# connect

### ENGAGING MARKETING MINDS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020

# TIME TO TAKE A LEAP OF FAITH AND EXECUTE



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## THE AUDACITY

**THIS IS A TIME** for courage and maybe a bit of audaciousness. It is a time to let go of normal constraints and disregard the limitations of traditional thinking. The cold, hard truth is that the coronavirus has turned many things upside down and has forced us all to rethink the way that we approach our lives. As a result of the chaos, a combination of audacity and courage is not just in order—it is required.

The best leaders do not take bold initiatives to simply serve their egos. They throw caution to the wind to serve the common good and do not apologize for it. What makes this time compelling is that we have no choice but to be outlandish with our ideas and even more daring with our execution.

The most common constraints that we all face—regardless of the pandemic—are the ones that are imposed on us by others. These impositions may not be malicious, but they are, historically, very limiting of what is possible. The silver lining of all this confusion is that we should feel free to explore our ideas and search for better ways to do things.

In many cases, policies and procedures hold us back from getting things accomplished. But, the baked-in culture of "we don't do it that way here" is possibly the biggest hurdle to audacious success. The idea that we must protect sacred people, products and processes will not lead to a spectacular future.

The time for audacity and relentless effort has never been more ripe. It may seem like dark times, but we should feel free to explore new horizons. Just like our cover article, "The Plunge," highlights, we believe that it is time to take a leap of faith and execute. Ideas are meaningless without execution. You can think as much and as hard as you want, but until you actually act on those thoughts, they have no value.

In our second feature, "The Cumulative Power of Narratives and Why They Matter," we remind you to be audacious and control your own narrative. The piece underscores the need for marketers to dance to the beat of their own music and find a better version of their brand in a redefined world.

We hope you are safe and that you are staying positive. We will continue to do our best to uplift and educate with audacity and courage.

Warmest wishes,

Gina M. Danner, CEO

We are proud to announce that *Connect* magazine won the 2020 Gold Hermes Creative Award for the January 2020 issue "Creative Brew."





#### AS A RESULT OF THE CHAOS, A COMBINATION OF AUDACITY AND COURAGE IS NOT JUST IN ORDER—IT IS REQUIRED.

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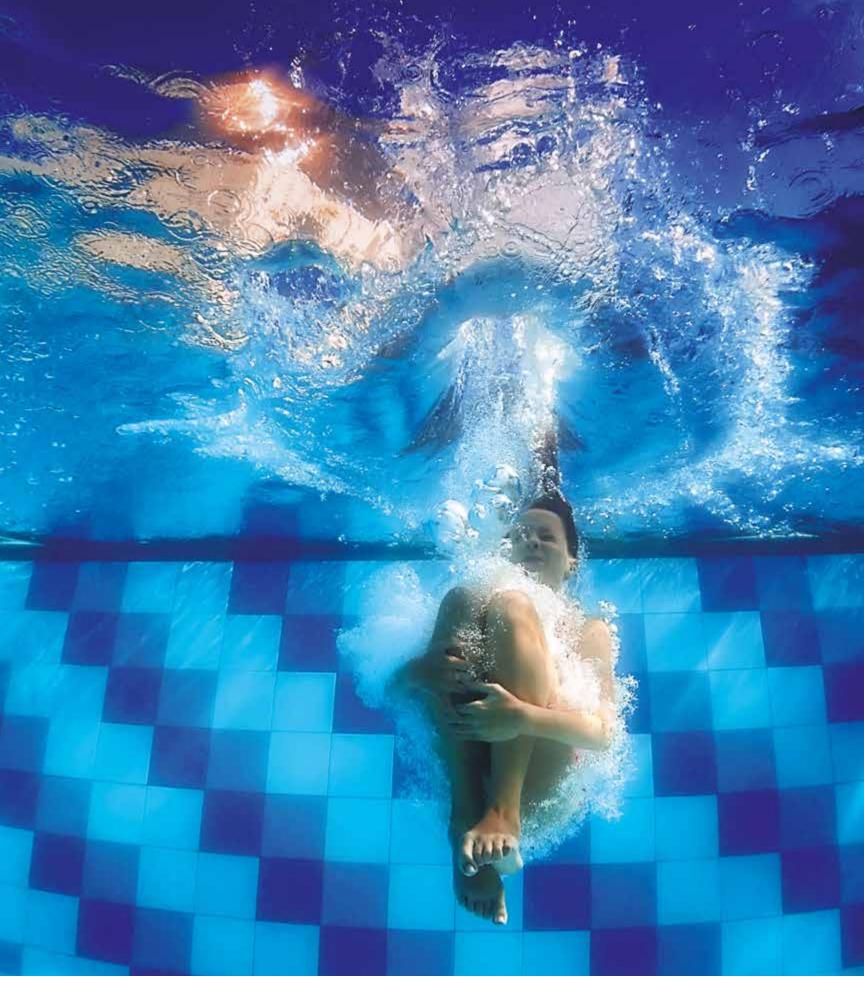
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WHATEVER YOU SAY, do not bring up the "Build it and they will come" mantra to Christopher Tompkins. When it comes to sales and marketing strategies, execution is everything. So,

