

# Transcript: bigQUEST Podcast | S1, Ep 12

## Adrian Swinscoe on Leading From The Edge

**Andy Murray:** Well, hello, Adrian. How are you today?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** I'm awesome, Andy. How are you getting on?

**Andy Murray:** I am doing well. I'm going to immediately apologize for the disappointment that we're not here to play or talk about tennis. Everywhere I went in Britain, it was a slight disappointment when they said they were talking or meeting with Andy Murray. So, I know you know that already. And I'm sure it's the accent that gives it away, right?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Well, you don't sound like you're from Dunblane, so I mean, being an expatriate Scot who's living in Brighton on the south coast of England, I can generally pick out the Scottish accent from time to time. So maybe if Andy loses his accent when he's out on the tour, and he just hams out when he's back home. Who knows?

**Andy Murray:** Who knows? Well you know I lived in the U.K. for four years there, I was just surprised at how many dialects -- 22 different at least dialects, probably more than that, and accents -- that what you find in America is they think everybody in the U.K. sounds like the people on the BBC. And you really don't even have a clue. I mean, it's not a clue unless you've lived there.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah. Accents -- I think that's one of the things that the U.K. does is that I guess the density of accents are ... It's quite phenomenal, actually.

**Andy Murray:** Yeah, it is. And it was quite a learning experience for me, but anyway.

And then the phrases that go with that: "So now, then, how are you doing," that's a very Yorkshire thing to say. And I said, "'Now, then, what?" Or it starts with, "Ay up."

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Ay, up.

**Andy Murray:** "Ay up," that's like, "How are you doing," right?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Ay, up.

**Andy Murray:** Ay up?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah. Ay up is ... Because I spent quite a bit of time in Yorkshire when I was growing up, so "ay up" is a thing. And then another one-

**Andy Murray:** The response back of, "Now then," right, isn't that the response, "Now, then"?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Well, you could actually argue that "ay up" and "now, then" are one and the same things. You can go, "Ay up," or you can go, "Now, then." And it's one and the same things.

**Andy Murray:** Well, yeah, it's obvious they're the same thing, to me. Obvious. It took me a while. And the only other thing I would say that took me a while, I thought that the Yorkshire pudding was a dessert because in the U.S., pudding is a dessert. And it's not a dessert.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Well, let's not get into the cookie and the biscuit thing.

**Andy Murray:** Yeah, no. Yeah, exactly.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** And let's not talk about grit either because, I mean, crumbs.

**Andy Murray:** Well, we could talk about a lot of things, but one of the things that we definitely have in common is this **passion for customer experience**. And what I'm really interested in talking to you about today in addition to hearing a bit more about what you're doing with the book, Punk CX, which is a great read, by the way, is to talk a little bit about the spaces you go into that are new.

And that's an area that I've been working a lot in: *How do you help passionate leaders create breakthrough change in some of the new spaces where it hasn't been done before?* So, the more blue ocean work.

As you point out in your book, about 72% of customer experience initiatives fail, or they fail to deliver what was promised. So, doing something new is very different than removing dissatisfiers. And that's a great space to work in customer experience too, but when I start thinking about who's doing new things, I immediately go to the customer experience industry or sector or practice area. And you're a leader in that space, so I'd just love to hear your thoughts on how getting to **new** is so challenging, and yet how are some ways you've found a way to solve it?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** So, I think it's an interesting thing. I mean, you talk about moving away from the dissatisfiers and thinking about the new sort of thing. But I think there's opportunity in the dissatisfiers, as well.

**Andy Murray:** Oh, yeah.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** I mean, I was talking to someone the other day on a thing, and I said, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if you had somebody celebrate your complaints procedure?" Right? Just as a different way of looking at things. We're human beings, and we know that stuff goes wrong. And then something went

badly wrong and somebody makes an official complaint. And then they enter your complaints procedure. But the way that you handle it and manage it and everything is just off the chart. That idea is going, the complaints department, the complaints procedure, those facilities, they're just forgotten about. So, I think there's an opportunity in all sorts of things.

