

THE **MISSING** CONVERSATION

An Open Invitation to a Conversation
on Conscious Leadership

By Stefan Beiten
Initiator of *The Argonauts*

Editor: Richard Koret
Co-Editor: Marius Tölzer

CONTENT

FOREWORD 1

Curing the Great Disease of Modernity

By Akinyi Ochieng

Sustainability and Social Impact Activist

PAGE 4

FOREWORD 2

Welcome Home

By Curt Cronin

*Serial Entrepreneur,
former US Navy SEAL Commander*

PAGE 8

CHAPTER 1

Missing Conversations:

Why Trust Erodes and Meaning Disappears

PAGE 11

CHAPTER 2

Call of the Wild:

Disrupting the Status Quo for a New Mindset

PAGE 18

CHAPTER 3

The Foundation:

A New Conversation Among Leaders

PAGE 25

CHAPTER 4

The Argonauts' Proposal:

Trust Circles Leading to a New Destination

PAGE 33

REFERENCES AND FURTHER INSPIRATION

PAGE 39

DEDICATION

*To the memory of my sister Nikola,
whose last words “at the end, love will
conquer all” have crystallized as the
guiding light and hope for any of my
“missing conversations”*



FOREWORD

FOREWORD 1

Curing the Great Disease of Modernity

By Akinyi Ochieng

“To decide whether life is worth living is to answer the fundamental question of philosophy. Everything else is child’s play; we must first of all answer the question.”

— *Albert Camus*

A cursory online search yields over a million results on the habits of highly successful people “hustling” for success. This rat-race, the seemingly endless pursuit of status, money, and power, has yielded the explosive growth of new technology and record levels of new wealth. No one represents this better perhaps than Elon

Musk, the mercurial serial entrepreneur and founder of SpaceX, Tesla, and PayPal. For years, Musk famously touted the 100-hour work-week as the “prerequisite for changing the world.”

But there was a problem: after amassing hundreds of millions and catapulting multiple companies to success, it dawned that there was a hidden cost. After his second divorce, he realized he hated “*being in a big empty house, and the footsteps echoing through the hallway, no one there.*”

His story speaks to the paradox of today’s archetype of success—a person optimized for consumption—both the consumer and the consumed. However, the mentality of “work hard, play hard” cannot save even the brightest of stars from our societal epidemic of depression and anxiety or being at the mercy of broken social contract, driven by the polemics of demagogues and fascists. The scramble to the top of the heap to capture the elusive prize has created a generation molded to pursue goals without meaning. The solution to this malaise is to shift the conversation towards answering the question of “why.”

Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs hints at an answer. Maslow argued that basic needs such as food, water, and shelter must be satisfied to allow more advanced needs—love and belonging, esteem and, finally, self-actualization to be realized.

Understood superficially, this line of thinking could be abused to justify the pursuit of pres-

“The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life.”

tigious, grueling, soul-sucking careers. If you can pay the bills, then buy belongings, access the best schools, jobs and other markers of esteem and success, this warped logic goes, you will then be happy and free to finally pursue your passions. Yet in

every country and every industry, there are many unhappy people at the top. The system is broken, somehow, and the solution to fix it murky.

The path forward appears clearer when you consider Maslow’s revision of his theory later in life, distinguishing pursuits in service to oneself from those in service to others. True self-actualization, he explained, can only be achieved by going beyond yourself with self-transcendence, which he described as the *“very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos.”*

The journey from self-actualization to self-transcendence lies at the heart of Walker Percy’s The Moviegoer, published in 1961. Its protagonist, Binx Bollinger, is a young stockbroker living in 1950s New Orleans. He dedicates himself in equal measure to his career in finance and his family while indulging in a love of movies and love affairs with his secretaries. Soon, he embarks on a “search” for a more authentic life, explaining,

“the search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life.”

The novel, which won the National Book Prize, sheds light on the alienation and despair that so often accompanies the age of abundance. (In Binx’s case, it is a post-war boom; today, it is our Second Gilded Age). In other words, he seeks to answer Maslow’s question, *“What happens to man’s desires when there is plenty of bread, and when his belly is chronically filled?”*

In this set of essays, Stefan Beiten leads us through his own search for an answer to the question of “why.” An entrepreneur, investor and lawyer, Beiten had all the trappings of success: by age 40, he had placed over \$1 billion in investments and founded nearly 20 companies. He had raised three children and produced global hits such as *Deep Blue* and *Planet Earth*. But after the 2008 financial crisis, he lost it all. After a life spent in pursuit of accolades and achievements, he wondered, “what is the point of it all?” This quest for self-inquiry results in the creation of The Argonauts.

The Argonauts is a global community built to withstand the turbulent time we now find ourselves in. Its Trust Circles operate as a laboratory, an incubator for holistic self-discovery. It stands in direct contrast to the demagoguery of contemporary leaders. To quote Beiten:

“Bad leaders produce bad times. But bad times can also produce good leaders. Good leaders then produce good times. But good leaders cannot emerge in the absence of good ideas.”

Good ideas need an ecosystem of collaborators and champions behind them.

I write this passage amid a global pandemic. The world's responses to coronavirus have, of necessity, been coordinated by local and global governmental bodies, forcing people to rely on these more than has been the case in recent memory. The outsized role of these institutions has exposed growing deficiencies in even the

most hallowed political institutions. Indeed, the leadership crisis that Beiten speaks of seems very much upon us.

And yet I feel that we are in a golden age of ideas and collaboration. This is an era in which we see San Francisco-based entrepreneurs developing drone delivery services to get blood and medical supplies to remote, rural communities in East Africa. Meanwhile, in India, financial technology platforms strive to help smallholder farmers break the cycle of debt. In a refurbished train depot in Paris, cybersecurity and green-tech companies flourish in the creative entrepreneurial hub Station F. These examples show that good ideas, good *leaders* are all around us even in these dark times. But to fuel their drive to pursue a conception of success beyond mere monetary gain, they need an ecosystem of collaborators and champions behind them.

In just a few short years, The Argonauts has emerged as that rarefied space at the global level that is not about self-aggrandizement or accolades. At the end of the day, it is a community that is more focused on listening and learning than speeches and soliloquies.

Poland-based Argonaut Tomasz Karwatka founded Divante over a decade ago to provide software solutions for industry leaders from T-Mobile to 3M. With a fast-growing business and high-caliber clientele, it is easy to default to rooting one's success in contracts and spreadsheets; however, Tomasz has turned to The Argonauts to help maintain sight of his north star. He calls his Circle peers a "*great source of experience and inspiration.*"

In the words of fellow Argonaut and acclaimed data scientist Alex Jackl, it takes "*a certain humility [and] servant leadership*" to access this community's full power. But once that power is realized,

"we can more powerfully shape ourselves, our relationships, our communities, our societies, and the world far easier than we can alone."

