



## Season1-Episode3

# Leadership in 2023

---

### Journey to the future

The charger! Susan is upset. Monday morning, and then this?! Three times she had pointed out that the offer had to go out to the client on Friday. Now it just fell through. Of course, the data sheet from the technical support department had not been ready until Friday afternoon. No, that's no reason to just drop it.

Now that Xenia Miller, her assistant, works in the home office on Thursday and Friday, you can't rely on anything. On Friday Susan had been to a training course. Susan sends Xenia a chat message that she should come to her office immediately. In the meantime, Xenia had also noticed that the offer had been forgotten on Friday. Her boss Susan is a fantastic salesperson. She always gets new customers on board, even in the current difficult times. ...

But there isn't much left of the former Team spirit. Susan rushes from meeting to meeting and her employees are sometimes only lightning rods for bad mood and failures. Cold one-liners as e-mails. Ranting tirades in the team meeting. Xenia takes another deep breath. She heads to Susan's office. Let's just get this over with.

Susan is reaching for her cell phone, empty the damn thing! She's digging into her bag for the charger. She tries frantically to plug it in and slips off a few times. Oh yes, the charger! ...The charger should be her anchor for mindfulness since Friday. ...New-fangled stuff. In the end, all that counts is how much revenue I make. ...Still, the charger is now an anchor for mindfulness. The charger, what would life be without it? ...

Susan closes her eyes. What did the coach say on Friday: Susan imagine how the charger would feel in your hand? Imagine how the electrons flow through the charger and charge the batteries and how good this feels. Say thank you to this little object for being always with you. ...Well, unless I just misplaced it. (*smile*) ...Susan takes three deep breaths and as she opens her eyes, Xenia is standing in front of her. Susan says: "Xenia please sit down. I want to discuss something that is very important to me. I understand that you did not do it on purpose on Friday. However, it is very irritating. Do you have an idea how we can do better in the future? "

### Agnes:

We still live in the times of COVID-19 over 10 million confirmed cases all over the world. And over 500 people have died from this disease. The hotspots are USA, Brazil and India.

In Germany we had a severe outbreak in the meat industry, and therefore we have fears about what lower temperatures in fall and winter might bring. My name is Agnes Kunkel. Today is Monday 29th of June 2020. Our guest today is Brigitta Wurnig. She works as coach for top executives in Hamburg for many years. She worked many years with Treuhand Anstalt and McKinsey. In recent years, her focus has been on digital leadership and now mindfulness. Welcome Brigitta!

**Brigitta:**

Hello, Agnes. I'm so grateful for being guest in this podcast.

**Agnes:**

Dear Brigitta, you spend a lot of time with questions regarding leadership and teams. Let's talk about leadership in the year 2023. Before COVID-19 most people understood a team as a structure, opposed to a project structure. Will we see any changes regarding this point in 2023?

**Brigitta:**

Interesting question. Triggered by the current experience with home office, fixed team structures are softened. New forms and processes are formed. Not everyone wants to go back to the old structures and enjoys their space and the personal responsibility in the remote office. It may even be that highly sought-after people only want to work as freelancers.

**Agnes:**

Let's stick to the topic that the intensive use of Remote Office erodes established team structures. How does it look in practice?

**Brigitta:**

I can say the whole thing just becomes more and more heterogeneous. The existing processes cannot simply be transferred from our head office into a patchwork of remote office. That's too simple. Not every employee has the same technical and spatial resources. And certainly, the interface suddenly looks very different when some of them work remotely in the team and others are in the office.

**Agnes:**

And what new structures and processes will be merged?

**Brigitta:**

What I see already is more freedom in the execution of tasks and greater personal responsibility for the structuring of one's own workflows. That's becoming more important in order to work well in the home office or remote office. It's more of how do I structure myself? How do I structure my day and how much am I really feeling responsible for the outcome of my path?

**Agnes:**

That's a nice bridge to our little story in the beginning about Susan and Xenia and their experience in the new structure, as Xenia has now much more time in the remote office. This of course has some difficulties and different challenges for executive. How does this impact the executives in the next years until 2023 maybe?

