

## Eric Liedtke Transcript

**[00:00:01] Eric:** "Would you like to save the oceans?" And I was like, "Yeah. I love the oceans. Who doesn't love the oceans?" "The footprint you have is affecting and actually killing the oceans." And so you start going into down this rabbit hole of understanding the amount of stuff sporting goods industry makes and fashion industry in general makes, and the amount of fast fashion that's disposed and where that goes and how that ends up degrading the environment and degrading the oceans and breaking down the micro and nano plastic that then goes in and kills the krill and the microorganisms in the ocean. The ocean's responsible for every second breath we take. So it's like, holy shit. It was basically a mind opener. Once you get this education, you can't unhear. You can't unsee it.

**[00:00:42] Matt:** To thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape, brands must move at an ever-increasing pace. I'm **Matt Britton**, founder and CEO of Suzy. Join me and key industry leaders as we dive deep into the shifting consumer trends within their industry, why it matters now, and how you can keep up. Welcome to *The Speed of Culture*. Up today on *The Speed of Culture* podcast, we're thrilled to be joined by **Eric Liedtke**, the CEO and co-founder of Unless Collective and Brand President of Under Armour. Eric has spent over two decades shaping the future of fashion from his leadership roles with Adidas to pioneering a regenerative plastic-free fashion revolution at Unless. His work with Under Armour and Unless is driving innovation and sustainability, pushing the boundaries of what fashion could be for both consumers and the planet at large. Eric, so great to see you.

**[00:01:28] Eric:** Wow. I love that. That was a great opening. Thanks, man. I'm going to hire you for the future. If you could do that every time I walk into a room, that'd be fantastic.

**[00:01:34] Matt:** Sold. I'll just be on your shoulder saying that. So I'd love to hear a little bit about your career journey, how you ended up in the world of apparel and fashion, and what you're really passionate about right now.

**[00:01:45] Eric:** Well, great. I came out of school in **1990**, so middle of a recession, and basically had a journalism degree with philosophy emphasis and went into advertising. And I loved it, but I was a suit. So I was working on Cadillac and Flora's TransWorld delivery, and I did a little Chiquita Banana on the side. And I just realized that, like, I had one of those Sunday night moments where you're just like, you're a little nauseous. You don't want to go back, and you're like, what do I really want to be doing with my life? And I quickly realized if I wasn't doing sport, thinking about sport, having done sport, I wasn't going to be happy.

So I found a friend of a friend who was designing shoes for Adidas or Adidas in Germany. He put me in touch with **Rob Strasser**, who, if you know, if you've watched *Shoe Dog* the movie or anything like that, Rob Strasser was the genius behind signing Michael Jordan. Anyway, he had left Nike and left Phil Knight and went over and started Adidas America. And I got in touch with

him, and after a year of correspondence, the old way, and this is before email, and this is like handwritten notes and phone calls on landlines, he finally took the chance on me and brought me in to be a **sweeper in training**. And after that, I never looked back. **Twenty-six years later, I was Brand President at Adidas.**

I just finished a great run. I went, uh, I left Adi and started my own company called **Unless**, which you said was the first 100% fashion brand made of plants and no plastic. And we were **acquired last year by Under Armour** about a year ago, and now I'm sitting back in a big ship with Under Armour. So it's been a circular, but it's been a joyful run.

**[00:03:13] Matt:** Yeah. Congratulations, by the way. And a lot to unpack there. I mean, it all starts with that moment where you said, you know, it was a Sunday night, and you just felt like you weren't doing the right thing. And you knew what you loved, and you weren't doing what you loved. Like, what gave you the conviction to say, you know what? It's time. Because I bet so many people right now are in that same position where they just don't love what they're doing. And this, as you know, like, this is not a rehearsal. We have one shot at this. So I guess what gave you the conviction to make that leap, and what advice would you have for others that maybe feel stuck right now?

**[00:03:47] Eric:** Yeah. It's great. I mean, I think we all have been there. Right? We've all suffered that Sunday night blues where you just don't want to go back to work the next day. And I think it wasn't one Sunday. I paraphrased. It was a year of Sundays. And it was at a certain point, you got to say enough is enough. And it's a hard break because you've got a well-paying job, and you're in a career. You're doing your thing. You're putting it together. But the good thing is I didn't have to make a leap. I started **working my network**. I started working my friends and family. I started, like, talking to people and understanding more about myself, like, when I am really happy, and I think that was the big thing.

