

I had to die first, to write this article

 By [Conn Bertish](#)

18 Nov 2016

And the very thing that brought me back to life - will do just the same for your brand during this difficult time. My name is Conn Bertish - I am a brain cancer survivor, creative strategist and founder of Cancer Dojo - the first project of my resilience-building content agency, HTK - (Harder To Kill).

I am writing this article from my office in a cancer clinic in Cape Town.

Humans don't like fear. They attempt to avoid it at all costs, just like brands do – And our world is overdosing on it right now. Trump, Brexit, Zuma, Artificial Intelligence, climate change, #feesmustfall... The world is not the same as it was 10 months ago. The change is fundamental, scary and necessary – but are all natural symptoms of unsustainable and unbridled capitalism on a planet riddled with inequality, overpopulation and environmental devolution.



And though you may feel like it, building walls and protesting aggressively on the streets of New York won't change anything. You need to embrace the change, become a part of it – play a role in guiding it in the right direction.

Because the times they aren't changing – they *are* changed.

The recent shift in US and UK politics hails a new world of challenging times ahead – for humans, brands and businesses

attempting to succeed in a world under pressure.

And are we prepared for it? Nope.

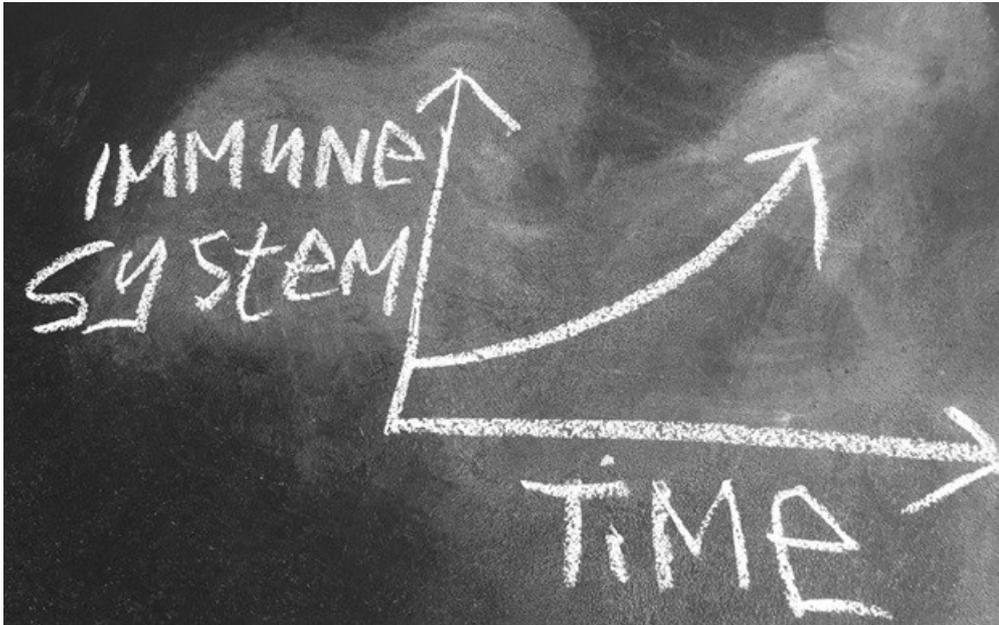
Most of us are pretty stumped, still waiting for the changes to happen – but they are here, all around us. We are witnessing a continental shift in culture and the beginnings of new commerce (read [Blockchain](#)) and for most, it's easier to be angry or shocked as a community or an industry – proclaiming a collective ‘OMG, what just happened!’ And then carrying on regardless, because there's solace in numbers – look they're okay, so we must be okay too, right? But we're not fixing anything. We're not changing with the change. What it demands is fresh thinking – seeing a different landscape as an awesome opportunity to dive in from the high board, while others are debilitated by the fear and confusion of the unknown that lies ahead.

And this is it, this is the time, now, this very moment, not in five years, but today – to step up and go into the scary places we may not want to go – to become part of the solution and not just another cause of the problem.

