NUTSHELL:

**Try to keep a dialogue with the media.
Be prepared to invest time even when
you're not looking for column inches.**

STAY IN THE REAL WORLD

As much as stories can still be spun, the truth is that journalists are no more likely to believe an entirely sugar-coated version of events than fans are. While sporting leaders still tend to try to overly manage the message, openness and pragmatism are often a better bet. Roan talked about the quality of engagement he'd experienced with Scott Lloyd and his team at the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), the sport's UK governing body, on the back of Emma Raducanu winning the US Open.

“They're under pressure to capitalise and acknowledge that there's work to be done – they've been open,” he said. “Scott didn't mind being asked some tough questions about what hasn't been done right in the past and how they intend to put it right in the future.”

This importance of staying grounded in honest reality also relates to the messaging you provide. More and more it's important for senior leaders to have an understanding of how their news relates to the wider social context. As Roan says, “sport is a microcosm of society. It's an entry point for us to have some of the debates that we tussle with around gender, race, the health of the nation....even transport. Sport has an impact on every facet of our public life.”

This is something I looked at in my recent book. It's a tall order for a senior leader to keep the pulse of the national media debate and social change – but a necessary one. Roan admired the work of the Commonwealth Games Federation under former chief executive David Grevemberg to “take these issues head on”. He adds: “I'm sure it wasn't an easy thing to do, but they recognised... that you have to address them and be seen to be progressive.”

IN A NUTSHELL:

**Sport is not an island. Actively engage
with issues in your sport and the way
they relate to wider society.**

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KEEP IT SIMPLE

In order to be a credible interviewee on the highest profile platforms, you have to be a master of concise communication. As Roan says: "Your average interviewee will get 20 seconds. By its very nature the media is very fleeting."

That's also a challenge for Roan: "When I am stood in Tokyo and asked to assess the Olympic Games in a minute and a half, that is very hard to do."

His approach is to be very structured in his communication by following a 'rule of three'. "I will hit three big points which give the viewer or the listener an inkling into the big trends. That's a frustration, but it's also a skill."

The 'rule of three' was an approach that I was taught early in my career. There's science behind it, too – it transpires that people can process three points relatively easily compared to anything longer. It's the reason I write these Playbook articles in threes.

The great communicator himself Steve Jobs was even a regular user of the 'rule of three' approach - [as this article explains](#).

IN A NUTSHELL:

Communicate in threes.



LISTEN NOW



TEN WORDS OR FEWER

**“Understand
the context and
stay succinct.”**



❖ MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

BRAVERY IN LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION

The debut episode of the Playbook Podcast featured Natalie Benjamin, a partner at performance management consultancy EY Lane4, talking about the importance of bravery in leadership communication. That seemed an obvious subject to kick off with. After all, some of the messages we are each having to communicate are tough to deliver in person, let alone over Zoom.



“Complete transparency and disclosure is never desirable nor possible.”



LISTEN NOW



Natalie Benjamin
Partner, EY Lane4



UNDERSTANDING THE WHOLE PERSON

When I started my career 25 years ago, we were encouraged to keep home and life apart. Always-on emails started to make this more challenging, smartphones even more so (I know, I am showing my age here). Finally the pandemic has made this distinction an illusion, to the extent now spend the working day peering into each others' houses. Natalie talked about the critical importance of understanding both the home and work life of those we lead. Only in doing so, she argued, can we really hope to help them perform at their best.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Virtual communication can force you to be too transactional. If you want to help your people succeed, it's hugely important to understand their wider world and the pressures this brings.

TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Have proper conversations with people you lead.”



LISTEN NOW

BALANCING CLARITY WITH COMPASSION

Many of us are sharing tough messages with our teams at present. Natalie talked about the need to balance clarity and compassion in these moments. Too much focus on clarity and not enough care, and the message can come across as cold and disconnected. Too much emotion without clarity, and the result is upset and confusion. This is not an easy balance to get right – as much as you plan a blend beforehand, no conversation ever goes quite as you might expect.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Communicate with both clarity and compassion. Do as much listening as possible to understand whether you’re balancing the two effectively in the moment.

