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I've been in business for about 25 years working with leaders, the leadership teams, CEOs and helping them fundamentally transform what it is they do. And so I thought I'd tell you my stories and share with you some of the lessons that I've learned in working in business over the last 25 years.

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And my story really starts when I was, when I was a child, I had a fascination with commercials. My brother and I would watch Saturday morning cartoons and we really only had three channels, that's how old I was or I am. And, we would we would watch these great cartoons and then as soon as a commercial came on, my brother would bolt out of the room and he would go do something else. But not me, I would get closer to the television and I would watch these commercials. And these commercials really really got to me, because I thought they were promising something. They were promising something big and I really liked what they were promising. And I got sucked into one of those commercials at a very young age and I went out and I talked my mother into buying this product.

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So I used this product religiously. And what the product promised me at a very young age was that I would have super model like results. That's me on the left in my 11 year old super model self. What I discovered at a very early age is that there were a lot of promises out there and those promises would not yield the results, that they were ultimately promising. So I kept studying these commercials. I kind of look like a garden gnome, don't I? I kept studying these commercials and I kept getting sucked into them, but ultimately I developed a pretty healthy scepticism about businesses and their promises.

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And, and I started to started to really investigate through my studies what it is that I thought I wanted to be and originally I thought I wanted to be in advertising. But I didn't want to break promises. I didn't see advertisers as really really helping companies deliver against promises. So I explored further and I started to, I started to really really embrace all these management frameworks that you see. But I, I looked at these management frameworks and they directed me to a new career. That career was management consulting. I was I was hooked. I thought that was the place I needed to be. And very quickly, I loaded, I finished grad school and I loaded up all my frameworks into a tool box and I got an incredible job with a major corporation that had a rotational programme and this rotational programme was geared to help me develop as a professional and really as an internal consultant to the business.

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Learning everything that I could from these incredible professionals that were around me. And that first assignment I set off and I loaded up my toolbox and my toolbox was loaded with things that were geared towards efficiency, efficiency gains and strategic positioning. They were great tools. And my first rotational assignment was around implementing a robotic system that was really designed to take humans out of a very harmful manufacturing environment. It was very very exciting. And so what I did, my role on that team was to develop the business case and in developing that business case, I looked at all these frameworks and I looked at all these tools and I got really excited about using them.

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And I had, I think I used total quality managements and I used balance scorecard and I brought it all together and I developed the most elaborate business case you've ever seen. It was beautiful. We took it in front of the executives, the executives said, the returns looked great. Go get 'em. We got our project approved and our project was up and running in no time. It was spectacular. We had this robotic system up and running. We were gonna help humans by getting them out of the way in this manufacturing environment.

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So we implemented, we went live. Nothing happened. Nobody came. It was the era of, build it and they will come, well they didn't come. In fact, they fought us and it was an amazing fight. And all this time and energy and investment that we put in it was wasted. The manufacturing lead in the facility said, I'm not gonna fight this. The operators don't wanna use it. What we neglected to realise was, people people really kind of wanted their jobs. They were all okay with what they were in. They didn't want to lose their jobs. We didn't even focus on that. We were so enamoured with the technology.

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So, we shelved that project. I learned a lot and enter into new era and frameworks, this framework time and loading my toolbox up was an all around process, re-engineering and change management, really looking at the human side of the change and the efficiencies through process into end process management. Very very exciting time for me. I loaded up my frameworks again and I focused on one in particular up here that I just loved, which was, John Carter's framework, Eight Principles of Change. It started with this premise that you needed a sense of urgency in order to transform.

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You had to have a burning platform. You had to have a crisis to be able to transform, because that's what people would rally around. That's how you were gonna get your employees to really buy into what it is that you were trying to get them to change to. And I loved that. I thought that was a phenomenal thing and a phenomenal way to approach it. So I moved to San Francisco and I started studying statistics and why projects failed. I joined a management consulting firm there.

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And I got really deep into the statistics of failure, and success, and I learned a lot during that time. And what I really learned was and this is what I espoused throughout my client interactions was, the technology doesn't fail, it's the people that fail to buy into the technology and that is your role as a leader. It's not the technology's fault, it's the fact that you haven't gotten the people to buy in. And I said things like, change is hard and culture eats strategy for breakfast. We've all heard that one, right.