So there's two things. One is what makes me happy in life, and I've always been sports-oriented. I love the dopamine and the endorphins you get from doing sport, but I love watching sport. It's the only unscripted drama we have in our lives. So it's like it's something that you can really get into. At the same time, when you start to realize that about yourself, it's like, oh, maybe I want to go work in sports. Maybe I'll go work for a sports team. Maybe I'll work for a sports league. Maybe there's so many ways to get into sport. I just started working at, and then it just happened. A childhood friend of mine, **Paul Gaudio**, was designing for Adidas in Germany. And it was like, oh, he could introduce me to some guys over here, but then it took another year. But, you know, so you just have to start taking bites of the elephant. And and I always tell people, like, **don't let perfect get in the way of better**. It's like, take one step and then another step and then another step, and soon when you look up—

**[00:05:06] Matt:** Versus getting overwhelmed with, like, the whole thing, taking one step at a time.

**[00:05:10] Eric:** Exactly. It's like, **do one thing every day for your future**. Right? Like, if you can do, like, whether it's save a little money or read a book that's different or, like, reach out and shake somebody new's hand, and and I was like, do one thing for your future every day, and it's like, all of a sudden, it adds up. It compounds like anything else. Right?

**[00:05:25] Matt:** Yeah. I saw Rick Rubin, the famous music producer, was saying, like, don't do things for the outcome, but you have no idea what the outcome's going to be. I'm sure you had no idea that you'd be where you are today. Right? But do things because it feels right to you, and just take, and that's kind of what you're saying. He was saying about the what and the why, and you're basically saying the how. And a lot of people just get consumed, "Well, why would I do that? What's the job I'm actually going to make? Is I'm wanting to make now," et cetera? But we have no idea what the outcome of anything is going to be that we're putting into life.

**[00:05:56] Eric:** It starts really small. It starts with understanding what really makes you happy, and that takes a little reflection, a lot of reflection sometimes. And then it starts with picking up the phone and just connecting and talking and, like—and now it's not even the phone. It's social media. It's everything else. And getting people to network with and contact with and and see what comes. But, yeah, I love the fact that I was just quoted with Rick Rubin, so, uh, I'm in.

**[00:06:18] Matt:** Yeah. Respect. And did you know when you joined Adidas, like, or when you went down that path, I should say, that did you know what actually you'd be doing for them, or you just knew that you wanted to be involved in sport and you just levered any relationship you had?

**[00:06:32] Eric:** So it's funny. So I wrote a letter once a month, and I called every week. And I would call Rob Strasser's office, and Rob was too busy for me. I was a young nuisance, so I would always talk to his chief of staff, **Owen Clemons**. And it got to the point where Owen was, "Eric. How you doing?" Like, he would know my voice. And, like, it was like, "I'm just checking in, like, seeing if Rob's available. Maybe I could talk". And I became such a repeating offender, if you will, that when a job popped up, it was **any job**. It didn't matter. It's like Owen's like, "You got to talk to this guy, Eric. He's relentless". And it's just like, okay. And then I got the job because I was **relentless**. I was resilient, and I had a friend that, you know, in Rob's words, gave me a good pedigree. And that was about it. My friend recommended me, and then it was just me and my resilience and my relentless follow-up that got me in. And then I was a sweeper, which means I worked next to the mail room. So it was a demotion from where I was in the account world of agencies, if you will. So I was a sweeper, which means, basically, I did a little bit of everything. But it was next to the mail room. And twenty-six years later, I was brand president leading the greatest turnaround in the company's history. So big things can come from little steps.

**[00:07:39] Matt:** So let's talk about that because you were at Adidas and witnessed so much there. What are some of your takeaways from your time there? And tell us about sort of your ascent at Adidas from being next to the mailroom as a sweeper to ending up in the position

where you did at Adidas? Like, what were the what you believe were the major milestones and kind of the business evolution that you witnessed along the way?