Katia Walsh, Chief Strategy Officer at Levi-Strauss, regularly wakes up at 5 am to get on her Argonaut Trust Circle calls. "*I never miss a meeting because communicating and connecting with my Circle crew keeps me going, energizes me, gives me the brainpower and optimism I need. These people I've never met in person have become my family, my confidence, my close friends.*"

To sail a ship in the stormiest of seas, you need a dedicated crew. In this volume, Beiten shares his journey to finding his cohort of mariners and how he found his way back to shore after years of being lost. As you read this volume and explore The Argonauts community, I hope you see the shoreline too. ■

FOREWORD

The background features a complex, abstract composition of overlapping geometric shapes. A large, semi-transparent blue circle is a central element, partially overlapping a dark purple shape. Various other shapes, including rectangles and triangles, are scattered across the dark blue background, some in shades of purple and pink. The overall effect is a layered, modern aesthetic.

FOREWORD

Welcome Home

By Curt Cronin

“We all long for the Moment of Truth—where we choose to sacrifice safety and security to do what must be done, with as much courage, grace, and dignity as we can muster.”

— *Jamie Wheal*

There are many types of Moments of Truth. There are courageous acts of heroism that I have seen so many of my friends perform during combat operations, and there are moments that require, as my friend Jordan Hall calls it, infinitesimal courage: the courage to do the thing that no one else will see.

The moment that Stefan told me that he was going to initiate The Argonauts was one of those Moments of Truth. He was clear that he was not going to “found” it, The Argonauts is not a singular “thing” that a single man could “do.” He didn’t start it because the art of sharing and relating with one another as humans in community instead of isolated life forms has been the central point of *humanity*.

Stefan was clear that he was going to *initiate* the latest evolution of his calling. Because creating from a selfless place of *community* has been and is his life’s mission. And it is harrowing. Because, although connecting and sharing with one another, and finding a community to belong to, is a core component of the human experience, there are so many ways to get it *wrong*.

In these times of increasing uncertainty and chaos, our default settings often lead us to want to surrender our independence to the one who seems most certain, most likely to have an answer that is more likely to get us out of this mess. But in today’s exponentially expanding environment of multi-nodal complexity, it is impossible for any one person to have *the* answer. Today’s world doesn’t take *one of us*, it takes *all of us*.

Our *lived experiences* initiate our journeys. Both our ecstatic moments of bliss and our traumatic setbacks, amplified by our relationships. In the past, our experiences were limited to our

personal encounters and to those of our immediate community. Today, we have the capacity to experience the joy and tragedy of all of humanity at an unprecedented scale. And the speed and intensity of this hyperbolic expansion of sensations overwhelms our capacity to make sense of the world as we now know it.

Which is why the Argonauts core operational unit is the *circle*. With no beginning and no end, the circle is an ongoing conversation where we as humans can gather to relate our experiences and integrate the core components of a meaningful life. The circle is where we can both surrender our individual fears and our elations, and, in being seen, heard, and understood, we can both celebrate and heal. Connecting with other humans is how we can evolve from contrasting “either, or” dilemmas into contextual “yes, and” possibilities.

The circle is where the present is. The wheel turns. And so we begin again.

Welcome to the next (r)evolution. ■

CHAPTER

1

MISSING CONVERSATIONS

Why Trust Erodes and Meaning Disappears

IN PART ONE, I relate my personal struggle for creative and professional meaning within societies dominated by a ruling ideology which ranks material and quantitative accomplishments of the individual and the corporation as the standards for evaluating and rewarding success. I challenge the status quo by posing questions concerning alternative ways for leaders to measure themselves according to the quality and harmony of their lives and relations. The questions I raise about these competing worldviews and their respective impacts on social and individual consciousness are:

- What vs. Why: How does transactional thinking limit the pursuit of meaning in life?
- How does “the missing conversation” subvert individuals, families, and businesses?

“Love is not something you do, it is just the way you are.”

— *Sadghuru*

The most impactful experience of my professional life came from executive producing the “Planet Earth” movie project, which I had the privilege of helping to bring to life and to the

world about 15 years ago. Almost two decades later, the film has influenced more than a billion people worldwide and shaped their views of the planet, nature, and the role of humans in conversation. In joining that project, I immersed myself in a story greater than my own as I re-considered my role on this spinning blue-green orb we call home and the ecosphere of plants, animals, and fish with whom we share it. The production itself, the ravishing cinematography, and the arduous filming experience brought me together with some extraordinary people who share the credit. The BBC TV series was already a global success, but the moment which began my transformation occurred at the world premiere of the feature film.

The finished work was projected onto a gigantic screen in San Sebastian, Spain. The screening left the festival audience in an altered state. Everyone in the room, my children included, was silent, visibly moved, touched to the core. It was as if the whole of the theatre became for one moment a single organism. It was not the ecstatic applause after the rapt silence which moved me so: it was the emotional turn-

ing within, and the animated exchanges which followed with people of all ages, from all walks of life, engaging me in deeply self-revelatory human conversations.

This phenomenon was not unique to that premiere night. In each country, I found a similar experience that took hold of the audience as the film drew to a close at screenings in each country. The film sparked a near-universal reaction: people began speaking with me and each other about discovering Meaning and how they could apply it in their own lives: newly awakened feelings of connectedness with family, with nature and with Planet Earth.

What this experience unforgettably impressed on me is that we drive the most impact amongst human beings when we engage them around the question of *Why*? Meaning is the inner core or value around which all else revolves, as in Simon Sinek’s famous concept of the “Golden Circle.” According to Sinek, *Why* is the central message that an organization or individual communicates: this is the key inspiring people to action and transformation. As Victor Frankl puts it: *“The will to meaning”* drives our lives and determines our destinies. This is your purpose and the reason you exist and behave as you do. By communicating the passion behind the *Why* you can reach the listener’s limbic brain, the center of emotion and memory, where we process feelings such as trust, empathy, and loyalty. And this, it turns out, is where our decision-making is heavily influenced and shaped.

“We are emotional beings who use logic to justify our emotions.”

The problem with seemingly rational choices, such as investment decisions, is that they usually take place only on the *What* level since this is the easiest to measure with standard economic or empirical parameters. Our cerebral cortex, the largest part of our brain, is adept at making calculations and executing transactions calculated to return gains over a fixed measure of time. Yet, until Israel-American psychologist and behavioral economist Daniel Kahneman won the Nobel Prize for Economy, most scholars were loath to acknowledge Homo Economicus as a myth divorced from the realities of the human psyche and the complexity of life.

Kahneman wittily deconstructs the myth of purely rational decision-making as a psychological distortion—a combination of suppression, ignorance and rationalization that therefore becomes irrational and unconscious. “*We are emotional beings who use logic to justify our emotions,*” setting himself against the long-held belief in the rationalism of people and markets. To quote the German-Swiss psychologist and philosopher Carola Meier-Seethaler: “*In other words, reason separated from emotion is not only one-sided, but at the same time highly susceptible to irrational undercurrents. [...] Irrationality is only the flip side of one-sided rationality.*” Rationality, by its

nature, goes far beyond itself, instead. Holistic decision-making integrates perception, reason, feelings and intuition—under the incorruptible and ever inspiring direction of a strong *Why*. Kahneman’s theory is founded on the reality that without Meaning, without a strong *Why*, we often fail to reach more in-depth conversations and eschew the standard social script. This, in turn, prevents us from accessing inputs that should inform our decisions. And without that *Why*, we shy away from activating the courage to confide and frankly interrogate our deeper emotions and motivations. Friedrich Nietzsche made this correlation abundantly clear more than 150 years ago: “*He who has a why can bear almost any how.*”

I am personally conditioned by the phenomenon of the “missing conversation” between generations. My parents are representative of the German, the European “Children of War” generation. Both of them were child-refugees in their own country, having lost everything, from their closest relatives to their dignity. I realized only later in life that it was a near-universal experience for most of the world. The traumas of war and the coldness of the era that followed it were experiences transferred from one generation to the next, manifesting old narratives and more *Whys*.