USING DISCLOSURE TO GAIN TRUST

Although my default is towards openness, I never find it easy to understand when disclosure is a good thing, and tend to trust my instinct. “Complete transparency and disclosure is never desirable nor possible,” Natalie explained to me, “but I think if you can disclose things that are hard and are willing to deal with people’s reactions to that, then that’s when real trust is built.”

That strikes me as something sport really needs to get its head around. We all try to hire bright, enquiring minds, and in my experience the more we disclose to them, the more quickly they learn and the more likely they are to walk alongside you. That means taking the brave pill and being more disclosive than you might normally be comfortable with.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Push yourself to be more disclosive with your team than you naturally feel comfortable with. That’s where trust comes from.



DELIVERING PERFORMANCE

BUILDING DEEP FOUNDATIONS IN YOUR BUSINESS

“We were very clear that we wanted to build a performance culture into the DNA of our business.”



This podcast was a rather different one. It's now ten years since I co-founded sports agency Two Circles with my wife Claire and good friend Gareth Balch.

In recognition of that fact, Balch joined me in chatting to SportsPro's Eoin Connolly to reflect on the journey so far. In true Playbook style, we focused on lessons learned along the way which might prove useful for others.

It's not easy to sum up an hour's podcast and such a long and pivotal period of your career in a short article, but I've done my best to synthesise things down to five key principles we chatted about on the pod. Regular listeners, or readers of my CEO Playbook, will likely see in here some themes that have occurred before.



TWO
CIRCLES
DATA
DRIVEN
SPORTS

Gareth Balch
Chief Executive,
Two Circles



A CLEAR UNDERLYING STRATEGY

In truth, deciding our Two Circles 'birthday' was 1st September was a little arbitrary, based principally on the first day of trading in our accounts. We'd actually been working on the plan for Two Circles for almost a year before day one, the core tenets of which – why we existed, the culture we wanted to create – remain key touchstones of the business today. This worked for us much like the 'strategic North Star' that Richard Hughes from EDF Energy talked about in my first CEO Playbook.

From those key principles we built a strategy which was very explicit where we wanted the business to be three years on. We then worked back from that point to key metrics for each quarter – based on a balanced scorecard framework looking at our team, processes, clients and market positioning.

This strategy planning process continues as the cornerstone of the Two Circles business – which is now in the direct strategy running from 2020 to 2022. Co-creating a plan in this way helps to coalesce the company, which becomes increasingly important as it grows.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Work back from your long-term goal to focus your effort today.

“We wanted to be sure that there was a viable, long-term model to deliver the work we were selling.”

A LONG-TERM APPROACH TO CLIENT GROWTH

Driving growth in sports agency land is tough. We tried to build products and services that would facilitate client retention. We also set a firm set of criteria for the kinds of new clients we hoped to find – looking for long-term opportunity rather than short-term gain. This meant we were far more interested in understanding the extent to which a client was engaged in our project and open to change at board level than how much they were prepared to pay us for a first project. Sometimes this meant turning down glamorous one-off projects that we felt were not destined to create long-term partnerships.

IN A NUTSHELL:

You only know you've got a strategy when you say no to things.

TAKING TIME TO PUSH THE ACCELERATOR

The business grew quickly. However, it was only in month 20 (during which we exceeded our targets for month 36) that we felt confident enough in the model to really push the accelerator. That might feel quite late, however it was critical for us to be able to stress test all components of the business. We wanted to be sure that there was a viable, long-term model to deliver the work we were selling, with great quality people, strong client retention, quality processes and word of mouth brand development at its core. Without all four of those things, we'd have been far more reticent to keep pushing on with the business, let alone invest what it needed to double in size within months.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Take time to validate your whole business model, not just the revenue line.