**[00:07:55] Eric:** I mean, I think it's hard to point at one or two things in a multi-decade experience, but I would say, like, the one thing I made sure is, like, I think so many of us get boxed into a vertical function, if you will. Like, okay. You're a product person. You're a footwear person. You're a footwear developer. You're an apparel person. You're a marketing person. You just do comms. You do PR and whatever. And so my whole thing was I never wanted to be labeled. So I as I came in from advertising, I had that comms background. It would've been very easily pigeonholed me into comms. I intentionally took the job as a **sweeper**, which was on the **product side**. And the product side was like it was everything from, like, really helping the product line managers do stuff to helping designers get stuff done to helping the sales guys to fulfilling orders, whatever it took, going on sales calls, but it was more about the hard coding of the product world. So I had this comms background in product, and then three, four years later, five years there, I switched back to comms. And then five years after that, I switched back to product. So I think what I was able to do was **diversify myself between different disciplines of expertise**. So when there was a job of head of footwear for America, I was offered it. When there was a job of head of brand marketing for America, Adidas, I was offered it.

**[00:09:06] Matt:** You're versatile, basically.

**[00:09:07] Eric:** Exactly. It just—I was able to play multiple positions, which, like any sports team, and, again, every analogy for me goes back to sports. It's like, if you can be a long snapper and a tight end and play special teams and, like, all of a sudden, I've got multiple things the coach needs to, you know, I'm going to make the final cut.

**[00:09:22] Matt:** You're never going to have to worry about getting the next deal if that's the case.

**[00:09:25] Eric:** Exactly. And then at the same time, I was then, you know, to really sell me, I had all this great market experience from America. And so when I got the opportunity to go to **Germany in the headquarters**, I was like, absolutely. Now I've got international experience in America. I've got the world's biggest market, most important market on my resume, and now I've got headquarters experience. So now I've got this bifurcation of multi-discipline, multi-geographies, and now you're building up your resume. And some companies do that for you. And, again, Nike does that exceptionally well. They rotate their teams around really well from geographies and functions. Some companies don't. I don't know why there are companies that do that, so you have to do it for yourself. And as younger marketing executives that listen to this podcast, I would really encourage everybody to try to diversify yourself as much as possible and get that different disciplines because it does make you more attractive to executives that are looking to fill next jobs.

**[00:10:17] Matt:** So when you went to Germany in the headquarters of Adidas, like, what were some of the, I guess, cultural nuances working there? And what did do the Germans, especially at a place like Adidas, do really well to have gotten that business to where it's gotten to?

**[00:10:31] Eric:** Yeah. Listen, the cultural differences are far and wide. I loved it because I love learning. I find myself to be always try to be **intellectually curious**. So learning new cultures, learning about new people, learning new languages, which I did not, but I've got enough to order at least my meals and get my wants and needs across. And, basically, I think it's just appreciating that. I mean, Germany, I mean, from a quality of life, it's unrivalled. I mean, the highways, the infrastructure, the buildings, the beer gardens, you know, it's like the beer. Like, they've got so many things going for them. And when I got into a more executive position on the board level, one of the biggest issues was the divide between the Americans and the Germans and the collision of two very strong cultures coming together. And we're German-headquartered. And the Americans need to take what we give them, and the Americans like, "Screw that. Like, we're not allowed to do that. Like, you guys are going to do what we want". So it becomes, like, this constant battle.

And so the one of the cultural breakdowns I had to do was say, "Guys, it's not us versus them internally. It's us. And what are the roles each of us play?". So the Americans, "You're going to be the creative. You're going to be where the creative director sits. You're going to be the storytellers. You're going to lead our digital efforts. You're going to be that, you know, that essence. You're going to be a co-headquarters in Portland, Oregon". And in Herzogenaurach, Germany, "You guys are all about the **innovation**. You're about the infrastructure. You're about the systems that make it go". So how do we make one and one equal three and be a multiplier versus one minus one equals zero? And it's this—I think that was the big cultural fix that, and one of the things I had to do was get rid of the us versus them internally and start to point the guns out, if you appreciate that analogy. So to me, it was more about romancing the strengths of both and bringing together to be a multiplier effect versus this detractor effect that we were experiencing when I took the role.

