

## Let's Get Practical

### The Future of Work Episode

Episode 42: Interview with Ben Pring

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As a leader, talk is cheap. Action is what counts and practice makes a difference. Below are practical steps to improve performance.

- **Institute a reverse mentoring board.** Ben spoke in Episode 42 of the importance of listening to those outside your circle to stay relevant, and a reverse mentoring board can help you do just that. Create a team of half a dozen people lower down the totem pole, lower down the food chain from you that you identify as progressive, interesting, open, and not intimidated by speaking to an older person in authority like you. Set up a reverse mentoring board meeting once every quarter like a regular board meeting, bringing those people together for an entire day to find out what they're thinking about. Let them drive the agenda and tell you what's happening and what's current. Something like this might be exactly what you need to get tuned into things you're not hearing about, and there's all sorts of benefits that can accrue from that.

Most importantly, check your ego at the door in these board meetings. You can't go to these and tell them what you're thinking or present to them what you want to do. It's the complete inverse if you want to reap the benefits of a reverse mentoring board.

- **Pay attention to new technology before dismissing it.** If the goal is to remain relevant as you and your business age, this one becomes critical for many obvious reasons, not the least of which is your own bias for what you think is good and against things you don't like or understand. Each new technology you dismiss is an opportunity to fall further behind everyone else.
  - **Be intentional and thoughtful about when the company really needs to come together.** This suggestion comes on the heels of the last bullet calling attention to your biases, and many traditional CEOs strongly believe employees should come back to the office permanently now that the pandemic is over. Don't make this decision by yourself just because you're the leader and you can. The benefits you hope to regain may be outweighed by the consequences when your employees begin looking for more flexible work.
  - **The emergence of what some people refer to as "the woke generation" requires some rethinking and new management skills.** Whether or not you agree with the beliefs and perspectives of younger Millennials and Gen Z workers, they're here to stay and they now make up the largest portion of the workforce. If you can't connect with and relate to them, they'll choose an employer who can, taking their cutting-edge technology skills with them.
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- **Adopt the beginner's mindset.** Ben highlighted how this approach revolutionized Microsoft for the next generation as it sought to overcome the issues of an aging workforce with aging skills. Be open to new technology and culture change necessitated by different generations of workers. For more on this, listen to episode 42 in its entirety.
- **If you and your company want to stay relevant, you have to be aware of what's unfolding around you.** Pay attention to trends not just in your industry but globally. Challenge yourself to read different things than what you're reading today. And it doesn't hurt to stay current on what futurists like Ben Pring are predicting for the future of work.
- **"You can't preach the value of disruption and then complain about it when it washes up on your shores".** This quote came from Ben Pring in Episode 42 and doesn't really need much explanation. Just be aware that while you're trying to disrupt your industry to capitalize on the opportunities that might create, disruptions may simultaneously be coming for you and your company. Be ready to embrace it rather than complain.
- **If you still haven't rethought the use of your office space, there is no time like now.** Some companies understood this during the pandemic, but others still haven't reimaged their old, tired office spaces. The workplace of the future will be optimized for three purposes. First, it will be a showroom where you will wow your customers. Second, it will be a lab where employees come together to create the secret sauce. And third, it will serve as a social space where employees come together to build teams and celebrate your culture. If your office space isn't set up for this or is sub-optimized in any one of these three areas, you're potentially losing customers and not giving employees what they need to be productive. You may find yourself losing the war on talent because potential employees won't want to work in a cubicle graveyard that lacks life and energy.
- **Sustainability actions might pause with the economic slowdown, but your conversations should continue.** It's understandable that some things might be tabled with the current economic uncertainty, and sustainability might be one of those things. However, if you want to be positioned to capitalize on "the Green Rush" when the economy returns to normal, you can't stop the talking and planning today. For more on the Green Rush, listen to Episode 8 of *The Frustrated CEO Podcast*, our 2021 interview with Ben Pring.
- **You should already be thinking about your workforce of tomorrow.** If you want to stay relevant and position yourself for future success, you should already be thinking about the addition of new positions and how your workforce might need to evolve, not for today but for the future. That's a conversation you need to be having in every succession

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planning discussion: where do you think you're going to be in the future, and how does your organization need to evolve from where you are today to where you ultimately want to be? How will you support a new workforce that needs new technology, new locations, new work systems, and new work models? Ben mentioned a few in Episode 42, positions like a Work From Home Coordinator, a Chief Purpose Planner, an Employee Mental Health Coordinator, and a Neurodiversity Coordinator. Whatever it might be for your organization, be curious and creative in thinking about where might the workforce go and how do you position yourself for it?

- **Be like Clive Davis and Satya Nadella.** If you're in the older generation and really desire to stay relevant and outlast your peers, study those who are doing just that. Davis has remained at the top of the music industry for decades, and Microsoft's Nadella successfully figured out how to integrate and accept new realities and new ideas to revitalize the company. You can do the same if you follow their leads.
- **There's a distinction between "heads-down work" and "heads-up work".** Heads-down work is the technical, data-processing, task-oriented work employees need to do to get the work done, and heads-up work is the team building and relationship-building work that's just as important for problem-solving and creating world class culture. Previously, these two had been mushed together, but hybrid work changed that forever. Be intentional about designing the heads-up work to create more collaboration and relationship-building and help employees understand why they're coming face-to-face with each other.

To listen to this Episode again and tune in to episodes that you may have missed, go to <http://www.thefrustratedceo.com/>.