RIGHT:
The Two Circles team

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BUILDING A PERFORMANCE-DRIVEN CULTURE

We were very clear that we wanted to build a performance culture into the DNA of our business. This was predicated on being hungry for feedback from clients and each other. As leaders, Balch and I are both naturally fairly restless souls – always striving for the extra two to three per cent that would make a difference, including from ourselves and our team. To enable that, performance planning for every employee every six months was fundamental. We hired for attitude and potential to succeed in the new field we were creating.

We balanced the ambition for the future with a mindset of doing the basics well every single time. Gold medals are not won by dreaming, but attention to detail each minute of every single training session. For us as leaders that meant a focus on every single first round interview, team feedback session or client slide. It's exhausting, probably slightly obsessive... and absolutely critical.

Building a culture starts, of course, with recruitment. Balch talked on the pod about "making the recruitment process about the interviewee, not the interviewer". This mindset is particularly important as Two Circles continue to try to build an employee base that genuinely reflects society – an area where both Balch both and I wish we'd done more, earlier.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Performance doesn't happen by accident.

"Gold medals are not won by dreaming, but attention to detail each minute of every single training session."

CREATING CONFIDENCE IN INVESTORS

We'd always worked to Claire's mantra that "good businesses secure investment". Two Circles has twice done so – firstly through WPP and then [Bruin Capital](#). Our mindset had been to look at the due diligence processes as creating confidence in our future investors, rather than ticking boxes and enabling quality conversations about the specific support we felt the business needed. This has enabled a fast start to the new ownership structure on both occasions.

WPP supported the international growth trajectory of the business both in terms of infrastructure and profile. When expanding internationally, Two Circles blends skills from experienced team members from the business in London with local hires. The team is then focused on 'listening from the ground up' to refine the proposition locally.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Create confidence in your investors to support your specific goals.

SO TO THE FUTURE

With a similarly fast start since its acquisition by Bruin Capital, Two Circles has made two acquisitions and [launched a unique new venture](#) with the European Tour and Ryder Cup Europe. So it's no surprise Balch feels the business is only "in the foothills" of what it is capable of achieving in the next ten years.

In Balch's mind "digital, diversity and capital" will be a heady cocktail both for the industry in general as sport evolves to a point where it can genuinely serve "all eight billion people who live on this earth... which of course stands Two Circles in good stead". I smiled when he said that on the podcast – it felt like a sentence that might have appeared in the last chapter of my book [All to Play For](#).

Although we work less closely together now, we're both still following the same blueprint.



LISTEN NOW

TEN WORDS OR FEWER

"Talent wins games, teamwork and intelligence wins championships."