This generation neither had the material nor the emotional luxuries we take for granted today. They were taught to make the rational *What* level the core of their existence, driven to become as professional and successful as possi-

ble. This drive for survival has led many of this generation to ignore, distrust, and sometimes even demonize the emotional and spiritual layers that formed the belief system of their existence.

By this, they have missed a holistic conversation about the *Why* of their lives, and therefore the opportunity to harmonize the rational with the emotional. It has been said: “*We are all born into someone else’s story,*” into another’s *Why*, mistaking it for our own.

Consequently, many conversations within such families only take place, if at all, in a purely transactional exchange of objective fact and subjective fiction. Wealth, along with its old stories, is inherited. But the belief systems that attach to them do not fit the new realities. The succeeding generations, trained to be complacent in return for comfort, become lost in translation. *Why*-based conversations about Meaning

“We are all born into someone else’s story.”

are avoided at all costs. Feelings and profound questions are neglected and distrusted. Bad decisions are made. Conflicts inevitably lead to confrontation instead of cooperation and generate this sad reality: In 84% of all families, a family’s wealth is lost from the

3rd generation onward, and with it, its legacy.

Victor Frankl, a psychiatrist and Auschwitz survivor, offered humanity a guide of wisdom and truth with his ground-breaking work, *Man’s Search for Meaning*. For members of his gener-

ation and their direct descendants, the core of Meaning was often too painful to confront and integrate into their personal lives. Yet Frankl not only confronted and integrated the searing experience of the Holocaust, he used it to help others by developing a psychotherapeutic method to assist that integration.

With every new man-made mass traumatization by war, civil war, in refugee camps at our borders, with humans seeking refuge dying in the oceans, and many, mostly untold, others and anywhere on this planet, we continue to scar humanity, starting with ourselves, for generations to come. We must confront this pain and take on the monumental challenge of transitioning from *What* to probe Meaning through *Why* not only to address the wounds of war amongst older generations but also to end the cycle of trauma for the current and future generations. For us.

Trauma alone may not cause genetic change in our DNA, but recent research suggests that it can have a triggering effect on our genetic make-up. The young science of epigenomics suggests that “*Grandma’s Experiences Leave a Mark on Your Genes.*” As we become more aware of generational legacies, we realize that issues around traumatization remain highly topical and urgent in light of the challenges we face today. The “*Search for Meaning*” may have just now become accessible to be included in the conversations of our lives, mostly lived in a

bubble, a comfort zone of safety and wellbeing that is not a birthright but an obligation.

“Be afraid of the conversation you need to have but be absolutely terrified of the conversation you are missing.”

A mentor once taught me to “*be afraid of the conversation you need to have but be absolutely terrified of the conversation you are missing*”: The power of a non-existing conversation can leave scars deeper than a conversation that went bad. But even worse: We are all constantly in a situation where we are compelled to act appropriately in the face of everything

that happens in our lives, internally and externally. We inquire and we respond. In abstract terms: We are perpetually in an inescapable conversation with life itself, anyway. But what could be more tragic than misunderstandings with one’s own life ignoring the foremost existential principle of our existence: conversation itself?

This phenomenon becomes painfully apparent in our relationships, from intimate ones to other social and professional interactions. If “missing conversations” are not recovered and resolved, we can’t understand what the other means. What passes for “normal”—conversations between parties who “miss” each other—often ends up with misunderstandings and disrespect for each other’s essential belief systems and causes offense, whether intended or not. Each

speaker manifests and justifies their respective attitudes and behaviors, ignoring those that come from another person. In other words, we don’t even know what we’re missing. Everyone remains trapped in their silos, prisoners of their perceptions, mistaking them with objective facts. They are unable to become emancipated and sovereign over their own stories, and thus unable to become existentially responsive to their lives. In consequence, our individual “*pursuit of happiness*” will remain a hollow one, a trap. It will lead to a dead end.

If you take responsibility for your life—(*response-ability*, as the literal meaning of the word is highlighted by the Conscious-Business-thought-leader [Fred Kofman](#) as well as the Indian mystic [Sadhguru](#))—everything you see, hear, taste, touch, and experience becomes your responsibility. It is limitless. By adopting this ethos, it becomes clear that your life is not just your own: you share it with other creatures, indeed, with the whole of existence. In entering that conversation and thinking about your life in relation to things known and unknown—in living in pursuit of Meaning—we begin to find the answer *Why* and unlock higher value in our interactions. We may even discover that there is an ultimate and universal *Why* that underlies the diversity of our personal *Whys*, unconditionally.

It is our commitment to the principle of conversation. The commitment to strive for harmony and alignment with existence overcomes the limits of our ego. We realize true

self-actualization through self-transcendence, the term Abraham Maslow, in his later writings, used to describe the “*very highest and most*

“Conversation is the method of actualizing appropriateness, alignment and harmony.”

inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos.”

Self-transcendence is an unconditional affirmation of and commitment to

life itself. We become response-able, limitlessly: Hence, conversation is the method of actualizing appropriateness, alignment and harmony. This principle of affirming life addresses us unconditionally. Every single one of us. Whether we want or not. We definitely don’t want to miss *this* conversation.

As we pause in the face of escalating crises, what are they revealing about ourselves?

What are they uncovering in our relations with each other, with the planet on which we spin, and with life itself?

Why?

If we dare to pursue Meaning ourselves, seeking forgiveness and taking responsibility, we may find that a surprising answer and an opportunity awaits. ■

IN PART TWO, I discuss how my creative and business activities became overshadowed and undermined by a personal crisis which triggered a profound disruption in my life and re-evaluation of its meaning.

CHAPTER





THE CYCLE OF DISORDER AND DISCONTENT

Disrupting the Status Quo for a New Mindset

IN PART TWO, I reveal how my creative and business activities became overshadowed and undermined by a personal and financial crisis which triggered a profound disruption in my life and re-evaluation of its meaning. I confide the loss of my sense of authenticity and self-worth, the feeling that I had lost my soul and that my accomplishments were meaningless. And I relate my personal quandary to the crisis of meaning that society as a whole is now confronting in the wake of the pandemic and its aftermath. I ask:

- What is the secret to the sense of personal fulfillment that we need to keep on going?
- Are families and businesses falling apart due to the failure to communicate meaning?
- What will it take to wake up humanity to the realization that its course leads to ruin?

“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”

— Rumi

Breaking down inner barriers is impossible without Meaning. But how do we do it? The transactional tools of measurability and accountability that we so often turn to in the world of business provide the illusion of certainty. Probe a bit deeper, and

you will find that those who relish the mechanisms of returns on investments and KPIs down to the minute detail are those most likely to find themselves uncertain and unmoored, operating within the paradigm and parameters of a flawed system. Instead, to arrive at better decision-making and a stronger society, we must be anchored by Meaning as our guiding principle.