6:01

So I learned a lot during this timeframe and I studied a lot on it. And what I also learned during this timeframe was, that the next evolution was gonna be marred or marked by the ability to drive innovation and customer intimacy. It was the year 2000 I made partner at my firm. It was the dot com era. It was an incredible time to be in consulting and it was about the time that Al Gore invented the Internet. It was also about the time where Stanford grads were coming out and being millionaires overnight and I was right in the heart of it in Silicon Valley. It was incredible. They would load up their puppies into their Porsches and they would drive to work. They would put foosball in the halls. They would hire these gourmet chefs from around the world. You'd eat for free. It was amazing. Incredible.

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Cheryl, the value was incredible. Market caps and some of these companies were like nothing you'd ever seen, overnight. It was awesome. Great time to be a consultant. And then that bubble burst. More like it exploded. And when it exploded there was dot com shrapnel everywhere. Shareholders were miffed. They could not understand why they were not getting the returns that they were anticipating. And you know all my frameworks to date had really led up to this fact that it was all about shareholder returns, ultimately. All these frameworks were about shareholder returns, ultimately, driving improvement for shareholder returns. Every single tool in my toolbox.

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So, in Year 2000, it was actually 2012, I joined a new firm and we had a new CEO and this is one of the things that attracted me to this firm. We had a new CEO and he was launching a brand new strategy for our business vision 2020. And in that strategy, he had a commitment that we were gonna fundamentally implement a new purpose, a new identity for our company. And within a few months of joining the firm I was asked to bring my toolbox and come and help our own firm transform, biggest challenge, no pressure. The biggest challenge I've ever been through. And my CEO said, 'Cheryl, you can do it. What do you need?' So I went out, I grabbed all my frameworks. I grabbed the most amazing team of professionals I've ever had the honour and privilege to work with. In fact Mark you know a couple of them. And I got them all in a room and we spent months. We analysed everything. We spent months. We looked at the strategy and we we analysed the markets. We went through all of the geographies. We decided how we were gonna approach each one of 'em. How we were gonna execute our new strategy - Vision 2020. We brought it back to the board. Laid out these plans and we were really proud of the fact that we could take this massive complexity.

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We had 200,000 people in our company, massive complexity in trying to take it down to its essence. To put it on a road map. To manage the steps in the process to get us to transform. Laid it out there. Waited for the reaction. You know what my CEO said? My CEO said to me, he said, 'Cheryl, this is great. This is awesome. But how are you gonna help me activate the purpose of our new company? How are you gonna bring that purpose to life? How's it really gonna become real in the eyes of every one of our employees and it's gotta start with our employees, because they have to bring it to life. They have to make it real.' Building better working world was our purpose and it had to be something that everybody could activate, could live, could understand, because he believed that if we did that we would provide better service to our clients. We would engage them in the dialogue about becoming better. We would help society and we would help the communities that we operate in and it would provide the guide rails necessary to become a better company. He was very passionate about this.

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And all of a sudden that 11 year old super model or garden gnome started to pop out and I said, 'Wow. At last.' I actually think I've arrived, because what it did for me was it took me back to what I, I held firm to since I was a child, which was about implementing on your promises and that those promises need to be real. And how do you activate those promises. I was pretty, pretty excited about this. I took my team and we went back and we said, we are onto something. And what we said was, we really need to understand the role of purpose in transforming business today. It's all about meaning. It's all about human connection. It's about being authentic and being vulnerable. It's about coming up with a dialogue that helps you collaborate. It's very very powerful. And it's what we are looking for when we talk about purpose.

10:35

So the first thing we did is we really set out to define it. And one thing I want to set out, right now is purpose obviously isn't new. There isn't a business that hasn't started for some purpose at some point in time since the beginning of time. What's different about today's purpose and I've had long discussions with people like Simon Sinek who is now not only my hero, but my friend. And what he told me was, he goes back to the why, why we exist and he truly believes that purpose is at the forefront of what we are gonna see in business today. And it's critical to you engaging with an entire constituency to get help. And we think it's, it's very very important for what you are gonna see next in the toolbox.

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But what I discovered is, my toolbox was rusty. I needed to go back and I needed to learn a lot more before I could answer my CEOs questions. So we did a lot of research. We talked to CEOs. We talked to luminaries and talked to Simon and we talked to people like academics like Marc Ventresca. We talked to a number of folks. We learned a lot along the way and what we learned was, purpose, although not new, what is new is the definition is morphing into something that's much more societal. Much more grounded in humanity, today.

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And so the first thing that we thought we had to do was, define it. And the way we defined purpose was purpose is an aspirational reason for being. It's grounded in humanity and it inspires a call to action. It inspires a call to action. One thing that we learned about this definition is, it's really all around us. It's playing out all around us. On the front of every web page that you look at, most CEOs are directing letters to their shareholders now and to their employees and their stakeholders using much more aspirational, inspirational tone.