❖ DELIVERING PERFORMANCE

HOW TO GET THE BEST FROM A NEGOTIATION



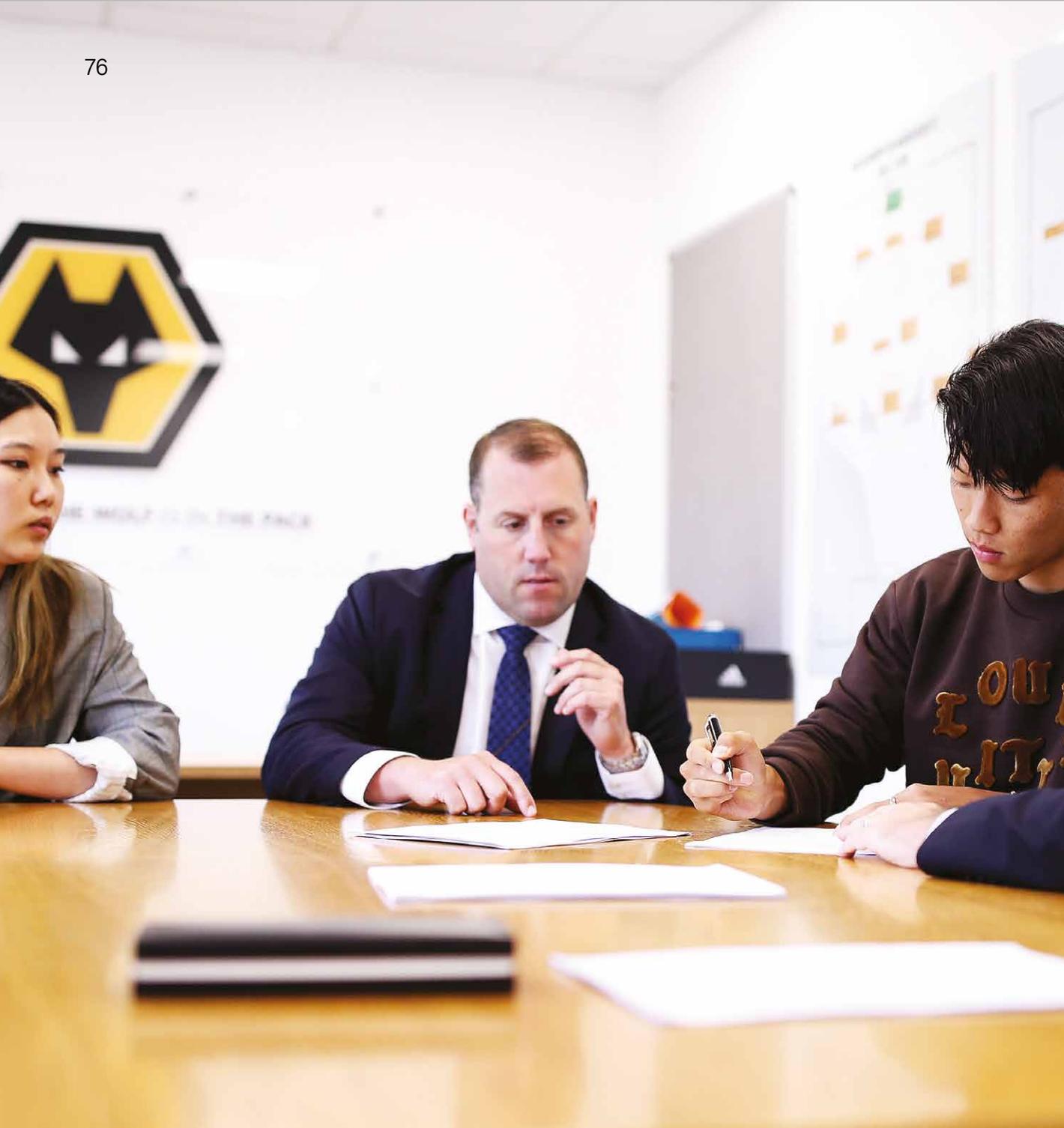
Tim Green
Global Head of Delivery,
GAP Partnership

“Don’t treat it as a competition. Ego is a dangerous thing to enter into a negotiation.”

I have wanted to look at negotiation for a while - after all, we negotiate every day, and yet it’s frankly ridiculous how self-taught we are at one of the fundamental business disciplines.

As such, this conversation was with a man who is a qualified expert: Tim Green, global head of delivery at the GAP Partnership, a global negotiation consultancy working with more than 500 blue-chip organisations.

Currently, many of us are having to try to make the numbers add up again, often re-cutting existing deals, re-contracting with members of our teams or even re-thinking entirely the way we work. Negotiation is clearly fundamental within that.



GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT

So what are the basic pillars of negotiation, something so many of us can still feel a bit uncomfortable about? Green described the overall process as “when two parties come together to find a mutually beneficial outcome” which surprised me a little. I’d imagined an expert in this space might have painted it as a more aggressive, confrontational discipline. That set the tone for the way he described the basic pillars of a successful negotiation.

To paraphrase Green’s thoughts briefly...

Understand their position: Even if you don’t know your counterparty well, it should be possible to think through their priorities for the negotiation.