The outdated mantra—i.e., sitting around twiddling ones thumbs—is just one of those things that drives him crazy. Tompkins, founder, head strategist and CEO of The Go! Agency, is one of those "if-you-are-going-to-dosomething-just-do-it-now-don't-talkabout-it" marketers. The philosophy, which seems like a no-brainer on the outside, is something that too many marketing agencies struggle with, whether they do not have enough faith in their ideas, are not fully sold on the strategy or not excited about diving in

#### It is time to take a leap of faith and execute

#### IT IS ABOUT FORCING COMPANIES AND ORGANIZATIONS TO TAKE A HARD LOOK AT HOW THEY DO BUSINESS AND MAY MAKE IT EASIER TO OVERCOME TRADITIONAL CHALLENGES THAT PREVENT THINGS FROM BEING DECIDED OR ENACTED QUICKLY."

- EDWARD SEGAL, CAE, CRISIS MANAGEMENT SERVICES

"Many marketers are not sure how to track the success of their ideas or where they would fit in the overall picture of the marketing strategy," Tompkins says.

As Tompkins sees it, many ideas—or brainstorming meetings—must have a bit more structure so that the ideas generated can be put into the right "buckets" for further discussion and planning. Being bold, especially in times where bold is rewarded, is a move he recommends. Just make sure you know what your overall strategy looks like first.

"I always advise to consider your team and company ethos when building any strategy," Tompkins says. "You work together as a team, so you must have elements of the strategy—or the results you wish to gain through execution—that directly benefit the team, either monetarily or enhancing their feeling of success and worth. You must also show how your strategy will build and fortify your company for years to come. Remember: It isn't always about what you want; it is about creating a triple win: for you, the company and your employees."

Tompkins recalls the strategy a recent client that offers a socially conscious apparel brand implemented. The company planned to sell a certain type of merchandise, but because it is supportive of different causes, it created a new line of T-shirts with a unifying message. Sold at cost, all proceeds from the shirts were earmarked for charity. The brand not only gained massive media attention, but also increased awareness at grassroots level, resulting in even more sales. The success formula: The company created the T-shirt line, stuck to its goals, and reaped the benefits.

When it comes to execution, there are two paths you can follow: strategic thinking and strategy execution plans. Strategic thinking involves using the right metrics, goals, and KPIs during the brainstorming and planning processes. Strategy execution is using these metrics, goals and KPIs to track the effectiveness of your campaign and make adjustments along the way.

"It is important not to confuse the two as they are mutually exclusive," Tompkins says. "You need the thought process to set things up for success, and the execution portion to track, refine, and access the success."

And if you think your planning is apt to be derailed due to these unparalleled times, think again. Tompkins says this is the perfect time to dust off any ideas that may have been set aside, and reinforce your internal processes and how to deliver your message. He believes today is a "Refocusing Revolution."

"Anyone that is focusing on making positive changes and looking to the future by implementing new processes and strategies will be the ones that really reap the biggest spoils during this time," Tompkins says. "Those who sit around and wait for normality to return will be left behind. Change, refocus and renew or you will be blown away with the wind." ■

"YOU NEED THE THOUGHT PROCESS TO SET THINGS UP FOR SUCCESS, AND THE EXECUTION PORTION TO TRACK, REFINE, AND ACCESS THE SUCCESS." - CHRISTOPHER TOMPKINS, CEO, THE GOLAGENCY

#### WAYS YOUR BRAND CAN GET MOVING AND MOTIVATED TO TAKE ACTION

List three goals you want your strategy to achieve (as a business owner/leader)

2 Share these goals with your team and get their feedback

Brainstorm/create a strategy of execution as to how to deliver on the three goals 6 Execute your strategy focusing on daily monitoring of your three goals and budget

OF

Constantly change and editstrategy as needed

BONUS TIP: Stay flexible and unafraid of organic movement

SOURCE: THE GO! AGENCY

## WHERE IS THE BREAKDOWN?

LACK OF LEADERSHIP. Lack of a champion or cheerleader. Corporate culture. Internal bureaucracy. Past history. Afraid of commitment, especially in uncertain times. When it comes to delaying that idea you have been wanting to implement, it could be any of the aforementioned reasons.

