

**Chris Fussell:** Welcome to No Turning Back, a McChrystal Group podcast hosted by General Stan McChrystal and me, Chris Fussell. Our goal here is simple, to have serious conversations with serious leaders so we can learn from the best and navigate these complex times together. Thanks for joining us.

**Danielle Tenconi:** No Turning Back first began in April of 2020, originating as a video series where Stan McChrystal and Chris Fussell would speak with some of the world's most consequential leaders about leadership and resilience through such unprecedented times. This video series served as a way to bring people together for a conversation and gave viewers a slight reprieve from the uncertainty in our world.

We quickly realized there was a larger audience who were looking for impactful conversations, like No Turning Back. Since then, we've released over 75 conversations with leaders of all different backgrounds and industries discussing their experiences facing the pressing challenges they and their organizations encounter every day. As we wrap up this series, we are taking a look back at the favorite episodes from our team who helped create No Turning Back from behind the scenes.

Rosalind Brewer was an early guest of No Turning Back originally joining Stan and Chris, when she was Group President and Chief Operating Officer of Starbucks Corporation. Stan and Chris revisited their conversation as Roz began to transition into her current role as Walgreen Boots Alliance's CEO. Roz discusses the philosophy of leadership in times of constant change and how leaders can implement discipline, companywide communication to enable timely execution.

**Rosalind Brewer:** I have learned that in order for the business results to be truly great and sustainable, you can't leave people behind, your teams behind, the community behind, it has to all come together.

And the times that I actually have focused more on the results than I have the whole picture, my results have been very temporary. They've lasted for a couple of quarters. I answered the right question. I far exceeded every plan I made quarterly bonus. I've done those things. But sustainable results quarter over quarter, year over year, creating roadmap, stretch plans, transformations.

Those are only if you get the opportunity to think about how you're impacting the people that work for you, the people that you serve as a customer, and the community that has to follow you. And there's many examples of that.

**Stan McChrystal:** Let me ask you a question if I could, because now we're in uncharted territory. I mean, we know we're in a unique crisis. I certainly don't know exactly where it's gonna go. And I certainly don't know exactly what we ought to do about it at the individual level, the firm level or at the national level. How do you communicate to your team? The fact that the

future is very uncertain because we're sort of raised with the idea. We're when we get senior, we're supposed to have the full answer.

**Rosalind Brewer:** Right, right. I get asked that question a lot right now. How do I feel about the future and what's next after what's next? What I commit to when I'm in those conversations is to tell them what I do know. And every day we're actually monitoring customer sentiment right now. What's on the minds of everyone. What's on the minds of the people that work for us. And we're feeding that back to the people who work for us so that they can understand, first of all, you're not in this alone, everyone is feeling the same uncertainty, but here's how people are mobilizing themselves.

And we share information from other industries. So then, the information piles on each other. So at least you're in the know of what the reality is right now. The other thing is that we're just transparent to say, we don't know what we don't know. But here's what we're going to do about it. And so, we explain to them where the company is financially.

It's interesting that right now, what we're doing is really breaking down in the most simplest terms where we are, because we're seeing so many companies go bankrupt.

**Danielle Tenconi:** Simon Sinek is the author of multiple best-selling books, including start with why, which led to his viral TED talk about how great leaders inspire action with the concept of why. He is a thought leader changing how we connect leaders and organizations together to inspire a sense of purpose and action. A visionary and optimist Simon shares his perspectives on the future of organizations, observations from teams, concepts from his most recent publication, The Infinite Game, and why people are so motivated to find their purpose.

**Simon Sinek:** It's worth just taking two seconds to define the terms. It doesn't take long. Dr. James Carse in the mid 1980s proposed these definitions of finite and infinite games. Finite games are defined as known players. Fixed rules and an agreed upon objective: football, baseball, conventional warfare.

There's always a beginning, middle and an end. And if there is a winner, then necessarily there has to be a loser. Then you have infinite games. Infinite games are defined as known and unknown players, which means new players can join the game at any time. The rules are changeable, which means every player can play however they want.

And the objective is to perpetuate the game or stay in the game as long as possible. We are players in infinite games every day of our lives. There's no such thing as winning global politics. There's no such thing as winning education, you can come in first in the finite amount of time, you're at school, the objectives are recognized and agreed upon.