Plan your position: Very few of us are smart enough to make up win-wins on the spot. Think through areas you may be prepared to flex, and those you think your counterpart may be.

Try to be creative: If you think you and they are both likely to be willing to think outside the box, go with it.

Practice: You wouldn’t dream of pitching for a bit project without practising first, so don’t do it when negotiating the detail of the deal when you’ve won it.

Emotional control: Effective negotiators are able to stay in control at all times. For example, they never threaten things that they wouldn’t actually be comfortable delivering on.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Effective negotiators prepare like high performing sports teams. They plan their tactics with the other team in mind, and practise how they will react in response to different situations.

TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Plan properly, get inside their head, don’t try to win.”



LISTEN NOW

DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE

Although he did reiterate that every situation is unique, Green did a terrific job of dispelling some myths that I have carried around in my head for years.

'Never make the first move'... Green's view was that more often than not, the reverse is true. He said: "We would always advise you get your offer on the table first. It helps you get in control of the conversation from the off and has an anchoring effect."

'Splitting the difference is a good way to conclude'... Green feels that often people finish negotiations in this way when they're just keen to conclude an awkward situation that can be exploited by the other side. "You need to be careful as it's very easy to get into the habit of not pushing as hard as you should do," he said.

'Make sure nobody loses'... Green agreed with me on this one. "Don't treat it as a competition," he said. "Ego is a dangerous thing to enter into a negotiation." A negotiation that finishes with two satisfied parties is unsurprisingly more likely to result in the two wanting to do business again down the line.

IN A NUTSHELL:

While each negotiation is different, try to start in control, and finish by ensuring both parties walk away satisfied.

“Get your offer on the table first. It helps you get in control of the conversation from the off.”

THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT WHO LEADS YOUR LINE

We also agreed on the danger of assuming that the best salesperson will always make the best negotiator. I've rarely seen a situation where that is actually true in business, any more than the best lawyer in a practice will make the best line manager or the best football player makes the best team captain.

Green said: "A sales process establishes the needs between two parties. But that's very different from agreeing what the terms of the deal are actually going to look like."

The skills required are different. Negotiation, for example, requires the ability to ask great questions, exceptional listening skills, self control under pressure and strong detail orientation. These skills are developable, and too business-critical to be left to chance.

IN A NUTSHELL:

It's easy to erode the benefit of a big deal by picking the wrong person to negotiate its detail.



❖ DELIVERING PERFORMANCE

LEADING AND DELIVERING WORLD CLASS EVENTS



LISTEN NOW

“You have to be able to react when the curveballs fly at you.”

This podcast focused on how to lead and deliver complex, world class events. My guest was Jim Donald, one of the most experienced production directors in the business - with experience ranging from opening ceremonies and technology launches to the uniquely challenging London New Year’s Eve Fireworks.

Donald explained how delivering an event of that nature requires deep creativity balanced with excellent operational planning; sensitive leadership of your own team but also a keen eye for the needs of partners.

Jim Donald

Project Director, Major Events,
including London
New Year’s Eve Fireworks



BEING PROACTIVE WITH YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

The London New Year's Eve fireworks are hugely complex to execute. New challenges arise annually, just like our sporting calendar. One year Parliament is being refurbished, the next there's fog on the night. 2020 was no different of course – the pandemic rendered the event a TV-only event, which as sport knows only too well requires its own innovations.

In Donald's case, this saw a relocation to Docklands and a fleet of drones joining the display. The latter gave an insight into Donald's mindset with partners. He talked about "finding the best people in the world...to join an established team". Quality was fundamental, but so was their integration into the overall operation. There's little space for mavericks in the execution of world class events.

Of course it's not enough to simply find the right partner. Lots of other stakeholders need convincing that it is good and safe idea, too. For Donald, this is all in the planning: "If you walk in their shoes then you can pretty easily predict those who will put obstacles in your way and work with them." Having thought through potential objections they might have, he treats them as the most likely people to be able to solve the questions they are likely to pose. "This is what we want to do. How can we make it work?" It's all about proactivity, positivity and most importantly collaboration.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Start with the view that external stakeholders are on your team, too. Vest them in co-creating solutions before they get too stuck on the problem.