But it does not have to be. Edward Segal, CAE, Crisis Management Services believe there is a thin line between thinking about something and doing something about it. The 30 year veteran in crisis communications has witnessed just about everything you can imagine. If there is one thing he knows it is that without execution, your ideas will not become reality—turning into an endless cycle of unfulfilled promises and proposals.

"You can fall victim to paralysis by analysis and get frozen in place," says Segal, author of "Crisis Ahead: 101 Ways to Prepare for and Bounce Back from Disasters, Scandals, and Other Emergencies" and host of the weekly "Crisis Ahead" podcast. "It is about forcing companies and organizations to take a hard look at how they do business and may make it easier to overcome traditional challenges that prevent things from being decided or enacted quickly."

For proof, Segal says to look at how Amazon did its part to keep the national supply chain working so that essential goods are delivered in a timely and effective manner during the past five months. "You need to create or update standards and guidelines for what constitutes success and establish criteria for what will justify pivoting."

The tenets for success rest in how easy your plan can be achieved, the availability of required resources, budget constraints, creating a realistic time frame and having a sense of urgency. "You have to find ways to have your team own your ideas or be able to claim/share some credit for them."

Getting a buy-in from your team is a critical part of your execution strategy.



Tompkins says that now more than ever people have a little more time to thoughtfully sit down and have a conversation, so talking shop and seeing what trends they see—even what they have seen to work for themselves or their own peers, is absolutely invaluable. "That is way more important than spending hours on market research and trend analysis. All of this data at the moment is in a constant state of flux." If you want your idea to succeed, the plan is simple: Create a strategic plan. Set your budget for execution. Make sure you have the bandwidth to get the idea implemented. Create strict measurements and reporting structure. And, more importantly, have the flexibility to change on a dime if you see one piece of the strategy is more effective than another.

Do that, and there is not anything from keeping your idea from being executed.



# THE CUMULATIVE POWER OF NARRATIVES....

"IN TODAY'S CURRENT ENVIRONMENT, WE ARE ALL LOOKING FOR MORE MEANINGFUL MESSAGES AND EFFORTS FROM EVERYONE AND EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING— BRANDS, INCLUDED." - MARK SPEECE, FOUNDER, STOKESIGNALS

#### BY MICHAEL PALLERINO

**TWENTY-PLUS YEARS** into this whole branding and B2B marketing thing and Mark Speece swears he has seen it all. That was until earlier this year, when the world shut down and everything seemingly went blank. Once everyone moved past the shock and dismay, it was time to get down (and back) to business. But how? For the first time in a long while, there was a come-to-Jesus moment on how anyone was going to engage in a time when faceto-face meetings were out of the question. We are, after all, social animals.

But here is the thing: While in-person engagement is out for the time being, there are plenty of opportunities to connect. In fact, Speece, founder of branding and marketing firm StokeSignals, says that while ramping up your social media presence and jumping headfirst into the virtual meeting world are solid strategies, now is the perfect time to return to your brand ideals and brand narrative as a starting point. That includes listening with empathy, and then figuring out what authentically makes sense for you and your people.

"The best thing brands can do is listen to their clients and customers," Speece says. "What do they need? What are they asking for? How can you support them? Think outside the box: Everyone is doing webinars or sending emails that say little more than 'We support you' and 'Here's how we are responding.' But there are other things you could be doing for your community. Don't do something just because everyone else is doing it."

Speece is probably the right person for a moment like this. He started StokeSignals—a combined, associative name as a way to stir or shake up and excite brand narratives. Speece's expertise in brand strategy, brand architecture, naming and name systems has been employed by some of the world's best-known branding firms. Prior to StokeSignals, he headed the verbal branding practices at FutureBrand and Landor New York, as well as corporate branding for Sterling Brands. Over the years, he has managed large-scale, global repositioning and brand architecture development for clients like Ford, GE, General Motors, Microsoft, Proctor & Gamble, Turner Broadcasting and Visa.