**[00:12:18] Matt:** Yeah. And I'm sure another factor that you probably faced a lot, especially in the product role over time, is the Adidas brand or Adidas, however you pronounce it—

**[00:12:27] Eric:** It depends where you live.

**[00:12:28] Matt:** Yeah. Had a lot of ebbs and flows in terms of being a brand about performance or, like, or lifestyle fashion. Right? Ever since, like, you know, Run DMC, and I know Rev Run really well. And, obviously, his impact on that business and Run DMC is, obviously, is profound. But that sort of introduced them more as a fashion lifestyle brand, where before that, maybe they were just about sport. It went back and forth. Is that something as you kind of went deep into product development that was top of mind for you in terms of, like, why do people purchase this brand, and where does this brand really lean into?

[00:13:02] **Eric:** I think the aha! moment was recognizing that the **culture of sport doesn't stop when you leave the pitch** or you leave the court or you leave the field. It goes with you into the hallways, into the streets, in the music venues. So once you appreciate that and you hard-code that into your strategy and your approach, you start to look at you say, "Okay. This isn't forbidden territory. We don't have to be one or the other. We can be all". And then the third thing we added on to that was, like, if you really take a consumer-first approach, they also care about their world. So we always used to talk about **game, life, and world**, and how we would tell stories and how we make product to approach all three of those things.

So to me, it was really understanding that you have to go where the consumer is, and, yeah, we have to make product to help people run faster, kick stronger, jump higher, but we have to recognize that the culture of sport comes off the court and goes with you into the streets of life. And, also, like, we all doom scroll twenty-four/seven, and let's recognize the fact that the world is stressful, or at least it's more readily stressful to you every day because you get a constant drip of the news. So how do we help kids feel more relaxed and de-stress? And sport can help that, but maybe we can do something about climate change or plastic pollution or a Me Too movement or LGBTQ+. It's like there's things out there that maybe we can lean into and take a more active role to really, again, make a stand, but also win advocates to our brand.

So to me, it was really being a **balanced approach**, and I think Adidas was very well balanced to that because they had the history with Run. We leaned into **Kanye**. We leaned into **Pharrell**. We leaned into **Beyoncé**, and we had these different things that would allow us to have that multiplier effect. But because when I got there, we had the performance logo with the mountain logo, and we had the trefoil, and we had Y-3 and stuff. So we had multiple things to play from a brand of portfolio standpoint so that we could really lean into some of those things. The important thing for me was to always ground ourselves in **sport** because, ultimately, there's nothing goes out of fashion as fast as fashion. So if you're a sports brand, there's always a need for sport product. So you have to ground yourself there as a sports brand, and then you can use fashion to as commercial opportunities.

[00:15:10] **Matt:** I like that. "**There's nothing that goes out of fashion as fast as fashion.**" It's a nice one. And, obviously, now, like, not only has culture been injected into sneakers, now there's, like, **sneaker culture** where you have StockX and people buying and selling sneakers and waiting in line for a limited edition. Does that boom surprised you, or is this something that you've always kind of seen brewing?

[00:15:32] **Eric:** I think the last—it happened slowly, but it continues to accelerate. I think the sports industry has been discovered as a **growth industry**. There's no doubt about it. I mean, it continues to go, and it continues to happen in in different ebbs and flows, but it's always strong CAGR up to the right. And I think that's just because it is such a life-friendly thing. I think everybody loves sport. I don't care what your political affiliation is. Everybody can appreciate sports. And I think the look of sport is something that's bled into the business atmosphere and the business environment. And, you know, and then you bring in COVID on top of that, and all

of a sudden, you've got people who are sitting at home. They don't have to get. So now we're wearing sweatpants all the time, and it's become like dressing sweatpants is okay for you to work. Yesterday, I went in a tracksuit. You know? It's like, it's okay to, like, wear these things, and it's become much more appropriate. So it just continues to grow. And then you see LVMH coming down towards sport. You see these fashion houses coming in. So the proliferation of the sporting good industry continues to run ungoverned, in my opinion. It continues to go in different iterations, but it's always continuing to climb and outclimb other industries.

**[00:16:34] Matt:** We'll be right back with *The Speed of Culture* after a few words from our sponsors.

So eventually, you decided to leave Adidas after being there for over two decades to go out on your own and start your own company. What gave you the conviction to do that? What was the concept behind it? And tell us about your journey at **Unless Collective**?