**Brigitta:**

It has different impacts. There are some executives who are glad they no longer must deal with these details. They don't want to look after or micromanage their staff. They just want them to work independently. Thus, they will be happy about this new approach remote office, if they have a team which can work in a responsible way. Others who might tend to manage or micromanage their teams more, they are facing a lot of difficulties because just imagine half of their team is not in the office. So they can't walk by and control them. They must trust and rely on their team who sit in the remote office.

**Agnes:**

Even when sometimes mistakes are happening as Susan was experiencing. In which way, people like Susan should shift their focus in these coming years?

**Brigitta:**

I think the focus has not shifted to manage or micromanage more. It's not about control or demand and control. It's about establishing a team spirit and get people involved that makes a difference for the team members. And in that way team members understand their work is important and if they understand this, then they will establish more and more responsibility and take accountability for the task.

**Agnes:**

These old ideas of micromanaging are no longer a good approach. Could it happen that strengths and weaknesses of the managers are more visible in this new situation?

**Brigitta:**

Of course, nowadays I like to say the Corona crisis is the best assessment center we have ever seen. Because, isolation and home office made it obvious which manager was concerned with the framework conditions for a nice work environment, as well as the mental stability of the team members and the team. Do they really care about their team or do they only care about themselves? And I have seen a lot of different cases where for example, a manager did not even contact his team for over three months of lockdown. And I saw other cases where managers had very regular frequent virtual coffees or check ins or even team events. There was a huge difference and that you can see right away in this Corona crisis.

**Agnes:**

I understand that working in a remote office does not mean we lose social contact. That was on the executive level and the management level. But on the company level, what conclusions do you think will companies have drawn in 2023?

**Brigitta:**

I think companies now must rethink their model and they have to be aware that they are going to deal with the so-called hybrid team situation and even hybrid organizational setups. And this means that some of the staff or some of the team members will work remotely and does not mean necessarily working from home. It could be some place anywhere in the world and others are in the office. Companies must already create the right framework conditions now and prepare their managers and employees for this.

**Agnes:**

What do you think is most important changing factor here?

**Brigitta:**

Well, leaders! It always starts with the leaders; they must establish a sense of community in the team and the usefulness of all the work. What we see now, video conferencing and such platforms are hyped. And it's good because digitalization has really moved into the working field, but that's not enough. The challenges are establishing team spirit, values and profits.

**Agnes:**

You say great video conferencing systems and good working platforms like teams or so that's not everything?

**Brigitta:**

No, it's not. You need the team platforms and modern video conferencing of course, but they are only part of the whole system inside a company. But what do they help, if the employees do not recognize the meaning of their work and do not feel part of the team? I assume that these will remain the assess factors, because without purpose work makes no sense. And this I'm very sure will not change in the future. It will even gain more importance.

**Agnes:**

When you have loose structures, the purpose and meaning of the work is becoming more important. But on the other hand, the structures are looser than before. How does this match?

**Brigitta:**

Well, they seem looser because people do not sit together in one office or one floor anymore. But sitting together does not mean a team is close. I've seen functional teams

sitting together and, they were not close at all. And I'm convinced that teams need to develop better human relationships with each other; because now they have come to know how important it is to treat yourself and others in a good manner when working together. If you're working remotely, you must take more care about it. Now teams have experienced how important it is to treat yourself and others in the mindset of building a relationship when working together. The code of virtual distance is personal appreciation. And that's important to understand.

**Agnes:**

To reach a few conclusions for our listeners at this point: you say, we will see hybrid teams, we will have some mix of presence in the head office or the central office and remote work. And it will shift our focus on results more than detailed processes, how results are achieved will be less important. Hybrid structures will trigger challenges for the management and for the executive level. And executives and management people must improve their skills in communication, empathy, and mindfulness. When you have hybrid structure the challenge is to transfer purpose, meaning and warm personal appreciation through these technical channels. That's right?