And the way I think about it is that I think that we end up thinking about missed experiences, and they're a bit like a bell curve, right? And the things where people talk about things tend to happen on the edges. But we generally don't stress test or really learn about what's happening on the edges. So, you think about things where things go really, really well, or this moment of memory or delight or something. I don't know if we really, really sort of forensically investigate what happened and why, and what we can learn from that and where we can go from there.

And equally, on the other end, where people are completely thrown by what's happened and then they become confused and irate and angry and sort of things, and how we manage that and manage the anger and the emotion in that, such that it can create an opportunity for massive recovery.

There's this fascinating idea called the service recovery paradox, where it says that if you recover well when something goes wrong, then you can create a higher perception or a higher degree of satisfaction than if nothing went wrong. Now, that's not a good strategy, obviously, I have to point out. We don't need to create potholes in the road to give us a chance to recover, but there is opportunity when things go wrong. And I think when you think about this blue ocean type of idea, I think the thing that drives a lot of that is curiosity and questioning the assumptions around how we do things and how we go about things.

**Andy Murray:** Yeah, that's a great way to look at it. And I think too often, sometimes we're using customer data to isolate problems. You can see in customer data or in NPS the dissatisfiers. And we tend to dismiss some of that, versus what do you really learn from it, to find the new spaces. And so, you're absolutely right. And I've never seen a spreadsheet give up an epiphany on a customer insight. Have you?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** No. I think the epiphanies come from stories that you hear, because it's all about that connection, right? And it's like we have this fascination with solutions and technologies and processes and systems, but we forget the fundamental fact is that it is people that are building these things, and it is people that are buying these things. So, there are people at the beginning and the end of everything. And we forget that actually how we feel about stuff is the thing that generates stories and the things that generate memories and feelings and things. And that's the thing that we need to lean into, both the good stuff and also the bad stuff. Now, I don't have a morbid fascination with it, but I have a fascination with the stuff that elicits what we would constitute negative emotions, only because of the psychological impact of it.

Studies have shown that we remember things that are associated with risk and disappointment and failure or uncertainty between 5 and 17 times more than we do things associated with joy and surprise and delight. You look at that and you go, "Well, there's the ROI of all this sort of stuff," right? But the interesting thing about it is that the reason why this works and the reason why this happens is because we tend to, as human beings, ruminate on those stuff. It becomes a survival instinct, right in the back of our amygdala, sort of thing. We are hardwired to avoid these things, and yet I don't think that organizations spend enough time meditating on that type of stuff and actually doing the real work that means they can be 100% effective 100% of the time.

**Andy Murray:** Yeah, you don't really see on the board level a psychologist or a neuroscience specialist. Yet I would think given how things really work, even inside an organization, and the people-dynamics of that, companies would be served well by thinking about the neuroscience and the human condition. One of the things that was said to me a while back that I've never forgotten, says: "The word customer itself is a problem, in terms of it's a transactional description versus just calling it people." And you started by saying, "It's people on both ends." And I started to change my framework when I started looking at it as people, not customers. Does that make any sense?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah, of course. I mean, it annoys me, really a lot, when you have companies that they're in this space where they go, "Oh, the customer's really important, and people are at the heart of everything that we do, and we're customer-centric," and everything else. And then they talk about wallet share. And I look at it and just go, "Language is important because language frames how we think about things."

So, I think you're absolutely right. It's like the idea about talking about not customers but actually people is fine, but we also have to drill deeper into that, think about the mechanics of it, because we can go down one level.

And whether you have people that are still talking about wallet share, then it sort of commodifies the whole human being in many ways, so you're not actually interested in the person, you're only interested in how much money they've got in their pocket.

**Andy Murray:** Yeah. Well, I've been through a lot of revolutions and evolutions in the retail space. It's been most of my career. And you can see that play out in so many ways, and you, I'm sure, know this, but there were days when, a time when, retailers would put the things that people need most in the back of the store to make them spend time in that store, even though they didn't want to spend time in that store, under the notions that they would spend more. And they might, and they probably do, but they're not going to want to come back.