Without Meaning, there is no *Why*. Instead, the *Why* has been substituted by the *What* and entrusted to leaders with a transactional mindset. The *What* has been mistaken for the *Why*, success has been mistaken for fulfillment, material accumulation for Meaning. Those transactional leaders find themselves incapable of reenergizing this dying belief system with innovation and transformation. They allow themselves to think and act only within the paradigm and parameters of the system that created the problems in the first place and, thereby perpetuating them, with our societies remaining complacent.

With a dissociated and suppressed *Why*, quantitative growth becomes the sole measure of success. Financial success becomes our god and demands sacrifices of the transactional *What* behavior in ever-increasing quantities. We no longer ask the question: How much is truly enough? In Buddhist thought, the *preta*, or hungry ghost, is never satisfied. Humans often also follow this path: Like the transactional spirit who lives in want of material possessions, we are addicted to the pursuit of *more*—quantity instead of quality

This is where I found myself when I turned 40. I was at the peak of my business success, a billionaire on paper (until the infamous Lehman autumn of 2008 when this paper value vanished), but unable to answer the simple question: Why was I trying to achieve so much? I was highly trained in the execution of *What*, but clueless about the reason for my being, detached from the authentic me. At a dinner with acclaimed life strategist and entrepreneur Tony Robbins, he asked me this simple question, and I realized that truth: I was successful but not fulfilled. Even more telling: I could not tell the difference between the two.

As a result, I lost connection with my inner self, my “soul.” Consequently, every wrong decision I made in my life, every person I disappointed, starting with my family, every enemy I made, was due to this ever-widening gap between the real and the projected me. I had become inauthentic, far from holistic and conscious integrity. I wasn’t the proactive co-creator

of my life. Instead, I was only reacting to its shadow. I had lost my access to deeper feelings due to the barriers I built against it within myself.

Life since has taught me that this experience is more common than I thought. The endless pursuit of *What* over *Why* is common among

“Success without fulfillment is the ultimate failure.”

most driven entrepreneurs and leaders, but it’s also present in most families. Most business dynasties. Most organizations. Even most nations. It is part of our system. It limits our capacity to love.

In the most extreme cases, the negative spiral of detachment from the sources of Meaning and vitality continues until the last bit of the values and principles

that once built the *Why*—and the individual’s or family’s or company’s or country’s happiness and fortune—vanish forever. Facts and numbers can’t be the only truths on which we base our decision-making. The slow, slippery deterioration of values and principles occurs amongst those who cling to the transactional status quo.

The constant compromise and sacrifice of quality for quantity create a detachment from others, followed by a severing of ourselves from whom we truly are and from being fully alive. We become stuck to the false belief that the only remedy is a quantitative, fast-paced *What* lifestyle pursuing success and material attainment at any price. All this to escape the loneliness and forlornness we felt inside, detached and

alienated from the conversation about the obscured *Why* within us. “*When our humanness becomes the casualty*,” as Ambassador Holladay, Founder of PathNorth, once said at a Path North conference I attended, “*bad things happen*.” The romantic German poet and philosopher Novalis stated: “*Where no gods are, ghosts prevail*.” Disconnected from our sacred truth and purpose, we are left alone in a realm of hungry ghosts. We fail the great mission given to us of being human. And then, we recognize too late, quoting Robbins, that “*success without fulfillment is the ultimate failure*.” Or as Lady MacBeth lamented: “*Naught’s had, all’s spent, where our desire is got without content*.”

When the pursuit of the next reward purely drives us, it sets the stage for disaster. A dopamine-driven state of mind, over the years, desensitizes the neuroreceptors in our brains. It prevents them from receiving the higher echelon hormones within our biochemical reward system. The loss of the ability to feel empathy, gratitude, oneness leads to degenerative states of the human psyche. Depression and anxiety are the guaranteed next steps on the “road to nowhere”: The “hunger for more” becomes the only state of consciousness until the soul dies. This direct correlation between Abraham Maslow’s human needs hierarchy and human biochemistry was ingeniously highlighted by the ground-breaking work of Axel Bouchon in *Capitalism of Happiness*.

“Insanity:
Doing the same
thing twice
and expecting
a different
outcome.”

If we examine the victim’s role in this narrative, we find ourselves following Einstein’s definition of insanity—*doing the same thing twice and expecting a different outcome*. Instead of taking responsibility for our self-delusion, we blame the authorities to whom we have outsourced

leadership—managers, politicians, priests, gurus, or others—for not leading us to the promised land.

Instead of silently or unconsciously accepting and reacting from someone else’s narrative for our lives, we need to re-enter into the conversation with it and write our own ticket. We become responsible and proactive co-creators of our lives, following

Gandhi’s advice “*to be yourself the change that you want to see in the world*” to make “*life happen for us and not to us*.” To quote the Sadghuru again: “*The only way out is the way in.*” Only from unconditional life-affirmation, a place of seeking connection, meaning, faith and love are we able to see life’s challenges, hindrances and inevitable tragedies as invitations for us to grow and reach fulfillment. This pivot inescapably demands disrupting the status quo by inner transformation.

In seeking to fill that void, we choose self-pity and selfishness over empathy. We accept the cell blocks of the system we have inherited and confine ourselves to a prison of our own making. And in constructing that prison, we harm ourselves and others.

Let’s take a bird’s-eye view of the world. We live within a landscape of a triple divide: ecologically, economically, and culturally-spiritually. Instead of a mutually caretaking and enhancing relationship with society and the natural world, life has devolved to a game of “winner take all.” Today, we consume resources faster than our planet can regenerate. The top 1% of the world’s population has greater collective worth than the entire bottom 90 percent, and nearly a million people take their own lives every year, more than those murdered or killed in war.

We live in volatile, uncertain, and ambiguous times. We face challenges with far greater complexity than a thinking paradigm built on transactional-only leadership can solve.

The limitations of the traditional leadership mindset are obvious if we examine their most powerful representatives: Fortune 500 companies have seen their average lifespans dwindle from 75 years a half-century ago to only 15 years today. Open societies and institutions are under attack by demagogues who weaponize fear to fill the void of our missing Meaning with self-serving fiction masked as information, undermining belief in reason. People from all walks of life fall prey to the seductive power of sociopathic narcissism. They mistake the shiny entertainer and distracting noises with true leadership and wisdom.

S imply put: concentrating on *What* alone, on transactional quantitative parameters over holistic qualitative ones, leads to social, and personal ruin. By choosing the measurable over the meaningful, over what is fully alive, IQ over EQ, we approach life as a zero-sum game. We don't ask *Why*. We aren't able to align with the universal structures of existence anymore nor can we integrate our indeed valuable instrumental and strategic capacities, our knowledge of *What* and *How*, by the ever-orienting north star of a meaning-giving *Why*.

Despite all the ideological and utopian “solutions” that humankind has come up with so far, capitalism and democracy have, in principle, proven to be the most efficient distribution systems of ideas and

wealth ever invented. Both are not irreparably broken, but they are each cracked.