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They are using words like, like inspire and nurture and they are using words like, better, life, healthier, safer, community, world. You see it everywhere; the language is changing. So we took our definition and we took it out to work with the Oxford Said Business School and with HBR and we started to study this more and more. To really get underneath. What is the role of purpose in business today? And one of the things that we started to talk about is, why. Why it's so important and what we really learned about why it's so important is, it more than any time in company's history that we are dealing with things around, a connected fast paced, really complex world. And CEOs can't do this by themselves any more. They need help. They need help more than ever before. They have to rely on a broader constituency. They have to have guide rails.

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We think purpose is the guide rail that allows others in and tells you really how to, how to engage with a broader constituency. We also, in our research started to notice the tipping point had changed. What we noticed was, over the, since 1995, the discourse on purpose has changed dramatically about, it's changed fivefold. And while purpose is going up in public discourse, sustainability is going down. We think the tipping point in this obviously looks like the financial crisis. We think greed and the fact that giants toppled, society pushed back and a number of companies needed language to say, hey, we're good. We are about more than shareholder value and profits and so forth. We're about doing better. We're about societal change. We're about making things better. And so we think this is part of the trend that led to this new language of purpose.

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The other thing that we noticed was, there's really an evolving role of a corporation. There is this expectation that the corporations around for societal wellbeing, that really corporations are, are expected to perform better over time. The majority are expected to perform better over time, because they integrate purpose and go beyond profits. That they really address three major, the purpose needs to address three major elements, the value to the customers, positively impacting society and generating financial returns for long term, for their shareholders. Another another key trend we noticed was that it could be a lever to drive innovation in transformation for growth. And innovation isn't just about future innovation. It's about solving today's problems. It's about fixing societal issues and solving some of the biggest problems that are in front of us and you have to be innovative to do that.

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And so one of the things that we looked at was, although they feel like they're successful, 35% feel like they are successful and innovation and continuous transformation, the majority of 'em really have a big purpose in yet. They feel like they could be more successful if they had a purpose in transformation efforts and more than half of 'em are starting to plan this for future strategy development. Another interesting finding. The other thing that we looked at was, purpose driven organisations are believed to have better results overall. And this was results as it leads to employee satisfaction, customer advocacy and higher products and service, higher quality products and services. Very important findings. These are big results and there isn't a CEO out there that isn't worried about attracting this group of people to their company. We need you. We need you to drive innovation and growth. And we believe purpose is a great way to attract you. We think it's a way to connect with you and to connect with the great minds of what you have to offer.

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The last notable finding was there is an implementation gap, yey, wahoo. I love implementation gaps. It helps us survive. But, but the purpose has been under leveraged. 70% the majority of people felt like it was important to integrate purpose into their business operations yet, a little over a third really felt like they'd done that. There is this gap across strategy development and actually using purpose in strategy development and product development and overall business model design. So our quest had been answered. We knew we needed to develop a framework, of course. So so, to address the gap we came up with what we are calling the purpose activation framework and it has three critical components that are different than anything that I've seen before.

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The first thing is, it takes purpose as the pinnacle of strategy and it embeds it in what we are calling the corporate DNA. So it takes all those things that are necessary, but purpose is the thing that guides those things around your vision and your mission and your values and a lot of those things are internal to a company. Purpose brings the external length. It brings the why to the forefront.

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The other thing that we think is critical about the framework is it looks for trusted experiences across a broader array of stakeholders and again you can't solve the problems by yourself, but you have to put trust in your framework. So it looks at the experiences you need to provide with your employees, with your customers, with your regulators, with the NGOs. You see it, you see it happening today. How do you build that level of trust and those trusted experiences to really really drive your purpose home?

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And the third thing it relies that I think is fascinating is story telling. You have to be a marvellous story teller to get your purpose out to the market in a way that people can buy into it. It's critical. The stories that you tell need to be founded in that social impact and that society wellbeing and that human emotion. And it needs to make it real for people. And as you go to a lot of large company's websites and you start to look around, you will see these stories start to come to life. So those three things we think are critical and we also think the toolbox for the management consultant of the future, particularly in this next era is going to be loaded with purpose and collaboration tools and techniques and frameworks.

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So, my question for you is, what type of leader will you be? Will you be one that loads your toolbox with things that help you be purposeful? I will tell you my hope for you and my hope for the world is that you will lead with the most noble of personal and professional purposes.

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Thank you.

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