And I think we start thinking about people as people, and what do they want? There's a time budget, a money budget, and a frustration budget. And if you're just thinking about price and you want to keep them in the store longer, then someone's going to come along and give them a better experience where

they can get in and out very quickly. And yeah, I think we've moved on from that somewhat. You see most retailers now putting the grab-and-go type items in the front, which is a huge step forward in at least starting to think about people as having needs around time and humanity.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** I think that's fair. Well, I collect quotes from people that I see around the place, which I think describe the situation. And there was a great one from ... I think it was Alan Alda, the actor, who was giving a speech at his daughter's college. I think it was the commencement address or something. And the quote was something like, "Our assumptions are our windows on the world. We should clean them off every once in a while so we can see clearly."

**Andy Murray:** Great quote.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** And I find that really, really interesting because we make assumptions about what works and what doesn't work, and what's important and what's not important, and what's easy and what's not easy. And if we don't examine those sort of things and they just become -- they're just assumptions. And I think that's where, going back to your point around what's the new type of thing, it's only when we are open to examining all the assumptions that we make and being honest about those, then can we really see clearly. And when we can see clearly, then we can actually start to explore what matters.

**Andy Murray:** Yeah. That's a great thought. And something you said in there that resonates with me, we are definitely getting more and more complex. And the world's more complex. The VUCA thing is alive and well. We're probably in a super VUCA world by now.

But there is, with every force, I think the balancing forces, the higher the demand for technology and need for technology, the higher the correlation to human touch is requested and required.

And so, with this increasing complexity, there is this counterbalance. And I think things can be a lot more simple than they are, not being simplistic or trying to simplify a complexity in the wrong ways.

You talk a lot about simplicity in your book, and keeping things simple and looking through that. Tell me more about how you look at simplicity.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Well, I think it's another one of those things where people talk about wanting to make things simple, but I sometimes think that people don't necessarily try hard enough. If you give everybody a report card ... You know those ones you used to get in school that comes back and it was like, "Must try harder"?

**Andy Murray:** Yeah.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** And I think it's completely that. It's like, "Must try harder."

It's a bit like where people are turning around. There's a conversation around we need to be omnichannel, and you're going like, "Okay, what does that mean?" Well, a lot of people assume or fall into this idea that omnichannel means almost every channel, and you end up with this proliferation and plethora of channels where you're trying to manage interactions with your customers.

And when I see that or hear about that, I challenge people with this idea, I said, "Well, if you're going to add one channel to your mix, and if you're not taking away at least one if not more other channels, then you're just adding complexities to your business."

Now, that's a simplistic way of looking at it, but it's a challenge, nevertheless, to make them think more clearly, because actually, the true meaning of omnichannel, whether it's just the one channel or two or way, way more, is that they should all be connected. So, whenever you're dealing with a customer, you can see all the history of all the interactions across different channels.

But that's not necessarily how it's understood, I think.

But I think the other thing about the simplicity... There's a brilliant work that gets done by an agency called Siegel+Gale that's headquartered out of New York. And they have this thing they've been running there for the last 10 or 15 years called the Simplicity Index, which if you want to look it up, it's [simplicityindex.com](http://simplicityindex.com).

And they do a bunch of research, and it's global research, that shows where customers believe they have simplicity at their heart, their experience is simplicity at their heart. And they track against a portfolio of other stocks, like against the S&P 500, or whatever.

These organizations outperform the stock market by a factor of in excess of something like 300%. And I think the thing that's fascinating about them is that they are relentless in the pursuit of making things easier and more convenient and more effective for their customers.

**Andy Murray:** Well, that takes a lot of effort. I'm not going to name any names, but I do know of companies that absolutely are okay with a bit of friction, especially if it's a returns process.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Well, yeah. I mean-

**Andy Murray:** Right?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** I mean, I think, again, there's another thing that's in the experience sort of space. Everybody's talking about friction-free experience. But to your point, or maybe it's not, it's the opposite point, is some people believe that everything should be friction-free. But that shouldn't be because there's such a thing as good and/or bad friction. And it's figuring out when the right time to do that.

I remember talking to Andy MacMillan of UserTesting. And he told me a story about one of his clients where the board had gotten it into their head around, "We must have a friction-free experience." So

they went through this process, this online client. They just went, "Fine, we're going to make it straight-through processing. Here we go."

So they improved the speed of checkout, as it were, but what actually happened was it completely totaled their repeat customer numbers. And they were horrified by this. Well, then, they just went and launched into this investigation about what was going on. And when they looked at it really closely, they realized that the steps the customer went through to customize their order, *which was seen as being friction, bad friction, was the thing that created value for them. And actually, by removing all that, it was destroying their kind of business model.* So, they ended up doing all this stuff and then having to unpick it all, obviously, to stabilize their business model.

