



## Season1-Episode3

# Leadership in 2023

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### Journey to the future

The charger! Susan is just 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 Brigitte Wuring. 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 Brigitte!

**Brigitte:**

Hello, Agnes. I'm so grateful for being here in this very, very interesting podcast.

**Agnes:**

Dear Brigitte, 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:**

that's a really 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 structures, but enjoys their design form in 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:**

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

**Brigitte**

Well I can say that 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?

**Brigitte:**

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 definitely become more important in order to work well in the home office or remote office. It's actually really more of a how, 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?

**Brigitte:**

Yeah, I think what you can already see is that, it has different impact. There are some executives who are really very glad that they no longer have to deal with these details. They don't want to look after, or micromanage their staff. They just want them to work very independently. So they will be very happy about this new approach of remote office, if they have a team that can work in a responsible way. Others who might tend to manage or micromanage more their teams, they are really 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 have to 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?

**Brigitte:**

I think the focus has not shifted to manage or micromanage more. It's not about control or demand and control. It's really about establishing a team spirit and get people really involved that makes a difference for the team members. And in that way team members understand that, their work is really 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 idea. And could it happen that strengths and weaknesses of the managers are more clearly visible in this new situation?

**Brigitte:**

Of course, nowadays I like to say that, the Corona crisis is the best assessment center that we've ever seen. Because, isolation and home office made it so easy to see 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 take care about their team or do they only take care about themselves? And I've seen a lot of different cases where for example, a manager didn't 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. So 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 that 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?

**Brigitte:**

I think companies now have to really 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 doesn't 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?

**Brigitte:**

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. So 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:**

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

**Brigitte:**

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 like a 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:**

So when you have more loose structures, the purpose and the meaning becomes more important. But on the other hand, the structures are a little bit looser than before. How does this match together?

**Brigitte:**

Well, they seem looser because people do not sit together in one office or one floor any more. But sitting together does not mean that a team is very close. I've seen functional teams sitting together and, they were not close at all. And I'm convinced that teams need to develop more human relationships with each other; because now they have come to know how important it is to treat yourself and others with the mind of relationship when working together. If you're working remotely, then you have to take more care about this. Now teams have experienced how important it is to treat yourself and others with a mind, for a relationship when working together. The code of the virtual distance is personal appreciation. And that's important to understand.

**Agnes:**

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

**Brigitte:**

Yes. Agnes, that's exactly what I assumed, because you can already see, also in the last couple of years, that mindfulness and appreciation have really become more and more important, especially in our today's world, where everything's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. And if I look into the future in the next two years and I assume in 2023, I'm pretty sure that this 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.

**Brigitte:**

Well, that's a very interesting question. And what I think is; for the people who are still in the office frictions are probably still more noticeable than compared to working virtually. And the problems probably remain the same as they are today. We're all human beings, so the human frictions would stay the same. I don't think that this will significantly change. Team members in the office still can sit down and speak out. So I think that this will be probably quite comparable to now. But virtually one is more distant from each other, you all sit in different places and you only commute via virtual tools. So this means that you are less upset and at the same time free to make criticism because you are not physically close to each other, you just see each other on a screen. And this changes everything immediately. If you were in a room in person, this will have a complete different dynamic and a complete different energy. Everyone therefore needs to learn to deal with hybrid reality and to work, to shape the team.

**Agnes:**

So the impact upon team members also might a little bit differ. One maybe bloom and flourish in this new flexible environment. And others might get a little bit out of track and have more difficulties. So how do you think a leader could approach these additional difficulties?

**Brigitte:**

Yeah, there's already some research going on that. What you really need to do as a leader is you have to 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 have to change. It's always yourself that has to change first.