LEAVING NOTHING TO CHANCE

In the world of events, it is inevitable that things will go wrong occasionally. The trick is to know what your next steps will be when it happens.

That's more complicated than it sounds. A single 'Plan B' will not suffice. In the complex, large scale event where Donald specialises, the response to bad weather will be totally different to a new security risk, transport problem or illness in the team. The key is to have done the detailed scenario planning well in advance.

Over the course of the last 18 years leading the London fireworks, Donald estimates that he has considered between 200 and 300 different scenarios in the course of various table-top simulation exercises. These are not tick-box processes, but scenario run-throughs to make decision making on event day itself second nature. Donald's job is "to have the experience to know which scenario we're working to. What's the playbook we're running? You have to be able to react when the curveballs fly at you". Or in the words of football legend John Madden: "Coaches have to watch for what they don't want to see and listen to what they don't want to hear."

Becoming more experienced doesn't make that any easier; "You get more confident as your leadership skills grow, but equally understanding of the wider context to your event also grows. That can actually give you even more to worry about," said Donald. I can empathise with that from my time leading Two Circles – the more experience I gained, the more I realised our boat was sailing on a sea of factors (macroeconomics, sporting politics, generational shift and so on) which I knew were likely to create stormy seas at times for us to sail on, and over which we had no direct control.

IN A NUTSHELL:

In preparation for complex events, work through how you will respond if things go wrong. Your job as a leader on the day is to look for the issues and call the plays as the external context changes.

GIVING PERMISSION TO RAISE A FLAG

The responsibility that comes with leading major events is massive. Donald finds himself "at the top of the tree, where responsibility stops". That makes his interactions with his team executing on the day fundamental, in particular being able to recognise when team members are starting to get out of their depth. That is not an easy balance to strike, however. "When they are struggling, you step in and support them," Donald explained, "but equally if you step in too soon, they'll never grow."

To navigate this, Donald tries to actively seek out comfortable opportunities for his team to flag problems to him throughout the event preparation phase. When they do, he looks to role model a collaborative resolution of the issue. By the time he is executing on the ground, he can then be sure that team members will raise a red flag speedily when they're in trouble and under pressure. Knowing that the thorniest problems will be flagged quickly makes him more able to empower his team to make the day-to-day decisions that will help them learn.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Create a culture that means your team will raise the big red flags with you. That means you can step back and give them space to learn.

TEN WORDS OR FEWER

"Communicate well and collaborate."



LISTEN NOW

DELIVERING PERFORMANCE

EFFECTIVE CHANGE MANAGEMENT



Alexandra Willis
Communications and
Marketing Director,
All England Lawn
Tennis Club



In this episode we looked at managing change. I'd argue the ability to do this well is a core capability for anyone leading in sport. After all, signing acquisition papers, launching a new product or deciding to restructure is actually the easy bit - bringing the rest of the organisation with you can be far more challenging.

Despite this, there is relatively little knowledge among many senior leaders beyond learned experience and intuition as to how best to manage change in sport. When I spoke to leaders in both the UK and the US in preparing for this podcast, one told me he was looking for 'some kind of frame of reference to hold onto in the back of my mind, so I can tell I've got my bases covered'. No pressure then!

Happily, help was at hand. Alexandra Willis kindly agreed to join me for the conversation. She had great experience to share - not only from her roles driving change as communications and marketing director at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (affectionately known as Wimbledon) and board trustee at Greenhouse Sports, but also in sharing stories from a behind-the-scenes trip to Warner Bros' Harry Potter World a few years ago!