**Brigitta:**

Yes. Agnes, that's exactly what I assumed, because you can already see, also in the last couple of years, mindfulness and appreciation have really become more and more important, especially in our today's world, where everything's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Over the next years, and so in 2023, I'm pretty sure the demand for mindfulness and purpose will increase.

**Agnes:**

When we think of the little story in the beginning and generally of these hybrid structures, will they lead to special kind of problems that didn't exist before? And I'm not speaking of the technical side, but of the interaction between leaders, managers, employees, and maybe from team member to team member.

**Brigitta:**

Well, that's a very interesting question. For the people who are still in the office locations it will be probably still noticeable compared to working virtually. The problems eventually remain the same as they are today. We're all human beings, hence, the human frictions might stay the same. I don't think this will change significantly. Team members in the office still can sit down and speak out. In my opinion it is comparable to now. But virtually, one is more distant from each other, everyone sits in a different place and one only communicate via virtual tools. Thus, people are less upset and at the same time free to criticize because you are not physically close to each other, you just see each other on a screen. And this changes everything immediately. If you physically present in the room in a room full of people, this has a completely different dynamic and energy. Everyone therefore needs to learn how to deal and work within a hybrid reality and how to shape the team.

**Agnes:**

Hence, the impact on team members might differ. One person might bloom and flourish in this new flexible environment. And others might feel a bit lost and have more difficulties. What do you think, how can a leader approach these difficulties?

**Brigitta:**

There's already some research going on regarding this matter. What you really need to do as a leader, you must strengthen your self-awareness and mindfulness approach. If I want to be treated humanely, I must begin with myself. One can't sit there and say to others, you must change. It's always yourself who will have to change first.

**Agnes:**

Gurus and mental health leaders have been working on self-perception and mindfulness for years. How can we now in our organizations and corporations encourage employees and managers to become more mindful?

**Brigitta:**

Very good question Agnes! Of course, mindfulness has been out there for thousands of years. If you look down to the roots of mindfulness, you will probably come upon Buddhism from two and a half thousand years ago. But today you can support your team and your executives by appropriate trainings, retreats and coaching. I believe companies have to pay or provide these trainings, because having one soccer kicker alone is not enough. And as you mentioned in the beginning, I already worked with my program called mindfulness and business. I bring mindfulness to the business and there is also training for mindfulness space and emotional intelligence called "search inside yourself". It was invented by Google, the data driven company and was also developed for executives. What we can see here the direction of leadership skills development really goes into the direction of mindfulness.

**Agnes:**

I guess that was the focus point of the story in the beginning, when Susan was not working in her office on a Friday, but she was attending also a mindfulness workshop as the ones you are giving. Maybe she was even with you on that Friday (laughs).

**Brigitta:**

(laughs) Yes. I hope she was!

**Agnes:**

The story tell how she was thinking about this one little exercise to calm her mind and bring her to the state of perception by touching a little item of her daily work. Do you have experience with these techniques as they are published in books and in the Internet? What I mean is, the way of touching such a simple object can bring your mind to a calm state and bring focus to yourself and understand, in her case that she had to call her clients for the work that did not went through the previous Friday. Is this technique enough to create a switch of mind?

**Brigitta:**

Yes, what you are referring to is a very popular mindful practice.

You need very little effort here; the solution is a so-called mindful hijack. Her emotions were overflowing her brain and she couldn't think clear anymore. And what happens is simply sit, and

breathe and count to 10, for example. In the story you have the charger. In this case, you touch something in your hand, and this is your anchor. Immediately your brain recognizes this anchor and signals to calm down, that everything is fine, that you're safe and the solution will be found. Then your thoughts calm and your system also. This is a very good mindful practice. The story shows how easy mindfulness can be implemented in business.

**Agnes:**

When I wrote it, I was not completely convinced that it would work, but when I read it again, I felt the flow of the electrons (laughs). And charging the batteries maybe is worth the try.

**Brigitta:**

Yes, it is. And if you don't have the charger, you can always rely on your breath because it is always with you. If you look into meditation practices or mindfulness practices, focusing on your breath is the best as you always have it with you. For example, paying or drawing the attention to one or three breath in- and exhalations always calms down your emotional state. Then you experience how your thoughts calm and even your body relaxes.