And those are the metrics, it's a grade. But there's no such thing as being the winner of education. No one's declared the winner of careers and there's definitely no such thing as winning business.

But when we listen to the language of so many of our leaders, it becomes abundantly clear that they don't know the game they're in.

They talk about being number one, being the best at beating their competition based on what? Based upon what agreed upon objectives, metrics, or timeframes. And this is a problem because when we play with a finite mindset in an infinite game, when we play to win in a game that has no end, there's a few predictable and consistent outcomes.

The big ones include the decline of trust, cooperation, and innovation. And so, when we look at the pandemic, one of the things that I found so fascinating about it is that many of the principles of how you, we have to change our mindset to play for the infinite game actually happen quite naturally. So, for example, one of the practices of leading with infinite mindset is building trusting teams.

And that means operating with empathy and patience and knowing how to have difficult conversations, all these skills that we rarely if ever teach in, in business unfortunately. Just as a quick aside, I'm tired of us calling them soft skills because hard skills and soft skills. Those are in opposition.

No, it's hard skills and human skills and you need both those skills to be effective at whatever job we're asking you to do. That's an aside. And so, what we saw when the pandemic hit is many people in leadership positions, whether they were effective or ineffective leaders prior to the pandemic, they fell back and leaned on their natural humanity.

They picked up the telephone and they called each member on their team, and they said, how are you? You doing, okay? I'm worried about you. What's up? How are you doing? Well, that's just called good leadership. It doesn't take a crisis for us to do that. And I hope that habit remains. The other big one is this idea of worthy rivalry, where in a finite game, we have competitors and competitors are there to be beaten.

Right. But in the infinite game, the other players in the game are not competitors they're rivals. And some of those rivals are worthy of comparison, which means their strengths reveal to us, our weaknesses. For example, when Circuit City went out of business, Best Buy didn't win the game of electronic business.

Like one of the players dropped out, but that doesn't mean you're the winner. That's my point. And what I thought was so interesting as soon as the pandemic struck, the total number of companies that were obsessed with beating their competitors was zero. Absolutely, we stopped being obsessed with competition when the pandemic hit, because we all had to just survive, and that survival mentality is an infinite mentality.

Now, again, it doesn't take a crisis to be in survival mode. You can be in a survival mode. In other words, stay in the game as long as possible in good times as well. And if you have a

survival mentality in good times, it means you're gonna save money. You're gonna put in, you're gonna make strategic decisions that are more likely to keep you in the game longer, even if bad times strike.

So that idea of just trying to stay in the game for as long as possible is ignoring beating the competition. It's not that the competition doesn't have value. They have comparative value, but they don't have competitive value. And I think we, when the pandemic struck what I found so fascinating is many of these infinite instincts, they just sort of showed up, they didn't require any convincing or arm twisting for people to embrace them.

**Danielle Tenconi:** Tim Brown and Iain Roberts are experts within the design thinking field and are the Executive Chair and Chief Operating Officer at IDEO. In this episode, Stan and Chris, sit down with Tim and Ian to learn more about how design shapes the world to fit consumers' needs, how prototyping, mitigates risks, and why organizations learn faster by building faster.

**Iain Roberts:** Tim mentioned at the top of the session about this idea of the steps of design thinking. And one of those being think going from an imagination to implementation. Right. Like making things real, making them tangible. We like to think of this idea that a prototype is simply a question embodied, like the idea that fundamentally we have questions about the world.

We have questions about how we should grow as a company. We have questions around how we should change or what products we should make. And once we have the kind of insight that Tim mentioned earlier, the fastest path to begin that learning cycle is to begin to make these things tangible and to prototype them.

And we believe that a prototype can be a prototype of a physical product, a prototype of a full end to end service that you might walk people through, or even a prototype of actually how an organization will work now and in the future. And so when we think about that idea of leaping into the unknown navigating the, the kind of navigating the unknown without actually knowing what the outcomes are gonna be, we really believe that in the space, when you are trying to create new things right in that space, when you're trying to create new things, you can't look behind you to understand what all the data in the past has said that you should do.

The only thing you can do is start to create new data. And the only way to create new data is to build those things and frankly expect them to be wrong and learn from them. So, in the same way that you are using your metaphor for climbing, it's that shift your body weight, understand how that feels. Do you fall it's okay, because we've got someone belaying you, right.