No matter the situation, he

believes that without a wellthought-out communications strategy, a brand's narratives likely plural and vague—run the risk of being defined by the actions of customers, individual or groups. And while some could be good, and on strategy and in line with what brand managers want, there is just as much likelihood the narratives will run counter to everything the brand stands for.

"A strong brand is critical to building a valuable and defensible business," Speece warns.

So, does that make it easier or harder to control your brand's

narrative with everything going on today? Speece says it is both. "Given the plethora of online communications channels, it's easier than ever for a brand to proactively share its narrative with the world. It's also easier than ever for customers to call out brands who've mis-stepped or strayed from their purported narrative. In today's current environment, we are all looking for more meaningful messages and efforts from everyone and everything—brands, included. That's a high bar, and it's more important than ever that brands step up to meet the challenge."



## **MAKING A CONNECTION**

sk any of today's marketers and they will tell you that the goal of every brand is to make a rational and emotional connection with its community. Because people are emotional animals, when choosing between two similar offerings, the tiebreaker often is how they feel about the company.

A brand narrative creates a connection by telling a story. People remember, identify with, and relate to one another through stories. Brand narratives that do not do this are just sales propositions in here way consumers are protected at constitue.

disguise, which by the way, consumers are pretty good at spotting.

Ali Payani, CEO of LookinLA, believes that in the end, brand's narrative must deliver all the value propositions of the company to its customers. The whole brand and marketing strategy must be built upon the overall narrative to increase engagement, commitment and trust among the clients in every scenario.

It is one of the tenets of LookinLA, the company he co-founded when he came to the States several years ago. Today, LookinLA helps brands improve their digital marketing executions using data-driven marketing techniques—a narrative Payani says he and his team meticulously crafted going door to door, project by project.

"When your brand narrative and message connect with customers' emotions, you will create a trusted community where your customers will believe in you, no matter the changes," Payani says. "But the brand should also be careful about the delivery of the brand narratives."

Cole Baker-Bagwell spent two decades working in Silicon Valley and on Wall Street helping to solve complex sales and strategy puzzles for some of the world's largest companies. Her success during that period came from merging smart business strategy with her own long-standing mindfulness practices. Today, as the founder of Cool Audrey™, her approach to the branding game helps create higher levels of trust, connection, engagement, focus and understanding with her clients. The success is in the narrative.

"Your narrative is the anchor that defines your company," Baker-Bagwell says. "It's the story of who you serve, what you do and why it matters. It's the magnetic thing that attracts people initially and the very one they will come to know you for and rely on."

Riding in on the story you not only tell, but stick by, is critical, especially with myriad competition, uncertainty, noise and historical unrest out there today. "People are frightened, distracted and suffering from information overload," Baker-Bagwell says. "There are a lot of what I call 'popup posers' who are taking advantage and capitalizing on the host of challenges we're all facing. They are disingenuous and that's creating skepticism. Unless you're a super established company with a good track record, those things can make it really tough to reach the people and build the trust that leads to positive outcomes in business. So, I do think people have to work mindfully. They have to get super intentional and make sure that they are meeting people for the right reasons in the right ways."

On the flip side, Baker-Bagwell says today's landscape—defined by cultural, political and health unrest—holds tremendous opportunity for brands who can get it right. Some people are looking for a soft place to land and a big hug, while others are fired up and want change.

"They're looking for something they can believe in," Baker-Bagwell says. "I think this is especially true of the GenZ population. If a brand can manage to acknowledge the human challenges we're facing, connect with people to convey a sense of comfort and demonstrate that they represent something authentic that people can trust, they can be successful in creating awareness, loyalty and a new wave of "WHEN YOUR BRAND NARRATIVE AND MESSAGE CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS' EMOTIONS, YOU WILL CREATE A TRUSTED COMMUNITY WHERE YOUR CUSTOMERS WILL BELIEVE IN YOU, NO MATTER THE CHANGES."

- ALI PAYANI, CEO, LOOKINLA

people with brand allegiance."

In the end, the key to connection is stirring the soul or making people feel something genuine and trustworthy. Some people need a soft place to land. Others want a brand that causes them to think differently. Most everyone is looking for something to believe in. Enter your narrative. When you get it right, it can warm your heart, break your heart, bring a tear to your eye, or a smile to your face hours later.

The choice is up to you.