We wanted to make our conversation as applied as possible for listeners, and so referred to a framework that has been hugely helpful to me in my time. It was created by a performance psychologist called Katie Warriner, who I worked with at leadership development firm Lane4, now EY Lane4. You can read the whole of Warriner's article 'Demystifying the challenge of change' [here](#). Warriner has gone on to achieve some extraordinary things in the elite sport space and was also most recently the behaviour change consultant for Marcus Rashford's [books for children](#).

CO-CREATE A COMPELLING STORY

Building a story is fundamental to managing change. As Warriner explains in the article: 'A good story answers the fundamental question of why the proposed change needs to occur and bonds people with diverse perspectives and agendas into an engaged coalition of support.'

Of course, that's often easier said than done. As Willis remarked: "The story is absolutely pivotal. After all, the first question we ask, whether we are 55 or five, is 'why?'"

Co-creation is a really important part of building an effective story. I know my natural tendency is to want to quickly take teams to the solution in my head, which always turns out to be a mistake! As Willis explained: "It's so important to share something people feel they can contribute to, rather than feeling that it's a done deal. I think sometimes we can be too quick to get to the answer rather than taking the time to build narrative and consensus."

She offered the example of Wimbledon investing in digital and its brand for the first time. They spent time building a considered and very different narrative to the rationale for digital investment used by many rights holders at the time.

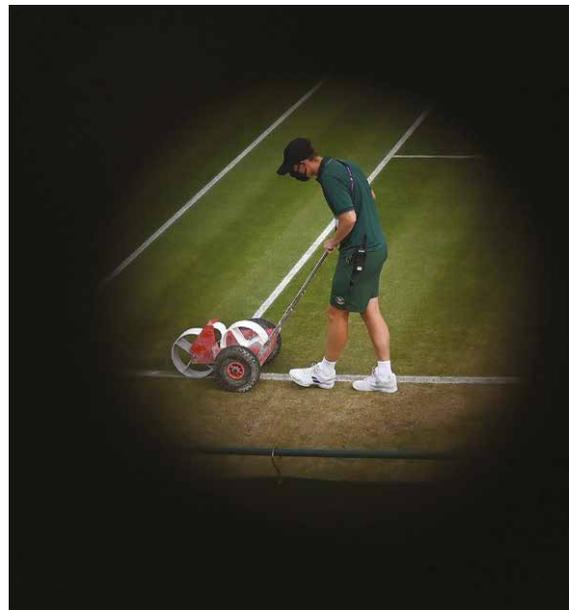
"We focused on moving the mindset away from being a really funky, busy and loud digital experience to something that felt beautiful, immersive and true to the experience of being in our grounds. That gave the traction we wanted and needed with fans, but also our board and other stakeholders."

One other key component of the co-created story is that it has to "feel authentic and like it's something anyone in the organisation could feel comfortable standing up and saying." At Two Circles we tried to help the leaders of our business feel comfortable with their own personal interpretation and then articulation of the change story. Often that landed most authentically – for them and others – as they verbalised what a change meant to them personally.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Explain the rationale for change by blending different perspectives, including giving a bit of yourself.

"It's so important to share something people feel they can contribute to, rather than feeling that it's a done deal."



CREATE A CLEAR PROCESS TO DELIVER CHANGE WITH FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMPONENTS

Anxiety and concern around change often comes from a lack of certainty around what the future may hold. Leaders can help navigate change by being very clear as to how any next steps will likely pan out. Willis framed this to me as the importance of "trying to put the future in terms that others will understand by having a clear articulation of a process ahead. Demonstrating how you are going to get from A to B through a chain of events is absolutely fundamental."

Warriner's article emphasises the importance of 'paying attention to whether the formal elements of the organisation (e.g. systems and structures) are aligned with the change initiative'. For example, there's nothing more disruptive than announcing a new initiative without having the systems or organisation structure to be able to make it a success. Ambiguity immediately raises concerns.

Warriner also emphasises the importance of leaders being able to 'influence the informal elements of their organisation to build support for the desired changes.' The desire to influence is a two-way street and can often involve iterating the approach. Harry Potter World look to create a shared responsibility across their business for improving the guest experience, as 'the person closest to the problem is often the best person to come up with the solution.'