And so, we think about that idea of prototyping our way forward, cause at the end of the day, prototyping builds, builds data, builds new data, and fundamentally what that does for an organization is it mitigates risk.

**Tim Brown:** And I think it's worth saying that so much of what we do with organizations is encourage them to learn faster by building faster.

I think expertise is a dangerous weapon in the hands of leaders when they're coaching creative teams, right? We're all tempted to use our expertise, our previous experience. And what leaders can sometimes do is use that previous expertise to come to a point of view, which they used to challenge the team.

Little else to go on than the fact that they know something different from their past and if that team has done a good job and gone out and made new discoveries, then your expertise from the past may not be relevant. Right. And as a leader, you have to be open minded and listen to what the teams have discovered and then make your own mind up whether your previous expertise or their new discovery is more relevant.

Right. Instead of setting them up to have to prove to you that their new discovery is more important than your previous expertise. And I'm sure you've come across situations like that in your own past. But it's important to remember as a leader that your expertise is a dangerous weapon to have and has to be used thoughtfully when you're coaching creative teams.

One final thing I'd say about this whole, how do you get teams excited and inspired to innovate is to just take 'em through the process, to be honest with you. There's nothing more exhilarating than starting the beginning of a day not even knowing what question you're trying to gonna tackle. And then ending the day having made something, created something, even if it's really rough and ready and tried it out and realize you've learned something.

That is a very exhilarating process for people. You really feel like you're making progress. We don't spend a whole lot of time trying to teach people how to do what we do in the abstract. We spend a lot more time just trying to take them through the process and letting discover it for themselves.

**Danielle Tenconi:** Every night at 9:00 PM eastern, Rachel Maddow sits down to discuss the latest in American politics on her award-winning "The Rachel Maddow Show." For this episode, Rachel joins Stan and Chris to explore her insights on leadership. After her 13 years of examining the political space, discussing whether Americans overweight, the importance of leadership, as well as the role of media in politics, using history and experience as their guide.

**Rachel Maddow:** And again, I'm thinking specifically about politics. I'm not necessarily thinking about running smaller organizations than that, but as a country, I think we're struggling with who we are and what our values are. And the reason that we are putting so much emphasis on who is the leader, who is the president, who is at the top of that pyramid in terms of public leadership, is because we think of that person as the projection of our values as a country.

And so, who do we want to epitomize and sort of anthropomorphize what we think we should be as a country? Do we want to be swaggering, take no prisoners, us versus us before everyone? Or do we want to be civic mind and thinking about leadership through a sort of cooperative sense of bringing people along to our way of seeing things by the power of our example, like those are two very different yens that we have as a country. And actually, I feel like I have a little bit of both of those yens in me in terms of who I want to think of myself as a citizen, how I want to envision my country and my time in the world.

I don't generally give speeches because there's a lot of rules around NBC standards where I sort of can't most of the time. But also, it turns out that I give weird speeches. And so, I disappoint people who hire me, who are expecting me to do something like I do on TV. And one of the last really weird speeches that I gave was a commencement address at Smith College. Which was about people having bad dreams, not dreams when you're asleep, but like having bad dreams of themselves and what they wanted to do in their lives.

So, I talked about some of the prohibition crusaders and some of the other people who over the course of their life, took on an impossible task and with incredible grit and determination and a work ethic, like you can't believe, and organizational genius, and incredible charisma, and leadership capacity.

They were able to accomplish an incredible thing, which was a terrible thing. And like Carry Nation, you know, took an ax to saloons and got America to make alcohol illegal. She was incredible at what she did. What she did was totally terrible and stupid and set the country back a very long time.

And so, I gave a commencement address, which was like, don't follow your dreams. Which was not probably a good choice by me. I was trying to say that your values in what you pursue are worth holding up against the test of history, as much as your skill in pursuing those things.

And so not only do you need to figure out what you're good at and what your passion is and what you can self-actualize by putting your all into, but you do need to test your aims as well.

**Danielle Tenconi:** What can a New Zealand rugby team teach you about leadership? Stan and Chris, speak to James Kerr to discover the answer to that question. James Kerr, a bestselling author, speaker, and business consultant brings an inquisitive mind and practical observations to the conversation. Stan and Chris explore some of the lessons learned from James's bestselling book *Legacy*, what the All Blacks can teach us about the business of life, examining the symbols, rituals, practices, and values that made the All Blacks a successful rugby. James examines, why smart leaders are great storytellers, draws an important distinction between humility is meekness and humility is confidence, and shares what CEOs can learn from coaches.