And our audiences are gagging for it.

The revolution is not going to be televised – It'll be scaled by digitally-enabled and socially-informed humans who want to align themselves and their ever more important social profiles with the brands and organisations that will fuel this positive change; this respect for the planet and the humans on it, rather than just serving the coffers of traditional commercialism. We are in the process of being out-evolved by our own technology and rampant consumerism – and the cracks are real and deep.

Band Aids just aren't going to cut it.



The best medicine for overcoming insurmountable challenges (and I know this, through experience – including the ‘dying’ part in the headline of this article) is to build resilience through agility and a purposeful shift in thinking. The marketing genesis of this ideology started in 1962, when David Ogilvy first humanised advertising by stating simply that “brands need to be like people,” – like your aunt, your friend, that lovable cousin who gets drunk at Christmas parties – brands need to be real and speak and act like you and me. They need to have a heart. A Love Mark, as Saatchi's Kevin Roberts reiterated. This thinking we've adopted to a point, but we've yet to truly grasp its full significance with respect to brands attempting to successfully navigate times of uncertainty – just like the one we face today.

“Fear is a mind killer.” James Herbert

I know how this goes. Fear *is* a mind killer. It debilitates and disempowers – sending even the bravest back into the safety of the past, the status quo, the Hillary Clinton tepid water of helplessness that glosses over the open wounds to carry on, on the same path, ignorant and regardless.

In the health world, this is the dynamic that leads to death.

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.” Dr Victor Frankl

I am not a doctor of marketing, but I do know what makes you stronger when everything around you burns. It is to find and embrace your honest purpose – your true and positive reason for being – and your right to exist on our overweight planet. For brands, this means a solid stake in the ground that helps solve real-world problems relevant to your product, but not necessarily just the product alone. A true purpose, just like a brand, is larger than that. Iconic psychologist and holocaust survivor Dr Victor Frankl stated it 60 years ago: “Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how',” and this he knew firsthand –studying resilience during one of the toughest periods in human history.

There is no more relevant time for this thinking than today, with a world in flux and myriad challenges to solve. A brand's 'why' is fundamental to its future success. I would propose, even more so than the product – because it fuels what the product is, how it is built, what its role is on the planet, for its audience, its employees and its own future sustainability.

And this is the thinking upon which I based my shift from traditional and digital advertising – to launch a social enterprise called Cancer Dojo, entirely fuelled by 'why' – with a simple, bold purpose – to make people facing debilitating challenges happier, healthier, more resilient – and I like to say, harder to kill.

As Cancer Dojo is gaining global attention, I was recently invited to talk at the WPP Unconference in Greece – I flew out fully charged, fired up for action, with 'purpose marketing' on my sleeve and a belief that the right humans would respond to my call. Which some did. And some didn't.

Just like [Cancer Dojo](#), purpose marketing is not a miracle cure – it's not going to work for everyone. Some will shun it, some will greenwash it, some will use it to win awards, but others, who in my view, are the world's next leading brands, will embrace it – entirely, wholly, from the top down, CEOs, shareholders and all. The next generation of Cokes, Nikes and Apples will be 'why'-driven and purposely relevant to a world with serious issues.

I'm now back in SA with some new partners, new ideas and even more committed to connecting like-minded brands and humans together, to change the way the world views and deals with challenging times that lie ahead. And it's exciting, super

exciting – because this is what creativity and technology truly thrive on – the unknown, the scary, the seemingly insurmountable challenge. Wow, what better reason is there to get out of the bed in the morning?

Finding your purpose is key for survival during difficult times – just ask Brett, he's just completed his cancer treatment, in the room next to mine.

It's high time, people – to buckle up your purpose, power up your driverless car and prime your bitcoin – because where we're going, there are no roads.

ABOUT CONN BERTISH

Conn Bertish is the founder of Cancer Dojo, an award-winning social enterprise project of HTK (Harder To Kill) - the world's first resilience-building content agency run by survivors and warriors...

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