So, I think there's a lot of memes that go round the experience and there's many people that say they want to lead, but actually, they're just following. They're following what they think they should do, rather than actually getting down to: "What are we doing, and why? And why does it matter? Why does it matter to us, and why does it matter to our customers?"

**Andy Murray:** Well, and who are they looking to for those inspirational points? I mean, for my experience, at least in the U.K., there's quite a centralized collection of grocery retailers that look a lot alike in terms of what they offer to customers, and it's very hard to differentiate. And sometimes, I think the reason for that is too much focus on what the competitor's doing, and copying that -- that's your source of new, rather than getting outside of your domain and looking for who's best-in-class in a completely different area. When you're doing customer experience work, how often does that come up, where you are encouraging people to go outside their domain to look for inspiration of new experiences, versus just looking at competitors?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Oh, all of the time. I mean, I have a slightly glib and flippant way of saying ... When people are going, "We need to benchmark or do best practice," I'm like, "And that's a fast track to average." Right? It's a bit like going, "What? Are you kidding me?"

**Andy Murray:** That's great.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** It's like, we know. And this is the difference between what we know and what we actually get, is we know that we are, in and of ourselves, as human beings and as customers and people who work, but as customers, we measure all the experiences that we had and all the levels of service that we had *by the best.* Regardless of where they are, we measure everything against the best. And if you don't bring that to work with you and infuse that into your thinking at work, then you're going to be average, you're going to be in the pack. And you should just stop staying, "We want to lead our field." You just go, "We're happy in the middle of the peloton, thanks very much."

**Andy Murray:** Right. Well, it's safe there, right, because you know anybody in front of you's going to stumble, then you'll be right there. So, it's the fast follower, because they're probably paying a lot of

money to be on that bleeding edge. And they might fail, then you could pick up what they've learned. So, there's a lot of logic on staying in the middle. But unfortunately, it's not really going to create the breakthrough results, not really.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** No, not at all. We talk about this idea of people being Agile and failing fast and testing and learning and all of that sort of stuff, and that's great. And it goes almost back to a Peter Senge idea of the learning organization. That's ultimately what being an Agile organization is trying to enable.

But I think if you want to do something which is breakthrough, then it requires a degree of bravery to try new things and incubate things. And that requires you to do something different and be different, and be willing to fail.

Now, I'll tell you who's a great example at this, and they're doing it in public, and they're a beast, and it's Amazon. And who remembers, what was it, the Amazon Fire video customer service button thing? It was this new thing that they advertised and they said, "You press the button, you can speak to somebody and get some service," sort of thing. That was a big trumpeted sort of thing. Where is it now?

**Andy Murray:** Yeah, exactly.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** The great thing about Amazon is they're not afraid to try these things, but then when they don't work, they kill them and they kill them fast. And I think that that's maybe a better challenge: Tell me the last time that you killed something?

**Andy Murray:** Yeah. What you're getting to is a bit more outside of the method. I mean, Agile's a great methodology, right?

It's a great methodology, but it's a tool. And if you don't have the right mindset in the organization, it does take a leadership mindset to drive change, whether that's bravery or, the word I used with you the other day, audacity. You've got to be able to have some other elements to it, otherwise another tool like Deming Model of Quality Management. And I think that's the risk that we have, is that it's not the answer by itself, because it doesn't create the bravery to put something into an Agile process that will actually create an output that's going to create real change.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah, and I think the thing is, what I find is that a lot of that insight and a lot of that inspiration comes from how you are connected to both your people and your customers. And I think that comes back around to this idea of time, as it were, and how you've managed your time.

You mentioned Deming. And in Deming's work, there's this idea, and it features in lean as well; lean comes from Deming, systems thinking, and all that sort of stuff. But the idea is that central to that, and particularly in lean, is this idea of the genba, the Japanese word, the genba.

And the genba talks about this word that says ... It means, the real place. So, news reporters will talk about reporting from the genba, or police detectives will talk about the scene of the genba. But in

commerce terms, the genba could be anywhere. *It's the place where the real value is created*, and almost having to go there and actually see how things happen and how they work.