## **3 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR NARRATIVE ON TRACK**

The key to building an attractive narrative rests in your ability to create a captive audience. Brands will be successful if they:

#### o1 Mindfully align to the 3 W's (Who do we serve? What do we do? Why does it matter?)

**o2** Consider the dynamics and challenges people are navigating.

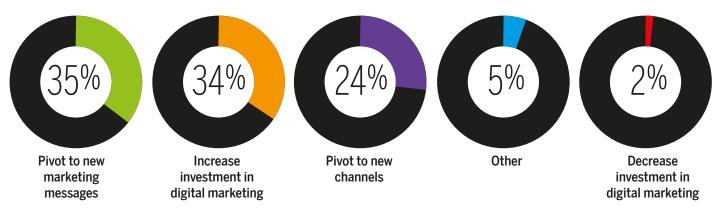
**03** Meet people where they are.

SOURCE: COOL AUDREY™



### HIDDEN TREASURES REPORT SHOWS BEST CORONA MARKETING STRATEGIES

Out of sight, out of mind. If your customers can't see you, they will forget about you. This is always good advice, but it is even more relevant during the craziness of the pandemic. According to Uplers' survey report "The Impact of COVID-19 on Digital Agencies," 90% of agencies who saw an increase in leads were actively spending on marketing through multiple channels. In order to stay ahead of the game, they had to invest both time and resources into their marketing. Let's take a look at what marketing strategies they recommend:



## CAMPAIGN CHECKLIST

SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS AND KEEP YOUR MARKETING CAMPAIGN ON TRACK WITH THIS CHECKLIST FROM MARKETINGPROFS:

#### **STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE GOAL**

First and foremost, decide what you want to accomplish. You can't create steps if you don't know what you're working toward.

#### **STEP 2: CHOOSE THE OBJECTIVES**

Narrow your goal into numerous, specific objectives. They should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely.

#### **STEP 3: SET THE BUDGET**

Determine which objective will result in the best ROI, and lead with that. Above all, stick to your budget.

#### **STEP 4: DEFINE THE AUDIENCE**

Who are you targeting? Maximize your budget to reach those who will actually turn into customers.

#### **STEP 5: PLAN THE TACTICS**

Your tactics should be based on the previous steps. They should take into account your goal, budget and audience.

#### **STEP 6: ALIGN YOUR MESSAGING AND DESIGN**

Express your message clearly and concisely using design that is both pleasing and brand-appropriate.





## 5 AI TOOLS TO BOOST YOUR CONTENT MARKETING

It's survival of the smartest, and technology keeps getting smarter. Artificial intelligence (AI) already plays a role in your marketing efforts. Bump up your strategy to the next level with these six tools from the Content Marketing Institute:

#### **NO. 1 DEVELOP A PREDICTIVE JOURNEY**

Each individual that visits your website will have a different objective, so they shouldn't be treated the same. Check out CliClap to add a script to your site. It uses AI to predict and deliver the right content at the right time for each visitor. As a bonus, it also integrates easily with HubSpot and Marketo.

#### **NO. 2 TEXT MINING**

Finding the best keywords is critical for engagement. Text Optimizer analyzes text to uncover the best keywords for your audience.

#### **NO. 3 CONTENT CREATION**

While the majority of your content should be organic, Al generated content can be useful for simplistic and factoriented reports and summaries. Check out Yseop, which is helpful with content in multiple languages.

#### **NO. 4 CONTENT EDITING**

You most likely already use some form of automatic editing software for grammar and spell check. Take it one step further with Atomic Reach, which analyzes the tone for the audience via a point system.

#### **NO. 5 PERSONALIZED LANDING PAGES**

Using personalized landing pages is an effective way to cater to each website visitor. Keep track of each visitor's demographics and behavior using Personyze so you can convert them to customers. OUT OF THE STORM

BUSINESS AND MARKETING TRENDS IN THE NEW NORMAL



**THE COVID-19 STORM** has torn through the world, leaving a different landscape for marketers to pick their way through. Things that were once relevant have been tossed aside, and new things have taken their place. While change is still

underway, it is certain that things will never be quite the way they were before. Businesses will need to take into account the new world attitudes. Take a look at the following trends from the Forbes Business Council:

#### **Renewed emphasis on digital**

Technology and digital allowed us to stay connected, even while social distancing.

#### **Protection & prevention**

People will be extra cautious going forward, even when they return to work. Take extra care with your operations and interactions.