Those cracks have a simple reason: their conceptual base of thinking has, until today, remained in the rationalistic

belief system of transactionalism and scarcity instead of transformation and the abundance of life. The dark side of Descartes' universal insight into the self-conscious condition of humanity,

that “*I think therefore I am,*” is a fear-based separateness from existence. We seek to overcome this fear by self-empowerment through reasonable insight and strategic control, by becoming “*maîtres et possesseurs de la nature*” (masters and owners of nature). It is, as the German Philosopher, Christoph Quarch, has discussed extensively, a belief paradigm rooted in a mechanistic mindset that has led to a losing game for people, societies, and the planet as a whole. That machine has now, suddenly and shockingly, come to a grinding, screeching halt.

What has become clear to everyone is that within the increasing pace of changing paradigms, the mechanical, transactional-only belief system is a thing of the past, a relic that should be consigned to a museum if not an attic or ash heap of history. Yes, it is a disease to be cured, a perversion (literally, “turning away”) of and from healthy human needs and values. It is urgent to realign life and the structures of society with it under the unconditional guidance of our universal *Why*.

Without this strong *Why* guiding ourselves and our societies, we should not be surprised about the low tolerance for uncertainty and diversity. Demagogues have an easy time with followers who have quit the conversation and thus never developed a robust *Why*—the slogans of a leader's cheap hero story fill their inner void, at least momentarily. They don't develop their own personal manifestation of meaning but instead settle for worshipping, or at least tolerating, those of the idol.

Within the increasing pace of changing paradigms, the mechanical, transactional-only belief system is a thing of the past.

Bad leaders produce bad times.
 But bad times can also produce good
 leaders.
 Good leaders then produce good
 times.
 But good leaders cannot emerge in the
 absence of good ideas and nurturing
 culture.

We are in dire need of a new mindset if we hope to produce those good leaders or we will have little chance to see better times return. We need to rediscover or reinvent our personal and our common *Why*—for the survival of our species and planet.

Riel Miller, head of Futures Literacy at UNESCO makes the point in his book *Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century* that the world's societies need to regain “literacy of the futures.”

We are asking *Why*, so we have a direction. But, so far, we continue on a course towards what has failed, rather than shifting towards something that has proven it can succeed. Conventional wisdom, traditional structures, established ideologies—none of them have delivered the goods or the Good. Not for most people. Not for humanity. Not for Earth. We are out of breath. We are out of time.

IN PART THREE, I relate how I reconstructed the broken fragments of my life with the help of friends and a circle of conversation which opened a new perspective on sharing secrets and discussing deep feelings from a place of openness and trust.

Have we overlooked something in our rush to transact ourselves to “progress”? Is it the elephant in the room? Or an iceberg just beneath the surface? This is the “missing conversation” that many of us have accepted, without question, for too long. It’s time for a new conversation. ■

CHAPTER

15



THE FOUNDATION:

A New Conversation Among Leaders

IN PART THREE, I relate how I began to reconstruct the broken fragments of my life with the help of friends and a circle of conversation which opened a new perspective on sharing secrets and discussing deep feelings from a place of openness and trust. I connect this to the ancient Greek view of the need to balance order and chaos, allowing disruption as part of life's natural harmony. What is not acceptable, I find, is allowing ourselves to stumble from disaster to catastrophe, never coming to terms with the natural imbalance we have created. I ask:

- How do we replace human hubris with a humble acceptance of nature's imperatives?
- Will this latest Black Swan event wake humanity from spiraling descent to oblivion?
- How did the Argonauts concept arise and what is its core philosophical foundation?
- Why do we see the metaphor of a garden requiring cultivation as a central metaphor?

“Individual thought is mostly the result of collective thought and of interaction with other people. The language is entirely collective, and most of the thoughts in it are. Everybody does his own thing to those thoughts—he makes a contribution. But very few change them very much.”

— *David Bohm*

found a safe space to tackle my own “missing conversations” when, a decade ago, I was invited to join the Young Presidents Organization. YPO is the largest CEO organization on the planet, with 30,000+ members representing more than 12% of the global GDP. For decades, the core of YPO has been its “Forums,” where groups of 6–10 members meet each other in the space of absolute trust and respect. These peers, all of them senior executives, convene in person at regular intervals, following a scripted conversation designed to lead them to find *Why* by continually, in these closed circles, examining and discussing their own personal and professional lives.

It comes of no surprise that, in a recent survey done by YPO, 96% of their members believe their companies have a responsibility beyond shareholder value. They hold that *stakeholder trust* must be their top priority as leaders. Their experiences have taught them that the priority is to create and sustain a healthy balance between shareholders’ and stakeholders’ interests within their organizations, with trust as a pre-eminent value.

I’ve learned from Christoph Quarch, that the sages of Ancient Greece conceived a similar formula. In a healthy human ecosystem, feeling and thinking, the emotional and rational mind, disruption and balance, live in harmony. Nine months of the year we are under the rule of rational thinking—balance and order—(as represented by the Greek god, Apollo). Then, for three months, a constructive period of disruption reigns while passionate and wild emotions flow (represented by his brother, the god Dionysus), integrated into a harmonious balance.

Wisdom emerged from a safe space of mutual trust and respect based on a *Why* that comprised the DNA of this ancient society. The Greeks of this era were led by Apollo’s twin imperatives to humans: “*Gnōthi Seauton*” (*Know Thyself*) and “*Mēden Agan*” (*Nothing in Excess*). Together, they could be translated into something like, “*Find out what it means to be human. Do not mistake yourself for being a god. Better not act in excess, or life will take its toll.*” It is a clear and unambiguous order to be humble yet self-curious.

Eastern philosophy also mirrors this timeless truth: Confucius articulates the same foundation in his essay, “The Great Learning” as Otto Scharmer observes in “Eight Emerging Lessons”: “[T]o change the world, you first need to cultivate your interior condition as a human being” and focus “on harmony between the external and interior.”

In the mechanistic thought-model of the world, this natural law of internal and external

harmony has been ignored for too long, especially when we have been successful, individually and as a species. For too long, we have believed that man can control and exploit without consequence. We have been conditioned to oppose disruption as an integral part of the natural order of life. We ended up believing that men are akin to gods whereas the humbling truth is otherwise. They lack respect for the infinite intelligence of existence and mistake what they have discovered for everything that is. Truly enlightened, we'd live fully in harmony with creation. Yet as puny humans pretentiously and immaturely claim total control, the real gods (or *God, nature, the universe, the manifestation power of quantum physics*, or whatever term one prefers) periodically show us who is the real boss, just as Apollo suggested.

These ancient myths whisper a clear message to us and bear an eternal truth: Whenever the hubris of humans ignores the sacred harmonic

Whenever the hubris of humans ignores the sacred harmonic principle, life reminds us.

principle, life reminds us. Personally, when we live in dissociation from life and stubbornly try to enforce something that we want or planned against all contrary signs, we invite failure and tragedy. Collectively, we witness one and the same pattern:

pandemics, Fukushima, Chernobyl, and climate change are just a few examples. Our illusion of permanence and invulnerability is suddenly

ripped asunder, suddenly surprised by an iceberg, or a strand of RNA, or a tsunami, or a leak. Invariably, we fail to recognize and prepare until it is too late.