**Agnes:**

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

**Brigitte:**

That's a 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 would probably come upon Buddhism from two and a half thousand years ago. But today you can support your team and also your executives by appropriate trainings, retreats and coaching. And I believe that companies have to pay or provide these training, because just having a soccer kicker alone is not enough. And as you mentioned in the beginning, I already worked with my program called mindfulness and business. So I bring mindfulness to the business and there is also this training for mindfulness space and emotional intelligence called "search inside yourself". And it was invented by Google, the data driven company and was also developed for executives. So what we can see here is that the direction of leadership skills development really goes into the direction of mindfulness.

**Agnes:**

Hmm. 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)

**Brigitte:**

(laughs) Yes. I hope she was!

**Agnes:**

And then as we always have this story very short. I made it that she was thinking of just this one little exercise about calming her mind and to 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 very published and in books and in Internet. What I mean is, the way of touching such a simple object can bring your mind to calm state and bring focus to yourself and understand, in her case that she had to call her clients as it was not worked the stuff from Friday. Is this technique enough to create such a switch of mind?

**Brigitte:**

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

In my program, that's what I call it. That's because you need very little action here. So, I understand that solution once in 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. And 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 down and your system also.

So, this is a very good mindful practice. Therefore, I think that the story reminds to show 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 it's really worth the try.

**Brigitte:**

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 the mindfulness practices, the breath is the best as you always have it with you. For example, paying or drawing the attention to one breath or three breaths always calms down your emotional state. Then you experience how your thoughts calm down and even your body relaxes.

**Agnes:**

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

**Brigitte:**

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, which is really well explained regarding 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 after six modules and have it spread in a period of six weeks.



So, there is no one line answer to the question. My idea would be, you would have mindfulness training, where you would 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 in the company as she is an excellent salesperson and we want to approve her team leading skills.

So, I understand that you think that after the Covid-19 crisis, we would have more emphasis put on use of technical of 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 that we have already experienced?

**Brigitte:**

Yes, I truly believe this is what I'm seeing. When I talk to my clients or colleagues all over the world, it is actually one of voices, which says, we need mindfulness more and more. We need also emotional intelligence and leaders more and more. This time was extraordinary, and it may also come again as we may know. We need to be prepared and to show that people want to have a purposeful and meaningful life regarding circumstances. The reason why I'm saying this is because 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, because when you work remotely, trust is the base of everything. You have to have the trust that your colleague or manager will do, what they are supposed to do. So, this experience all come back to the relationship levels and it is not about the technical stuff, as they are only tools people understand that relationships. People understand the relationships based on trust and love make you happy and motivated to make it work.

That does not come to, whether you have to work or not. It means that you are doing your work and you are happy and fulfilled with it. And when you have these motivated people in company, I'm pretty sure you will have less overtime as a worker.

**Agnes:**

Good to hear. Let's recap for our listeners: after all we will have hybrid teams, especially the employee, they will become more demanding. This will become more challenging for the leader. These qualified people will want to contribute and to understand the ideas. The executive will be much more of the role model. This would be the most important work to keep the Team in high levels. For being a role model, this executive will have to be very well trained in self-perception and have to have a good understanding of what are their strengths and weaknesses. Early companies

that started support the executives in this development will be able to master the challenges and especially the challenges in the quite difficult economic environment, which we will see in the next few years.

**Brigitte:**

Yes Agnes, I completely agree what you have summarized. We can now see what we would have started with this development, as we realized how important leadership and good team members with good emotional intelligence are. I'm pretty sure on 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 in your personal life: what changes do you think you will keep in your personal life in 2023?

**Brigitte:**

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 by doing something meaningful, as I sat and thought about creating something meaningful and leaving a mark behind. This is definitely something that I would keep and expand further, as it has become important from me. My job was not only a job, but also a passion and now I have a meaning and purpose in and putting it in the world with more and more focus.

**Agnes:**

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

**Brigitte:**

Thank you, Agnes. I love your podcast which is 2023, as it gives an opportunity to think the reality at the moment and provide the path for more in the future for the society and for the business. I'm grateful I was able to share my thoughts and my experience.