It is key to provide a clear roadmap of opportunities for team members to ask questions and make sense of change. For example, providing clear dates for Q&A sessions or times when management team doors and diaries are open for one-to-one discussions. Sometimes also just 'being around' is the best way to read the temperature of the team...to go for a walk, or just have an informal chat in the office.

Rarely will a change land in an organisation if leaders don't give diary time to engaging throughout. If it's not important enough for you to give time to, why should anyone care?

IN A NUTSHELL:

Build processes to create confidence and create diary time for the water cooler.

ENSURE YOUR PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO GO WITH YOU

Not only can change be hard to handle in the immediate emotion of the storytelling, it can also be mentally exhausting over the long run. Currently this is particularly acute. During the pandemic period, many of us have had to change our way of working from top-to-bottom – moving from office meets to Zoom, Frequent Flying to online pitching for business. This will have created a sense of fatigue in all of us – whether we all recognise it yet or not.

Given changing HOW we work will already have created a sense of fatigue, then we're very likely to find changes in WHAT we do in the months to come harder still.

In this area Warriner's framework refers to the importance of the 'psychological fitness' of the people in the organisation and their preparedness/willingness for change. This can include their resilience - confidence, focus, determination and the ability to successfully manage pressure.' Katie goes on to relate this not only to people's ability to manage themselves, but also their levels of 'emotional and social intelligence ... to react constructively to change initiatives and work successfully within teams.'

I certainly recognised the fatigue that change leadership can create. For example, after the Two Circles WPP transaction was signed I was probably the most mentally and emotionally exhausted I have ever been in my career. But it was also the time that my

emotional intelligence needed to be at its maximum. That's where having allies in the organisation can be so key.

This is an important message for sport leaders in 2022. If you're personally feeling a little frayed around the edges, then it's a fair assumption that members of your organisation might feel the same or worse. While less senior team members might not have shareholders or the media breathing down their neck daily, they also don't have the benefit of a line of sight to future direction of the organisation. They might have slightly fewer middle-of-the-night transatlantic Zoom calls to manage – but that's just as well because they may have been working from their bedroom for the last two years. Tread carefully and take time to understand them.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Ensure your organisation emotional intelligence to support each other and the resilience to move forward. It's a fair bet they're struggling.



LISTEN NOW



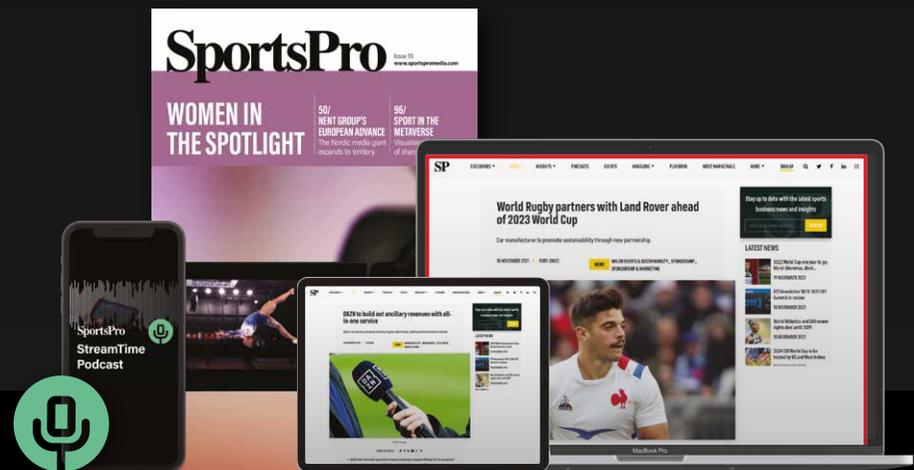
TEN WORDS OR FEWER

“Embrace change but embrace it with consideration for your team.”

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