We wake up to find ourselves living a classic Greek tragedy in real-time, non-stop, still stubbornly mistaking what is happening for an abnormal or surreal phenomenon. We wait for the lights to come on again in our theatre of reality TV while watching the cold shadows flickering dimly on the screen from our social isolation. Plato would have a blast in his cave self-quarantine.

In 2007, Otto Scharmer of the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)* proposed the “*Theory U*,” which explores how individuals, teams, organizations, and systems can build the leadership capabilities to address global challenges. This theory shows two primary human responses to disruptive events—a traumatizing, destructive approach and a constructive, evolutionary response (which the Greek differentiated by Titanic and Olympian). The former can be characterized as a “freeze” reaction that leads to the amplification of ignorance, hate, and fear. Meanwhile, the latter “opening” response amplifies our curiosity, compassion, and courage. It’s a choice between the *egocentric What* focus or *ecocentric Why* awareness. To even ask a holistic *Why* in the face of disruption or tragedy already means to experience connection with life instead of opposition and hostility. We live from a place of deep

rootedness in existence, secure and feeling the abundance of life. And whatever might happen can therefore have meaning for us and invite improvement and growth. We may perceive the advantage of the latter. But how do we go about uncovering it?

As Yuval Noah Harari made clear in his book *Sapiens*: nations, companies, money, religions, the market—with or without an invisible hand—are concepts turned into perceived reality. Despite being rooted in certain dimensions of reality, they are likely to overvalue or undervalue many of its aspects for different historically and culturally conditioned reasons. Hence, they distort or even pervert life. Therefore, any new *Why* which allows for a different mindset calls for a different construct on every level of society and its institutions. We have to uncover distortions. For example, economic growth and money—undoubtedly important instrumental

We have to realign our concepts of life and structures of society with the universal truths of existence, striving continuously and unconditionally for a more harmonious correspondence.

aspects of reality—have become predominant in society. Everything serves and circles around them—instead of them, in their natural position, serving as tools to attain life's higher dimensions. We have developed a money-centric world instead of a value-centric

one. We therefore need to see *“through our current economic myths just as Copernicus saw through the myths of a geocentric world that con-*

strained society in his time,” as Tomas Björkman asserts in *The Market Myth*. We have to realign our concepts of life and structures of society with the universal truths of existence, striving continuously and unconditionally for a more harmonious correspondence.

The coronavirus crisis is the fourth catastrophic event that I have experienced in my lifetime. The common denominator is that every time we call it a *Black Swan event* (at least since 2007 when Nicholas Taleb coined the term and the system behind it), something unforeseeable because it does not fit our logic-only *What* model of the world. With every crisis, the Black Swan looms larger and larger. We play dumb every time. We freeze. We flee. We fight among ourselves. And then, when the thing looms, and then hits, well, we never saw it coming. *“Of course,”* they say. It's because *“the data was withheld.”* Or the *“numbers were misreported.”* Other times, the response is: *“Who could have expected such a thing? We did better than expected!”* When we operate in this mode, we fall back into a blame game with invisible enemies.

Leaders today need to be smarter than that. We better be. And we can be. We must be. By now, we are aware that this is not a movie. This is not an accidental collision with an unforeseeable iceberg. It is our model of the world, our way of life that has unleashed the punishing Titans. The next Black Swan, or the next Titanic, floats just around the corner.

So, what will our response be: a Titanic “freeze” or an Olympian “opening”? We know where the former leads. But is the latter, however desirable, even possible now? Let us not underestimate the disruption that this seismic paradigm shift would engender. If we could pull this off, it would bring an urgently needed regeneration. A reconstruction. A renaissance of an ancient myth, happening right now:

The origin of the Argonauts saga lies in the legendary pre-Hellenic legacy of ancient Greece. The myth, passed on orally across many generations, tells of a motley crew of Greek heroes—not gods but fallible human beings—who accepted the invitation of their leader Jason, and the longings of their own hearts. They set off on a daring, seafaring adventure aboard their ship, the *Argo*, in a quest to find the *Golden Fleece* in a distant land. The *Golden Fleece* was the ultimate destination for them, the fulfillment of their journey, the supreme object of their longings, passions, and enthusiasm. We can understand it as their *Why*, the Meaning of their bold—some would say reckless—voyage into the great unknown.

In my post-traumatic years after 2008, I found my fellow Argonauts crew within my Trust Circle. We shared our deepest doubts and toughest challenges with each other. For me, it occurred in my darkest days of turmoil and uncertainty. Yet this diverse group of peers, gathering monthly by video calls from New Zealand, the United States, and Europe, came to be my

brain- and heart-trust. Looking back now, it is clear to me that, without the wisdom of this group and the deep conversational process in which we engaged, I would never have reached the insight or found the strength to make the decisions that led me out of my inner darkness. They helped me slay my dragon and keep my demons at bay. Our monthly conversations and yearly retreats laid the foundation for my road to transformation and reconstruction, rediscovering my authenticity and integrity, redefining my *Why*.

I felt what Swedish songwriter Fia Forsström beautifully paraphrased in her song “Shedding Skins”:

“Oh, the moment we stop running from
the demons in our heads
And instead we choose to love them
When saying yes to life both shadow
and light
Oh, our suffering is done and we come
alive.”

Today, twelve years on, The Argonauts, as an organization and a worldwide community, is tackling the challenges we have been discussing here. Distinguished and energetic leaders from all around the world, from every discipline and domain, are engaged in ongoing conversations with each other, finding new and authentic meaning in their lives and forming long-lasting and significant relationships. Together we are impacting the world with social and financial investments. We meet regularly in Trust Circles and external forums, formulating and dissemi-

nating this disruptive, yet ultimately constructive, philosophy and methodology on the *Why* level. We empower and encourage members and friends with the knowledge, tools, and human connections they need to achieve self-transcendence: something beyond themselves.

The Argonauts community builds on what organizations like YPO have started, taking it to the next step of evolution. Under an overarching common methodology, the community guides its members along the path of the principles outlined in the *Integral Theory* of Susanne Cook-Greuter and Ken Wilber, Don Beck and Christopher Cowan's *Spiral Dynamics*, Ichak Adizes' *Managing Corporate Lifecycles*, and many others. All these support us in our quest to transcend the crippling constraints of our society's achiever state and ascend to higher states of

“You cannot have exterior development without interior development to hold it.”

enlightened individual and organizational development, following Ken Wilber's conclusion: “*You cannot have exterior development without interior development to hold it.*”

The Argonauts' methodology provides a constitutional framework for this new thinking. It offers a basis for a new mindset that adds the long-neglected *Who*

to the *Why*: whom do we truly serve? We are on this planet to enter into a vibrant conversation with life itself, answering an imperative “Yes!” and by this become fully alive. We seek to live by life's universal principles, its intrinsic wisdom

of abundance and diversity. This is the ultimate *Why*. It is an imperative that unconditionally addresses every human being. With this awareness, we can reach what Scharmer calls the “*transformational ecosystem-based learning and leadership*” that eventually manifests in a “*universal social field of co-creation.*”

As a global leadership network, The Argonauts aim to mutually evolve to that next level through an ongoing conversation among members and friends. By cultivating a new model based on the metaphor of the “*flourishing ecosystem of a garden,*” as Quarch puts it, the leaders of any organization, regardless of its size, for-profit or non-profit, can become conscious stewards of continued organic growth. These leaders evolve from being egocentric officers of a technocratic machine to become ecocentric gardeners of a living organism: natural-born leaders spreading the affirmation of being fully alive in abundance.

