

THE 5 SHIFTS OF LEADING IN THE AGE OF PERSONALIZATION

We can't just ditch standards – we have to find balance between the extremes. The pendulum always swings from one extreme to another, before ultimately settling in the middle. Right now, we're in the stage of a swing that hasn't yet settled, which means we're constantly fighting the back and forth from the extreme of standardization to the opposite extreme of personalization. The age of standardization is giving way to the age of personalization: it is becoming less about the business defining the individual and more about the individual defining the business. The balance of power is shifting – and organizations and their leaders know it. They just don't know what to do about it. If you can make the following shifts, you'll create a healthy culture. When we're healthy, we grow.

SHIFT 1: FROM DIVERSITY TO INCLUSION

Diversity does not automatically lead to inclusion. Inclusion is a system for making sure the organization is welcoming at every level to every individual. Individuality is a concerted effort to know and account for the realities and the values of individual employees and customers. Leaders love to tout their commitment to diversity, even as they continue to hire and promote people who demonstrate the “thoughts” that have already been deemed worthy. In other words, they say they want diversity of thought and then they hire for conformity of thought.

- Diversity = feeling separate, unwelcomed, and unsafe
- Inclusion = Belonging, feeling seen, known and welcomed

SHIFT 2: FROM TRIBAL TO HUMAN

Tribal thinking and silos in business put people into the boxes they check (much like diversity) and divide departments, work, people, identities, and our stories from each other. This makes the people in the silos less cross-functional, collaborative, and communicative with each other – less human toward each other – just as it does in the highly polarized and contentious world, we live in. What's the point of bringing diversity into your organization if you don't let people share what makes them distinct? Our organizational cultures won't change unless we interrupt the limitations of tribal thinking. A human approach to leadership shakes us from our silos and makes us want to seek and have relationships based on genuine interactions that let us see and know our customers and employees.

- Tribal = Assimilation
- Human = Authenticity

SHIFT 3: FROM BRAND IDENTITY TO INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES

Finding ways to let individual identities impact the brand can be powerful. People want to identify with a brand whose products and services give their business or life meaning and significance. Employees and consumers want to align with brands that are capable of leading and serving them based on the person's own values, unique needs, and desires. This shifts the balance of power from brands and businesses to individuals—to the standardization of “me.” Organizations that make employees and consumers feel included and understood on an individual level will have a huge advantage over those that don't.

- Brand Identity = Shaping what people need and want to match what you offer
- Individual Identities = Shaping what you offer to match what people need and want

SHIFT 4: FROM MISSION TO CONTRIBUTION

Every organization has a mission, a vision or value statement and employees will buy into it on the surface because there is no freedom not to. Employees may join the organization because they share the mission, or they might just need a job. But why should that matter, if what they really want is to contribute? What is most meaningful to people is to know they have a chance to contribute their unique skills and strengths—no matter the mission. How can we enable individuals to personalize the way they serve the organization's mission and values?

- Mission = Control
- Contribution = Influence

SHIFT 5: FROM RESULTS TO METHODS

Unless you ditch your old standards, you'll never be distinct. When you let people break free from the standards of the past and attack challenges in their own way, you open up new possibilities. "Results" is not a negative word. We should expect people to deliver results. But too often our focus on results or on prescribed methods keep us from seeking bigger opportunities to grow in the future.

- Prioritizing Results = Boxed-in, pre-determined definition of success, limits capacity and capabilities
- Prioritizing Methods = Allows people the freedom to experiment, and to fulfill their capacity and capabilities