

THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS:

Leadership Strategies for 2023

SIMPLYBE.

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People are starving for
humanity in business.

Jessica Zweig

CEO & Founder, SimplyBe.

SCALING THE FUTURE

Through my work as the leader of SimplyBe., I am exposed to a lot of different types of work environments. I am often hired to come in and lead discovery sessions, train a small team of people, teach a workshop to a department, or present a lunch and learn to an entire company. Whether it's for a burgeoning tech start-up of a dozen people or a corporate organization of thousands, one thing is always clear: *people are starving for humanity in business.*

Employees across the board are desperate to feel seen, uplifted, and inspired. They are dying to feel free to be *themselves* at work. What's more, they crave the *permission* to be themselves at work. In most cases, being fully authentic at work is the exception, not the rule. This saddens me.

It also gives me immense hope.

The space of personal branding doesn't only benefit your own unique career path. Having a personal brand is becoming an ever-increasing, universal business asset for all employees, teams, and leaders across all industries, and companies are indeed waking up to this.

When an individual can clearly communicate their unique value and confidently “simply be” who they are every day at work, this becomes an organizational superpower. Imagine what would happen if every person inside a company had the clarity, the confidence, and the passion to become a true brand ambassador. That company's impact would be unparalleled.

What's more, when people feel that who they *are*—not just what they *do*—is valued, they become happier, more engaged, and more productive at work.

When an organization empowers its workforce to build their own brands, this not only unifies a clearly articulated company message, it also establishes a leverageable, digital presence that enhances credibility and external optics, while increasing internal collaboration, company pride, and a positive culture. To build a fully integrated, deeply authentic workforce is the secret sauce to scaling your business.

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This requires an understanding of where “authenticity” actually comes to life in the workplace—and where it fails to do so. By this point, you probably feel completely aligned to your own fully authentic brand message. But where the rubber meets the road is when the people around you—primarily the people who work for you—feel confident to express their own authenticity too. Assuming you are building your brand to grow your business, and your business ultimately needs other people beside you to run it, you must unleash the personal brands of your people to support your business, understand it, and help it grow.

LOVE OVER FEAR: A LOOK AT LEADERSHIP

Leaders today all have a choice: to operate from a place of fear (which is expressed as ego) or from a place of love (which is expressed as service).

Think about a leader you know who is operating with his or her ego. Chances are they intimidate you. This can perpetuate an unhealthy sense of admiration at best or total resentment at worst. Now think of a leader who is leading with love. Chances are you like being in their orbit. They inspire you to believe in their mission. What’s more, they inspire you to believe in yourself.

Whether you’re a CEO running a thousand-person company or a solopreneur managing a personal assistant, now is the time in your personal branding journey to open your eyes to the power—and responsibility—you possess. It’s time to take the work you’ve done on yourself and apply it to the people you lead.

We get to decide to build our businesses with love or with fear. We get to choose whether or not our organizations will stand for something greater than our net profit.

It starts with our vision. It comes to life in our mission. It’s upheld in our values.

We all have the power to be a magnetic, effective, and powerful leader. We get to decide what ripple effect we will create in the world.

Whether you’re a CEO running a thousand-person company or a solopreneur managing a personal assistant, now is the time in your personal branding journey to open your eyes to the power—and responsibility—you possess. It’s time to take the work you’ve done on yourself and apply it to the people you lead.

BUT, NO ONE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

A couple years ago, I was meeting with my new client Larry, a CEO of a large technology company. During our onboarding interview, as he was explaining his new artificial intelligence software, he boldly exclaimed, “Jessica, I want to change the world.” Then he paused and said, “I take that back. I don’t want to change the world. I can’t change the world. No one can. But I want to change *my corner of it*. Imagine what the world would be if we all did?”

Therein lies the bedrock to not only successful organizations but a brighter future. Passionate, human, authentic, purpose-driven leaders who are willing to wear their missions (and their humility) on their sleeves.

We all have a responsibility to make the world a better place, but we cannot do it alone. It takes a village. If you’re building a company in order to do so, you need to get your people behind you. And your people need to feel that they have a seat at the table as an influencer of change too.

This goes deeper than an open brainstorm in an innovation meeting. It’s more than saying a quick “hello” to your staff as you walk into the office each day. This needs to be woven into the fabric of the organization at the deepest of levels. When you do this effectively, watch how your people come to work with a renewed spirit, energy, and attitude knowing that the work they are doing truly matters. To get to the bottom of how this materializes, let’s revisit the idea of company values, or core values, to be exact.

Take a quick pulse check to ask yourself the following:

- ***Does my company have core values?***
- ***If so, what are they?***
- ***Do my employees know what they are as well as I do?***
- ***Most importantly, are we living our core values and are we keeping ourselves accountable for maintaining them?***

I was actually first presented with the idea of core values at my former corporate job. The idea of having a set of well-defined values, a “rally cry” if you will, deeply inspired me. It made me feel so good that my work in the world wasn’t only intended to collect a paycheck for myself but to change the lives of others. I believe all human beings have a deep psychological, primal yearning for purpose and a desire to make a difference.