**[00:16:55] Eric:** I think it was 2015, I would say. A gentleman by name is **Cyrill Gutsch** walked in my office and said, "Hey. Would you like to save the oceans?" I was like, "Yeah. I love the oceans. Who doesn't love the oceans?" I mean, he's like, "But I'm kind of busy. I'm I just became Brand President, and I got this thing going." He goes, "No. You don't understand. The footprint you have is affecting and actually killing the oceans". I was like, "Huh?", so he started educating me on the state of the oceans from a fish stock standpoint, from a pH standpoint, from a, you know, this is the in pollution, but, ultimately, the plastic pollution's coming through and the footprint that the fashion industry was responsible for. And so you start going into down this rabbit hole of understanding the amount of stuff sporting goods industry makes and fashion industry in general makes and the amount of fast fashion that's disposed and where that goes and how that ends up degrading the environment and degrading the oceans and and breaking down the micro and nano plastic that then goes in and kills the krill and the microorganisms in the ocean. The ocean's responsible for **every second breath we take**. So it's like, holy shit. It was basically a mind opener.

And so I got busy with him, and we started doing some cool stuff. And we did this party for the oceans, Adidas collaboration, and we did activations like **Run for the Ocean**. We did product around ocean plastics recovered, and it was fantastic. And I got to meet a lot of brilliant people like Captain **Paul Watson**, the founder of Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd. I got to meet **Sylvia Earle** of a royal deepness. I mean, it's just, like, an unbelievable amount of smart people, and they start educating me more and more. Once you get this education, you can't unhear. You can't unsee it. And you can only whisper yourself to sleep so much at night. Like, so I go like, I'm doing what I can, but I'm still commercializing all this stuff. So at a certain point, I'm like, alright. I'm young enough, foolish enough, and cocky enough to think I can do this. **I can solve the problem of plastic waste in fashion.**

So I took the bold move in **2019**, the lucky move, to exit Adidas at that time and go and pursue starting the first ever a 100% plant-based fashion brand. As you may remember, 2020 was the

start of COVID, and everything shut down. So I did not have to do any of the Zoom calls and all that stuff I've heard, that the horrors of managing large teams from a virtual seat and all those pieces and deal with that business. But I did have the challenge of raising money, starting a company, and building a new product range during COVID, which is a whole another podcast we can do one day. But that was my impetus. My impetus was to solve the problem of waste in fashion.

**[00:19:20] Matt:** So you wanted to solve that problem, but not a lot of people obviously don't have that action into a business. What was the next step in terms of turning that into an actual business that you can create enterprise value from?

**[00:19:29] Eric:** Yeah. So we raised a little bit of money thanks to our partners, and we got to work. Really, it starts with the **research and development**. Okay. What is going to be a holistic approach to it? And the end goal was always making a shoe. How can we make a shoe that's the first **100% plant-based shoe**? Which means, you know, and the things you have to solve for are: all glues are made from plastic today. You've got stretch that's primarily melted plastic, so you can't solve for that. You've got foams that are primarily all polyurethane, which is a form of poly petroleum-based plastic. You've got prints and dyes on your product that's primarily plastic and synthetic. So we had to solve for those big five things, plus a slew of other things, all during COVID and finding those things. So it was quite the experience, but I'm happy to say we did it. We started to get some traction, and we set up our own website. We based ourselves here in Portland, Oregon, and we got to work. And Unless is still a viable opportunity to continue to grow, it's growing slowly but surely month on month, year on year. We're in our fifth year now, or fourth year, really, with product in the marketplace, and we were **acquired, like, a year ago from Under Armour**. So we think now with the combined effort of Under Armour's research and development and Unless's, you know, pioneering spirit and expertise, the two are going to, you know, really change the industry, and that's what we hope. We did our first collab in Milan at **Milan Design Week** earlier this year. So it's been a fruitful relationship so far, and we're excited about what the future holds for us.

**[00:20:50] Matt:** And what was the experience like running your own business as an entrepreneur versus working at such a large organization?