**Agnes:**

You're teaching these practices in your mindfulness program. How long would you typically expect someone like Susan needs to calm? As an executive, for whom Susan is very important as she is good at her job, how many Fridays do you think it would be needed for Susan to be in that kind of program?

**Brigitta:**

That depends. One program that I work on is the mindfulness business, which is online and lasts an hour. So, I have four modules around emotional management to learn leadership skills and mindfulness skills. Every module lasts one hour, and it is online. I think contact over four weeks would be extensive, which means one module for week. The other program is the two days training, which has a lot of mindfulness practice. It also contains science and study, and explains well how the brain functions, if you talk about mindfulness. You can have this two-day training and a 28-day challenge by email. Or you can spread it over six modules and a period of six weeks.

So, there is no right answer to the question. My idea would be, you need mindfulness training to lay the foundation and then you would have smaller reminders, check-ups and webinars over a period of several months for people to start learning how to integrate it into their daily life and business life.

**Agnes:**



Okay, so they are maybe one or two-day trainings and a combination of webinars. Maybe individual coaching is also good for people like Susan, who is very important to the company as she is an excellent salesperson and we want to approve her team leading skills. So, I understand that you think after the Covid-19 crisis, we would have more emphasis put on use of technical-teaching like webinars online training to help executives and managers with being a role model, aware and appreciative for the employees and clients. Could this be a positive effect of the disease and the trouble we already experience?

**Brigitta:**

Yes, I truly believe that. When I talk to my clients or colleagues all over the world, it is one mutual agreement, we need mindfulness more and more. We also need more emotional intelligence and leaders. This time was extraordinary, and it may also come again as we know. We need to be prepared and to show that people want a purposeful and meaningful life regarding the circumstances. The reason why I'm saying this, some of my clients experienced how important family and friends are, especially if you're isolated from them. They also experienced how valuable it is to have trust in the team. When you work remotely, trust is the base of everything. You must be able to trust that your colleague or manager will do, what they are supposed to do. This experience goes back to the relationship level and it is not about technical stuff. People understand relationships are based on trust and love, which makes one happy and motivated to make it work. It means you are doing your work, whereby you are happy and fulfilled. When you have these motivated people in company, I'm pretty sure you will have less overtime worker.

**Agnes:**

Good to hear. Let's recap for our listeners: after all we will have hybrid teams, especially the employees will become more demanding. This will become more challenging for the leader. These qualified people will want to contribute and to understand ideas. The executive will be much more of a role model. This would be the most important work to keep the Team on high motivation levels. For being a role model, this executive will have to be well trained in self-perception and must have a good understanding of what are their strengths and weaknesses. Companies that started early to support executives in this development will be able to master the challenges, especially the challenges in a quite difficult economic environment, which we will see in the next few years.

**Brigitta:**

Yes Agnes, I completely agree with what you have summarized. We are realizing now how important leadership and good team members with good emotional intelligence are. I'm pretty sure in 2023 we will look back on this interview and think that the company would have survived because they have done the right job.

**Agnes:**

A final question about your personal life: what changes do you think you will keep in your personal life in 2023?

**Brigitta:**

That's a good question. I have been working on my self-perception during isolation. I experienced being part of a lot of online meditations and deepened my self-perception by grounding myself and make myself more self-aware and perceptive. I also learned to focus my personal and professional life on something meaningful, as I sat down and thought about creating something meaningful, which will leave a mark behind. This is something I will keep and expand further, as it has become important to me. My job was not only a job, but also a passion and now I have a meaning and purpose by getting this out it in the world with more and more focus.

**Agnes:**

That sounds great. We will talk about this in 2023, as it is very interesting and it's great to get a feedback. It was great talking to you. Thanks for being with us. Until the next time, Brigitta!

**Brigitta:**

Thank you, Agnes. I love your podcast 2023, as it gives an opportunity to think about the recent reality and provides a path for the future to the society and business. I'm grateful I was able to share my thoughts and my experience.