Sadly, this was yet another gaping hole I witnessed at that organization. Sure, they had core values, and they were beautifully plastered on the walls in expensive frames for all to see, but at the end of the day, they meant nothing. They were big, abstract statements that no one could explain, let alone embody. They were bullsh*t.

At SimplyBe., I made the decision to establish core values that not only meant something but that everyone could easily understand. Above all, I implemented structures and modalities for the organization to actually *live* the values day in and day out, over time.

Here are the SimplyBe. core values:

SIMPLYBE.'S CORE VALUES:



Be. Bold

The world needs more boldness. But boldness looks different on everyone. We celebrate getting out of your own comfort zone and taking risks, whatever that means for you.



Be. True

We own our authenticity and inspire others to do the same. We celebrate vulnerability and we celebrate our differences – these are what make us human.



Be. Kind

Being kind is different than being nice. Being kind starts with your soul. It means leading with your heart and genuinely hoping for the best for others.



Be. In Service

We help our clients leave legacies. Authentic personal branding, when done right, is about more than yourself. We work with people who are in service of a greater mission.



Be. Relevant

The world is changing fast. We keep a pulse on our industry and communities with insatiable curiosity and let the knowledge we gain inform our work.



Be. Extraordinary

Show up every day as your highest self. Build equity in yourself. Build equity in your future. It starts with you and it starts now.

Theoretically, these are great. But in designing these values, I wanted to ensure they would not just become pretty notions that we stuck on the proverbial company wall. I knew as I wrote them, I couldn't change my corner of the world if I was the only one who knew them, loved them, and lived them.

CORE VALUES IN ACTION

To mitigate the potential for meaninglessness, I have put a simple mechanism in place at SimplyBe. called the Core Values Round Table. It's a biweekly thirty-minute meeting where the entire team identifies a specific example that they witnessed of each member of the team "living the values." The aim here is to identify tangible moments of action, versus embellishing emotions. As such, these core value specifics have to be "tweet" length.

We have had this meeting like clockwork over the past three years and as a result, the core values have become embedded in the ethos of SimplyBe. Every other week, we gather in a conference room around a table or on a Zoom call and one at a time, share our observations of each other. It goes something like this:

- ***"Kristin, you were bold this month in leading your first client pitch. Your confidence shined at a new level."***
- ***"Aleksa, thank you for suggesting the team take the course you found on TikTok for brands. This makes us increasingly relevant as an agency and is going to add even more value to our clients in the future."***
- ***"Nora, your work with our client has been so extraordinary that they are re-engaging with us for another twelve months. This is a direct result of the incredible relationship you have built with them as their account manager."***

To some, this might look like a meeting filled with compliments. And that is part of it. But in truth, these micro-actions have created a dedication among my staff that upholds our culture as well as the vision of my company. They know that the way they "show up" (i.e., their personal brands) matters to the success, the bottom line, and the impact we are making as an organization. They have true ownership. And as a result, we keep scaling.

Like Larry, I have a grand vision for SimplyBe. to change my corner of the world. All good leaders need to have such a vision. But in order for it to actually be effective, it has to be tangible to the people you've put in charge of helping you bring it to life. And when you can provide the actual micro-opportunities for your people to feel seen, valued, and connected as they build that vision along the way, the game changes. Your workforce changes. Your business changes. Your impact changes.

The world changes.



INSPIRER > SURVIVOR

True authenticity, as I have explained, comes down to “embracing your sh*t” and using it in the service of others. But not everyone is prepared to embrace their sh*t. And sometimes, it’s your colleagues, superiors, and employees who are the most resistant. After all, we’re at work. It’s not the place to be, you know, *emotional*. We have been conditioned to believe that our “9-to-5 self” is not the same as our “5-to-9 self.”

F*ck that.

Your personal brand is not separate from your professional brand. They are one and the same. It is in the act of bringing your whole self to work (yes, with all of your “sh*t”) that authenticity comes to life. This is nonetheless terrifying for most people. To be emotional and vulnerable at work means bringing down the shields that keep us safely protected behind our 9-to-5 armor. For many people, it is those very shields that have helped them to climb the rungs of the corporate ladder. Many professional people have great pride and attachment to their shields. To have “made it” takes a level of detachment and is a sign of admirable strength. Why would anyone want to take their shields down?

Let me tell you a story.