**[00:20:56] Eric:** That's a big one. So I think the experience is **super liberating**. I like the idea that I didn't have to ask for permission to get stuff done, and you're able to really do it. But you think you've got the entrepreneurial spirit, but you don't know what that means until you try it. And, I mean, like, it's all the little stuff. So all of a sudden, you're in charge of HR. You're in charge of IT. You're in charge of the website going down. You're in charge of a warehouse and shipping out. You're in charge of retail experience. You're in charge of personnel. So you're basically all the jobs you had friends doing or colleagues doing on a regular basis is all now compressed onto you. So you want to do a pop-up shop in LA. Guess what? You're driving the U-Haul down. You're setting it up. You're manning it. You're closing it back up. You're taking it back. But, you know, all these different things, the PR opportunities, the marketing



opportunities, the wholesale opportunities, every little thing falls to you and your small band of startup founders. It's not for the faint of heart. So to me, it was, like, it was liberating. It was fun. It was exciting because you didn't have to ask permission. You could do these things, these radical things of trying to create the first 100% fashion brand out of plants, but it's hard. It's **hard yards**. There's no doubt about it.

**[00:22:05] Matt:** Absolutely. So now you're part of Under Armour, and it's a whole new phase of your career. What do you hope to accomplish as part of this new partnership? And talking about what you're most excited about moving forward with both businesses.

**[00:22:18] Eric:** Yeah. I think my focus is still the same. I want to systematically change the fashion industry to move from **petroleum-based feedstock to plant-based**. I mean, I'm here to build it, to play it forward, and so I can look my kids and my kids' kids in the eye and say, "You know what? I may have committed a lot of shit in my life and done some stuff that maybe I'm not so proud of, but this one I'm proud of, and I'm giving you a better opportunity". So to me, it's like I'm completely driven by this mission of **solving the plastic crisis in the world of fashion**. And, you know, I talk a lot about that in the documentary on Netflix called *Buy Now* if you want to hear more about that, because it's a lot about this journey, even a little bit more so.

And, you know, at the same time, though, I now have fiduciary responsibility to Under Armour's shareholders. So I do believe as we grow this thing, I think there is a **wellness community** that's growing every day and every week and every month in popularity, whether it's about longevity, whether it's about the foods we eat, whether it's about the beauty care. They're going to care a lot about the clothes they wear. That education is coming to a tipping point, and we'll be the brand. Under Armour will be the brand that brings solutions to them. So when you wear your leggings and where you wear your tights and where you wear your product in the future, you will know it's not full of microplastics and nano plastics and phthalates and chemicals that are bleeding into your body, you'll know that you're wearing healthy plant-based solutions that are natural and will go back to soil and become plant and worm food when you're done with it. And that is super compelling.

And if I can do that with Under Armour, and we can start to win consumer minds and heart share, mind share and wallet share, and then the industry follows because we know one thing, the industry is a fast follower too. When something gets going, others will come quickly to it. So I'm very bullish on the future. The partnership between Unless and Under Armour is right on target and right on time, and right on the pulse of where consumers are going. So I'm excited about that, and I'm excited about the mission of systematically changing the industry against that.

**[00:24:07] Matt:** And to drive that forward, how important is the support of athletes? Obviously, we think about brand Jordan, and it was obviously revolutionized this industry of sneakers and apparel and fashion and all that, but it was about ultimately one transcendent athlete. Does the same dynamic exist today, where when you launch new products with Under

Armour, you need a Steph Curry or you need an athlete behind it? Or are there other ways to go about it, where perhaps you and the creators or other mechanisms to build that brand and awareness?

**[00:24:37] Eric:** I think it's more **collective**. I think there is still those singular athletes like the **Lionel Messis** of the world that can really drive. But let's be clear. Messi drives soccer boots. So he drives soccer, and he does a really good job at it. He's a celebrity, but that's his niche. And I think basketball, Anthony Edwards is of the world's and those guys, I mean, they're great, but I don't see the impact that Jordan had back in the day. And I think you have musicians now. You have artists. You have content creators. You have TikTok influencers. You have a lot of different—

**[00:25:07] Matt:** Much more fragmentation, longer tail.

**[00:25:09] Eric:** Exactly. Look at **Mr. Beast**. Well, he's got 500 million followers on YouTube. It's like there's so many different legitimate athletes, entertainers, influencers that can help you here. And so the important thing for me to drive this initiative is it needs to be **mission aligned**. It can't be transactional because, I mean, kids—I think everyone sees right through a transactional thing, and word-of-mouth and purpose-driven and mission alignment is the most important thing, and people see it when it's authentic and they feel it and they can really speak to it. So to me, it's the **authenticity** that's the most important, and then we can work with whoever it is. And, again, a **hyperlocal influencers** are really interesting as well because the word-of-mouth on a local area almost has more credibility. It just takes a little bit longer. It's not a single bullet. You have to win street by street, block by block.