**James Kerr:** And I think that play pays to another thing that I think is vital is that theme of humility and humility, not as in meekness, but humility and the confidence to be humble.

The kind of, it's an arrogant humility if you like or confident humility. And that's humility before the task, because hubris, as we know from military tales from the ancients is the great enemy of high performance of any kind of performance. And so, managing to create a space around ourselves in which you have somebody who can speak truth to power, can tell you that your dinosaur tale is smashing up the morale of a whole bunch of people. Calling you on your stuff is really vital. And I think this is particularly, actually within a corporate space. I think the military and sport is particularly good at calling people on their stuff.

But there is a higher degree, I think, of kind of corporate anxiety that exists within the plush carpets of the C-suite. Because it can be a fragile existence and there's a lot at stake, and there can be a lot more politics and maybe the parameters aren't as well known, the hierarchies aren't quite as well established.

And that creates a certain amount of anxiety. And I think leaders, certainly leaders I've worked with, one of the benefits that I bring is that I can speak truth to power and call people on their BS and say, you know, that dinosaur tail of yours, that's wagging around because you like your golf, you know, or whatever.

Or because you know where you're going, but you haven't communicated it outwards. And the intent though often doesn't get communicated. Then they are some of the most valuable conversations I think that leaders can have, they don't have to happen all the time, but they have to happen sometimes.

**Danielle Tenconi:** Lydia Fonseca is the Executive Vice President, Chief Digital and Technology Officer at Pfizer and is responsible for the company's technology, data, and digital efforts. She's an executive who sits at the center of both the technology and pharmaceutical industries. Her team was critical in developing the Pfizer vaccine, one that has given citizens everywhere hope after COVID-19. Stan and Chris spoke to Lydia about how Pfizer and healthcare as a whole will be different after the pandemic, why it's important to focus on outcomes rather than activities, and how her leadership has changed after bringing Pfizer through the pandemic.

**Lidia Fonseca:** So, I absolutely believe that that clarity of our purpose and our strategies and our values really prepared us well. In parallel, we were also driving a digital transformation and I believe that it's not just about innovation.

You also have to change the way that you work, and to me, the innovations really reinforce your priorities and your strategies and how you want to serve customers. So, I would say it's really the combination of those things that prepared us as an organization. And it didn't surprise me then when we said we will find a solution to this pandemic and when we galvanized around science will win, science has to win. And that's how we went into that.

Look, I do think that I can tell you and I can share the perspective from Pfizer and then you can certainly share what I think, wider beyond us and I think that there were a couple of things that we learned through the pandemic.

Let me dive a little bit into that because I think that will help to kind of think about how do we bottle that? And we certainly are taking that into the future with us. So, some of those elements that we knew we needed to be in place for us to be successful. I talked about the first one, a hyper focus on the customer.

The patients that rely on our medicines and vaccines and the healthcare providers who care for them. Driving horizontal thinking, right, aligning ourselves to what the patient is experiencing. Their journey is not vertical. Their journey is horizontal. Our processes tend to be more vertical in nature, right?

Another big lesson that we learned is to work sequentially, sorry, to work in parallel rather than sequentially. That was a big change for us. Because of the nature of scientific discovery. There was a very specific approach and we really learned to work in parallel. We leveraged agile ways of working so that we could be more flexible and respond to patient needs and deliver those outcomes.

And that's another thing, right. Foster a strong emphasis on outcomes versus activity. I think sometimes, and I've seen this, with other companies as well, you focus on the activities. Whereas when you focus on the outcomes, it just brings an oncoming clarity of where to focus, act your energies, and what you're looking to achieve.

We also empowered our teams to have the courage, to think big, be creative, and work differently. And I think overall, we needed thousands of people to believe that we could do the impossible.

**Danielle Tenconi:** Thank you for listening to no turning back. Visit [McChrystalGroup.com](https://McChrystalGroup.com) for more leadership and team insights and conversations.

**Anna Butrico:** This is a McChrystal Group podcast. McChrystal Group assesses, equips, and connects your teams to outpace your environment, your competitors, and your next challenge. Visit us at [www.mcchrystalgroup.com](https://www.mcchrystalgroup.com). Thanks for listening.