We aim to manifest literacy on the three levels, outlined by German researcher and author Maja Goepel in her groundbreaking work *The Great Mindshift*. Even economically, this framework constitutes a “triple win” for the planet, entrepreneurs and investors, bringing consciousness to capitalism: “*Meeting the needs of all within the means of the planet,*” the formula wonderfully crystallized by British researcher and author Kate Raworth's “Doughnut Economy” model.

The conclusion is clear: We are steadily moving away from René Descartes' mid-seventeenth century proposal that humans should be “masters and owners” of the planet, which has been our society's underlying paradigm. We strive for harmonious cultivation of life itself. With this new value proposition, the new wave of leaders moves from serving shareholders slavishly and thinking quarterly to encouraging and empowering stakeholders to aspire to a higher and holistic purpose, with the *What* and *How* not neglected but consciously integrated by the *Why*.

Transactionalism is not to be rejected but integrated within the context of a transformation.

Human *doing* serves human *being*.

Achievement is not devalued but revalued to the extent that it contributes to humanity, to our coexistence and collaboration to survive and thrive on this planet.

This transformative and disruptive paradigm is how The Argonauts community breathes new life into aging structures and mindsets. The new conversational methodology develops and represents a vital revival of consciousness for leaders and their organizations. It is a socially responsible vision of capitalism and democracy that calls for all leaders to devise a people-first business strategy that respects the impact of their behavior and operations on our society and environment. ■

IN PART FOUR, I come full circle to detail the significance of The Argonauts as a leader-driven force for transformation in the world, starting with changing myself.



CHAPTER



THE ARGONAUTS' PROPOSAL

Trust Circles Leading to a New Destination

IN PART FOUR, I come full circle to detail the significance of The Argonauts as a leader-driven force for transformation in the world, starting with changing oneself. I describe the conversation-driven method of the organization and the tools it brings to strengthen its members and build lasting bonds among them. I discuss this leadership network as the realization of a transformation mindset that many great thinkers have described as essential to bringing humanity to a higher level of consciousness, just in time. I ask:

- Can egocentric, transactional values be integrated by ecocentric, holistic ones?
- How does the methodology of Trust Circles help accomplish the Argonauts mission?
- What are impact investments in the current context and how can they be realized?
- Has the current crisis, and the pause it engendered, brought us to a new renaissance?

“Only an I
that intends a Thou
can integrate an It.”

— *Viktor Frankl*

“Culture—
the collectively
shared meaning”

— *David Bohm*

The Argonauts community has developed an ecosystem, tools, and processes to cultivate the transformational power of conscious leadership in a sustainable and scalable way. Committed and diverse peers—from around the globe and across all fields of endeavor—find a safe place of trust and respect, common values, and principles. At its core, members are nurtured by authentic, non-judgmental,

human conversations in their Trust Circles, online and offline, united and guided by the common affirmation of a transformational mindset based on an unconditional *Yes* to life. Virtual encounters are complemented by physical meetings in places of beauty and wonder around the world. Additionally, the community provides members with a robust toolset of assessments and exercises, thought-provoking content, and hands-on practices for disruptive yet constructive change in their lives, businesses and communities.

These efforts are new experiences and relationships that transcend the learning limits of leadership training models. Trust Circle dialogues are professionally facilitated with curated content by The Argonauts community’s experts and coaches. They go beyond the social scripts of transactional exchanges to foster the development of conscious thinking and build

muscles to help members uncover authentic versions of themselves. In an age where reflection is rare and information overload is the norm, Trust Circle conversations cut through the noise and reach harmonies of who we are at our human core. Leaders achieve *“lucidity,”* as German-Swiss psychologist and Argonauts thought leader Dirk de Sousa calls this state of consciousness, one which every human can learn and attain.

Harvard Graduate School of Education psychologists Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey explain, in *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*, that most individuals and organizations are immune to deep and lasting change. The only way to overcome an organization’s immunity to change, they argue, begins within leaders.

The journey requires leaders to be open to vulnerability and adapt to a language of change, which first transforms the leader before spreading outward—not downward—across the organization. In this new value-based, human-centric era, it is not the organization that transforms, it is people, first. As Kegan and Laskow conclude, *“when we experience the world as too complex, we can either try to reduce its complexity or expand our consciousness.”*

To transform the transactional leadership mindset, we must strive to reach a new level of consciousness. In the community of Argonauts, we nurture global leaders in their courage to develop the ability to adeptly adjust to the complexity of the escalating changes of the

“An organization cannot perform at a higher level of performance than the collective consciousness of its leadership.”

environment. “An organization cannot perform at a higher level of performance than the collective consciousness of its leadership” concluded R. J. Anderson and W. A. Adam and thereby

took Einstein’s paradigm of problem-solving requiring higher consciousness to the organizational level.

Self-awareness is at the core of all the individual journeys that members navigate toward within their Circles. Argonauts simultaneously expand their leadership capability and evolve their mental capacity to tackle the thorniest questions encountered in business and life, in a trusted environment conversation by conversation. They harmonize the emotional

with the rational, the problem-solving consciousness with the creative unconscious state of mind. In the process, leaders move from a competition paradigm as the main driving factor for their life’s work to a paradigm based on trust-based cooperation and leading from within.

The Argonauts community helps us rediscover and retrieve the “missing conversations” within ourselves, sharing those discoveries and experiences with trusted others. Our members’ guided journeys with their trusted peers, from one Trust Circle session to the next, prepare them to share their deepest concerns and challenges, form long-lasting relationships and understand the power that comes from communicating with vulnerability and listening with the heart.

We are, by definition and design, a community of “courageous leaders.” It takes a strong heart to confront one’s demons and dragons to navigate the journey from an outer to inner-driven life. Once our members accept this challenge and cross the chasm, they become better equipped to lead with authority and authenticity, acting with transparency and integrity. They exert lasting and constructive impact on their organizations and the wider world, leading by example. Taking a perspective of “progress” and “evolution”, they adapt to change faster and with higher resilience levels. These conscious leaders become role models and inspirations to peers and the next generation of leaders, within and beyond their own organizations.

Argonauts come to understand that, as Tony Robbins said, “*the quality of your life is in direct proportion to the amount of uncertainty you can comfortably deal with.*” That resilience and self-esteem is directly correlated with your success in and through conversations with others and life itself. Only by committing to this conversation can you truly engage in personal soul-searching, assimilating your own story, your own meaning, your own *Why*: It can only develop in mutual exchange with life as your individual manifestation of the universal principle of life-affirmation: “*I become through my relation to the Thou,*” as Martin Buber put it. “*As I become I, I say ‘Thou.’ All real living is meeting.*” Committing to the conversation means transcending yourself to truly find yourself—and to finally

discover yourself as part of something that is infinitely bigger than you are, allowing for a life experience based on harmonious abundance, collaboration, and co-existence.