#### **Thinking ahead**

Strategies that were implemented during the pandemic will continue to be used in the "new normal."

#### **Remote options**

The work-from-home trend isn't going anywhere anytime soon, as many companies go completely remote or consider a hybrid model.

#### **Digital communication**

Zoom and Skype will continue to be options for meetings and gatherings.

#### **Ready for change**

The only thing that's certain in uncertainty is that change is inevitable, so be ready for anything!



## Can you talk about the repercussions of our addiction to innovation?

The biggest problem is that our society is out of balance, which causes us to stumble and fall unnecessarily. We buy something new, we get drawn in and neglect other things. This dynamic occurs at different scales in society: businesses bring out new products and neglect support for existing ones; government policies put money toward startups and "blue sky" R&D and have less money to spend on maintaining infrastructure. When we spend time and attention on one thing, we often neglect others.

## When did the innovation mindset start and how has it become so intrusive?

Creativity and ingenuity have deep roots in American culture. In many ways, the founding premise of America is the promise of the "new world," with all of the perceived benefits that come with walking away from the troubles of the old world. In our book, we talk about the rise of the "cult of the inventor" in the late 19th century, when new technologies such as electric light, power and railroads transformed life for many Americans. The myth of the lone genius—Edison, Tesla, and so on-helped Americans double down on making connections between individualism and material progress. The innovation mindset got more intrusive in the latter decades of the 20th century. when new products and services were cast as the result of hard work and ingenuity. The myth-makers of that era ignored the facts that Silicon Valley's rise was funded by the Defense Department and powered to a great extent by the labor of undocumented workers.

## Can you explain why maintenance is actually the core of any good business?

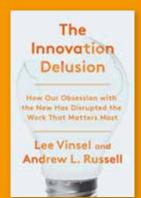
It's very simple, and intuitive. Success is fleeting if there is no attention to keeping

### ON THE RECORD WITH THE MAINTAINERS

### BEST-SELLING AUTHORS ON THE MAINTENANCE MINDSET

Together, Andrew Russell and Lee Vinsel co-founded The Maintainers, a global research network that studies and supports lovers of technology. Each brings years of research and reporting to the company, and to their new novel, "The Innovation Delusion."

Lee Vinsel is currently a Professor of Science, Technology and Society at Virginia Tech University. He



previously taught at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, NJ, and also worked in psychiatric hospitals for five years. A lover of philosophy, he teamed up with Andrew Russell in 2015 to found The Maintainers.

Andrew Russell is the Professor and Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at SUNY Polytechnic Institute in Utica/Albany, New York. His research targets the history of communication networks. Russell's work has been featured in publications such as The New York Times, Washington Post, Aeon, IEEE Spectrum, Technology & Culture, American Historical Review, and Information & Culture.

We caught up with Vinsel and Russell to learn more about how innovation will continue to affect us in the future.

it going. Customers demand reliability and want to depend on the products that they buy. The most successful companies are those that maximize "uptime" in their equipment and workforce, and earn a reputation of reliability.

#### How do we let go of innovation for the sake of innovation and embrace a maintenance mindset?

We like to invite people to start with simple reflection about their own lives. Think about what's important to you, your loved ones and your community. What do you hold dear and what do you see that's worth preserving? Those things that you value, and that already exist, probably could use some attention and care.

## What advice do you have for leaders about embracing the maintenance mindset?

Through our research and interviews, we found three consistent themes that occurred across a wide variety of industries. The first is that leaders need to understand that maintenance sustains success; it's an investment that usually generates substantial ROI. Leaders should start by getting familiar with some of the success stories and data. Second, maintenance depends on culture and management. Leaders need to demonstrate why maintenance is important to everyone in the organization, and incentivize or reward actions that support this value. Third, maintenance requires constant care. Organizations need to develop routines so that maintenance is always in strategic and financial planning.

## The book seems so timely. Why did you think it was important to write?

We are historians of technology, and there's a long tradition in our field of listening to the voices and experiences of the too often unheard people. We've been inspired by work by scholars like Ruth Schwartz Cowan, Howard Zinn and Studs Terkel. Our irritation about the justso celebratory stories about "innovation" reached a boiling point a few years ago, so we started writing about maintenance and care. The pandemic brought up moral reasons why we celebrate maintainers, as many of them have been recast as "essential workers." There are also analytical reasons, since maintenance's role in economic and societal health has not been adequately measured or appreciated.



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