A few years back, I was invited to teach a two-day personal branding workshop for a ten-person executive marketing team at a Fortune 500 company. In preparation for the workshop, I had taken a prep call with the client, the director of the team, who debriefed me about each of his team members. He had specifically warned me about Sara. He explained that, while she was extremely talented, Sara was having a really hard time collaborating with the team as a whole. She was described as “defensive,” “tough,” and a “loner.” She was on track to get a potential promotion, one that she really wanted, but my client made it clear she needed to work on her blind spots before any changes were made. The objective of all my workshops is not only to establish personal brand messaging but to invoke self-awareness in order for the group to identify what their message is in the first place. I knew I had my work cut out for me.

As the team entered the room, I could immediately point out Sara. She was exactly as described. We opened up the morning with a few icebreakers, a “Personal Branding 101” discussion, and a look at powerful case studies of personal brands in corporate America. By the afternoon, it was time for the group to build out their own Holograms. I had given the group time for a breakout session, and I noticed Sara was passionately, determinedly engaged in the exercise, head down, scribbling away. She had sticky notes spread out all over her station. I walked over, sat down beside her, and asked if she could show me what she was coming up with.

She swooped together her notes and proudly laid them out in front of me. “I am struggling to find my exact tagline, but I definitely think it’s one of these,” she said. Written on the sticky notes were the words *Survivor*, *Warrior*, and *Fighter*. I asked her to explain her rationale in coming up with these.

Sara responded, “No one understands what I have been through. I’ve always had to take care of myself. My mom didn’t take care of me. I have paid my own way since I was young. I put myself through college, and I have moved across the country multiple times by myself. The only reason I have this job is because I’ve worked my ass off. No one has ever helped me get to where I am. I have done it all myself. So, I have had no choice but to be a fighter. No one understands what it’s like to have to be a warrior in your own life. That’s why I am a survivor.”

I smiled and politely asked if I could use Sara’s pen, to which she agreed. Slowly, I began to cross out the words *Survivor*, *Warrior*, and *Fighter*.

I looked her square in her eyes and said, “Based on what you just shared with me, Sara, what if you were *this* instead?” Next to the crossed-out words, I wrote the word *Inspiration*.

Within a second, Sara burst into such severe, hysterical tears, she had to leave the room. The simple act of reframing a few words on a note meant reframing the story of herself she had clung to her whole life. It meant removing the armor. It meant letting go of an entire identity and finding a new one.

By the end of our two days together, Sara was a different person. She was open, softer, engaged, and vulnerable. She even seemed more joyful. A few months later, I got the news from my client that Sara’s performance at work had profoundly improved. She was communicating with more ease with internal team members, collaborating more effortlessly with external vendors, and was actually fun to be around at the office.

One year later, Sara reached out to me via email asking me for my home address. Within a week, I received a card in the mail from her with the news she had received that promotion and was once again moving across the country for it. She ended her note by saying, “Thank you for changing my life.”



But I didn't change her life. She did. She chose to embrace her sh*t. She made the choice to take down the shield. She chose to rewrite the narrative from "Survivor" to "Inspiration." It was that single decision that changed the trajectory not only of Sara's career but her whole life.

Take an honest look at how *you* are showing up at work. Examine the self-talk you have ruminating in your head when you ponder your job. What's the lens you're looking through? What story do you keep telling yourself about yourself? What would happen to your relationships, your output, and most of all, your own experience of your job if you were to change that story? What would happen if you let down your shield?

Your shield is not your superpower.

Your truth is.

Lead with it.

“*Your shield is not your superpower. Your truth is. Lead with it.*”

IT STARTS WITH YOU

When I close my eyes and dream about the future of business, I see offices, meeting spaces, co-working hubs, presentation rooms, and networking events overflowing with one abundantly clear and unmistakable energy: our humanity. Despite your title, rank, or salary, remember we are all just people. Every single person you interact with at work is the same as you. They *are* you. Everyone experiences love, fear, pain, joy, triumph, and failure. It is our sheer humanity that beautifully binds us together. The day we bring this awareness to our work will be the day that the planet shifts. This might seem lofty, but it is the corporate organizations, public establishments, and private businesses that are, in fact, running the world.

The shift starts with one person at a time. It starts with leading from love instead of fear. It starts with having a vision and a mission more important than your net profit. It starts with knowing your values and taking a stand on them. It starts with giving your teams the space to know themselves, share themselves, and be themselves. It starts with believing that your power at work is found in your fully expressed multidimensional truth, not your two-dimensional persona.

It starts with you.

What kind of inspiration will **you** be?

THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS

*The future of business starts with **you**. Answer the following prompts to understand how you can uniquely bring more humanity into business.*

What the word “leadership” means to me:

What the word “integrity” means to me:

When I lead from LOVE (service) at work, I act like this:

When I lead from FEAR (ego) at work, I act like this:

My vision for my company/business/brand/department/product is:

This is how I communicate my vision to my team or the people I work with:

Here are 5 non-negotiable personal policies I can commit to bringing to my career/work/office:



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Schedule a call with one of our personal branding experts to discuss your unique needs, [here](#).