Through Trust Circle conversations, living meetings of sharp, clear minds and compassionate hearts, our own mindfulness and individual identity, the quality of our leadership and our lives grow stronger. We practice our conversations. And we practice our life. We transform. The powerful principle becomes clear as it is practiced, as the German philosopher Marius Tölzer proclaims: *“Fate is a dialogue that you conduct with your life.”*

We Argonauts say, humbly: *“It all starts by having a different conversation.”* The conversation starts with yourself, with your feelings and thoughts, with your conscious and unconscious life, with your surroundings, with your friends, family and peers, colleagues, with society and

its conventions and beliefs, with nature, with life and fate and existence itself.

This new conversation constructively disrupts old ways of thinking by changing attitudes and behaviors to lead to positive outcomes on the *What*

level, too, while creating a new paradigm for the *Why*. The old ways of thinking and doing, based on transactional-only *What* and *How* mindsets, don’t work even economically anymore. This is why leading universities such as Stanford and

Harvard as well as leading consulting companies such as Mckinsey & Company have started to encourage and recommend conscious leadership models, spearheading a worldwide movement.

We now have a chance to finally evolve, transcending the model of Descartes—*“I think, therefore I am”*—to a new view of the world, centered on mutual responsibility in human and natural relations: *“We think and feel in harmony, therefore we are”*. With that disruptive and integrative paradigm in mind, we can bring more harmony to our families, organizations, and societies, inspiring them and ourselves to be, and feel, together, fully alive.

As our modern civilization finds itself humbled, we should take courage and heart. All over a slowed if not stilled world, across diverse cultures and traditions, humanity is awakening to new conversations such as the ones taking place in the Argonauts’ Circles of Trust. Together we explore and discover a new significance of fulfillment, and renewed sources of joy, in our lives.

With an impact investment in ourselves, we transform from a fear- and scarcity-based, ego-centric, mechanistic, and transactional thinking to a trust- and abundance-based, ecocentric, and holistic conception of ourselves and our planet. This “investment in human capital” uncovers the *Why* that lets us live with gratitude in the present, here and now, rather than await something better in a distant future or promised redemption in the afterlife.

“It all starts
by having
a different
conversation.”

As we begin to emerge again from physical and spiritual lockdown—amid threats of restrictions on our liberties of expression, assembly, culture and movement—we realize that this investment and shared experience could form the basis for a disruptive renaissance of *Why* rooted in a renewed consciousness. This imperative transcends nations, ideologies, and religions. The need is to “*Make Meaning Strong Again*” and become, individually and collectively, fully alive.

The Argonauts is re-telling a never-ending story, renewing an ancient tradition through conversations in our Circles of Trust. These encounters foster—enhanced by our newfound sense of mutual vulnerability—the potential for mental disruption, spiritual healing, and social reconstruction that integrate our lives and the planet we inhabit.

That is the investment we make, with lasting impact, in ourselves, our societies, and our world. Our commitment seeks to bridge the generations, encountering the missing conversations in our lives, as individuals and as citizens, members of diverse faiths and nations, fellow mortals, all inhabitants of the fragile Planet Earth.

We Argonauts ask, in a spirit of being fully alive, *Who* are we serving? Do we as leaders have the courage to affirm a life of abundance, harmony, and diversity amid profound uncertainty and disruption? This is an invitation to engage in a long overdue conversation about *Why* we are on this planet and *How* we can cultivate *What* for a better future, cooperatively and courageously. It all starts with a wake-up call—resounding through the ages, especially in times like these—with another question, awaiting your response:

If not now, *When*? ■

REFERENCES AND FURTHER INSPIRATION

Adizes, Ichak: Managing Corporate Lifecycles (2004).

Anderson, Robert J. / Adams, William A.: Mastering Leadership: An Integrated Framework for Breakthrough Performance and Extraordinary Business Results (2015).

Beck, Don / Cowan, Christopher: Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership, and Change (1996).

Björkman, Tomas: The Market Myth (2016).

Bohm, David: On Dialogue (1996 Routledge).

Bohm, David / Krishnamurti, Jiddu: Exploring the Legacy of the David Bohm and Jiddu Krishnamurti Relationship (<https://bohmkrishnamurti.com>).

Bouchon, Axel: Capitalism of Happiness (2019).

Buber, Martin: I and Thou (1923 dt., 1937 engl.).

Camus, Albert: The Myth of Sisyphus (Le Mythe de Sisyphe, 1942 frz., 1955 engl.).

Cook-Greuter, Susanne R. / Miller, Melvin E. et. al.: Creativity, Spirituality, and Transcendence: Paths to Integrity and Wisdom in the Mature Self (2000).

de Sousa, Dirk: The Self Beyond Myself: The natural way to end psychological suffering (2015).

Frankl, Viktor:

- Man's Search for Meaning. An Introduction to Logotherapy (1947).
- Psychotherapy and Existentialism. Selected Papers on Logotherapy (1967).
- The Will to Meaning. Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy (1988).
- Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning (1997).

Fromm, Erich:

- The Art of Loving (1956).
- To Have or to Be (1976).

Göpel, Maja: The Great Mindshift. How a New Economic Paradigm and Sustainability Transformations go Hand in Hand (2016).

Harari, Yuval Noah: Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind (2015).

Heinrichs, Johannes: Kritik der integralen Vernunft. Eine philosophische Psychologie (Critique of Integral Reason. A philosophical psychology, 2018).

Jung, Carl Gustav: Psychologische Typen (Psychological Types, 1921).

Kahneman, Daniel: Thinking, Fast and Slow (2011).

Kofman, Fred: Conscious business. How to build value through values (2006, 2013).

Laskow Lahey, Lisa / Kegan, Robert: How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation (2000).

Maslow, Abraham:

- Motivation and Personality (1954).
- Farther Reaches of Human Nature (1971).

Maté, Gabor: In the realm of hungry ghosts. Close encounters with addiction (2008).

Meier-Seethaler, Carola: Gefühl- und Urteilskraft. Ein Plädoyer für die emotionale Vernunft (Feeling and judgment. A plea for emotional reason, 2001).

Miller, Riel: Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century (2018).

Nietzsche, Friedrich: Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer (1898).

Percy, Walter: The Moviegoer (1961).

Robbins, Tony:

- Unlimited Power (1986).
- Awaken the Giant Within (1991).

Sadghuru: Inner Engineering: A Yogi's Guide to Joy (2016).

Scharmer, Otto:

- The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications (together with Katrin Kaufer, 2018).

- Eight Emerging Lessons: From Coronavirus to Climate Action (online, Mar 16, 2020: <https://medium.com/presencing-institute-blog/eight-emerging-lessons-from-coronavirus-to-climate-action-683c39c10e8b>)

Sinek, Simon: Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action (2009).

Taleb, Nassim Nicholas: The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable (2007).

Tölzer, Marius: Durch alles Leben geht ein Du (In all of life there is a thou, 2020).

Quarch, Christoph:

- Das große Ja. Ein philosophischer Wegweiser zum Sinn des Lebens (The great Yes. A philosophical guide to the meaning of life, 2012, 2019).
- Platon und die Folgen (Platon and consequences, 2018).
- Wo keine Götter sind, walten Gespenster (Where no gods are, ghosts prevail, 2016).

Wilber, Ken: A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality (2000).