**[00:25:55] Matt:** Very cool. So to wrap up here, and this has been—I mean, it's crazy because, Eric, you make it seem so matter-of-fact, almost like in the rearview mirror, but what you've accomplished is remarkable in my opinion. I'm sure there's so much more on back. So first of all, congratulations on your success as an entrepreneur. It's really inspiring to see not only what you've accomplished, but how you're so purpose-driven now at this point in your career to change and industry really have an impact on something so much bigger than the business that you're in. When you look back on your career, what are some of the things you can point to that you think you've done right in terms of your ability to harness certain skills or focusing on certain areas that's put you in a position to be so successful?

**[00:26:35] Eric:** I think, ultimately, I've been blessed with unbelievable family background and family, so I am lucky, and I will be the first one to say that. I come from a very privileged background in that regard. If I have one secret power, it's to **believe in the people around me and the teams** and inspiring them to believe in themselves to do better. And I think I've always tried to demonstrate that and try to lead by that, but my secret power of doing anything I've been successful at is being unleashing the potential to people around me.

And I think that's easier said than done because it requires a certain operating model that empowers people and holds them accountable. It requires a certain strategic direction to give

them to show them what winning looks like and what that upper right-hand corner of the whiteboard is and let them get there, but tell them the destination is very clear and you're measured against it and hold them accountable and empower them to get there. And then finally, giving them the culture to thrive and making sure that you're speaking to them and inspiring them in any way, shape, or form, whether it's at the water cooler or whether it's on a stage with a thousand people. It's like you have to continue to behave in a way that inspires others to follow and succeed you.

**[00:27:40] Matt:** I love that. So we always wrap up our podcast by asking our guests if there's a saying or mantra they go by. Given your background, I'm sure you have no shortage of them, but what comes to mind?

**[00:27:50] Eric:** Well, there's two of them, and I gave you one already, which is **"don't let perfect get in the way of better"**. I think that's something I quote and say relentless. I know it's a slight nuance to an engineering term, but I do like that. Don't let perfect get in the way of better is a key one.

And then I'll quote my first—well, the former CEO of Adidas, **Herbert Hainer**, who when he gave me my first appointment to the board, the brand was not in a good place. We had to reset the brand. It was really bad, actually, and it was a complete reset. And he looked at me and he said, **"Don't ask for permission. Ask for my advice."** And I love that. And I think I took that with me, and I've kind of tried to act that and apply that to as many of people that have ever worked me in the past because, ultimately, we all want to stretch our legs and we all want to run. But if we're constantly looking for permission, you don't get that. You're on too short of a leash. So come back and check in for advice. I like that a lot better. But in the meantime, run until your rope runs out.

**[00:28:42] Matt:** I love that. I think too many people ask for permission, wait to be told what to do. And I think this day and age, it really the spoils will go to those who take initiative and are proactive and asking for advice and having them mould it in terms of where the point they're going to reach to is a different story, but I agree. Don't ask for permission. I think it's a great one.

**[00:28:59] Eric:** Yep. Great.

**[00:28:59] Matt:** Excellent. Well, this has been an amazing conversation. I feel like we can go on forever, but I want to be respectful of your time. But, uh, really appreciate you sharing your wisdom and your feedback to the audience today. It's been amazing to hear, and I'll continue to follow your journey from afar. So thanks so much for joining.

**[00:29:14] Eric:** Appreciate it, Matt. Thanks for having me, and I hope there were some words there that were useful.

**[00:29:17] Matt:** Absolutely. On behalf of Suzy and Adweek team, thanks again to **Eric Liedtke**, CEO and founder of Unless Collective and Brand President of Under Armour, for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe, rate and review *The Speed of Culture* podcast on your favourite podcast platform. Till next time, see you soon, everyone. Take care. *The Speed of Culture* is brought to you by Suzy as part of the Adweek podcast network and Acast creator network. You can listen and subscribe to all Adweek's podcasts by visiting [adweek.com/podcast](https://adweek.com/podcast). To find out more about Suzy, head to [suzy.com](https://suzy.com). And make sure to search for *The Speed of Culture* in Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or anywhere else podcasts are found. Click follow so you don't miss out on any future episodes. On behalf of the team here at Suzy, thanks for listening.