You're a retailer. I think the person that really, really had this down really well was Terry Leahy, when he was heading up Tesco.

**Andy Murray:** Tesco.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah. When he repeatedly would spend 40% of his time, like two days a week, in stores, either working in stores or just talking to customers, just wandering around and watching people, talking to people, helping stack shelves, do all these different sort of things. And many of the things around his time as CEO I think can be attributed back to some of the stuff that he learned and he heard about when he was on the floor speaking to people, whether they were employees or customers. And I think it drove his level of connection. And the thing is, rather than actually just waiting for the inspiration, you almost have to go and be inspired. You don't have to find it. It will find you if you make time to go out and seek it.

**Andy Murray:** I've never met a retail leader that was great at being a retail leader that also was, like Terry, out in stores with customers, on a regular basis. I mean, and I've worked for some great CEO retail leaders between Walmart and Asda over the years. And the best would absolutely, "You want to have a meeting? Yeah, let's do it one-on-one. Hey, let's do it in the store while we're walking." And it's just the habits of being really close. Or, "Let's go spend a couple hours on the phones at a call center, listening in." You want the real, unvarnished truth, go to that. It is shocking. It will wake you up back into reality pretty quick.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** But that's where brilliance lies, there amongst the weeds, in the lives of the people that do the work or that are your customers, that are paying the money. And I think in this age of everything is fast, fast, fast, fast, and people talk about back-to-back meetings and everything else, when I hear that, I think about it like, "It's horrifying." I'm like, "Oh my God, when do you actually do any work, for crying out loud?"

**Andy Murray:** Well, you bring up another good point that I'd like to get your point of view on. I think that fast, fast, fast, and scaling optimization type stuff is very left brain, and it rewards left brain leaders tremendously, that are good at that. But I think as a result of that, the right brain thinking has been a bit atrophied, in terms of how it should really work. And the things you're talking about is about paying attention. That's a very right brain exercise, to pay attention to what's really going on and to the moment, and seeing that.

And I'm hopeful that more right-brain thinking will be valued because if you're a curious, creative, right-brain thinker in most corporations, as I've said before, you kind of get sent off to the Island of Misfit Toys, and don't really get in the queue for promotion because really good leaders, man, they want

to do things that are proven. They have this proven track record, pull from the reservoir of what's already worked before, do that again, rinse and repeat, and you're going to get promoted because it's about achievement. But to be original and to come up with new ideas that are original and thoughtful, you got to get off that treadmill a little bit and have some right brain space and some practice on, how do you really pay attention?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** So, there's a great story about a guy that I met, a guy called Martijn Gribnau. He leads the transformation effort at Genworth Financial across in the States. He's formerly of ING bank in Holland and IPsoft, and those sort of places. He's gone through this a number of times. I remember meeting him at a conference and having him on the podcast and stuff because the story he told was brilliant. He's a Dutchman, so he is properly direct. He'll just tell you how it is. And he has a system and a pattern of how he works. And the first thing he does when he takes on a new role, and he lays this all out for his future employers, he said, "This is how I'm going to do things. If you don't like it, then we're done here. Let's not even start."

So the first thing he says, "I am going to come and work for you, but before I start, I'm going to come and work for a month or two or whatever as an intern because I want to see things how they are. And then that gives me a better understanding of what's going to be easy to change, and how things get done around here." So, that's the first thing.

And then when he actually arrives, he splits his time three ways. A third of his time he spends speaking to people that deal with customers on a daily basis, and/or meeting customers, so getting close to what's actually happening. Another third of his time, he spends just wandering around the organization getting to know people and understanding how the big picture works. So, he goes local and then he goes, if you like, regional.

And then he spends the final third of his work doing what he says, "the proper work," answering emails and doing meetings and all that type of stuff, and writing reports and reporting and speaking to the board and all these different sort of things, managing programs.

Now that might be quite extreme, but I think it's evidence of the level of commitment that it takes, and the different sort of patterns that we have to try and adopt as leaders to drive the different results, and to see things as they are. Not how we want them to see them, but see them how we are so that we can have a better understanding of where we are and we can more easily plot, how are we going to get to where we want to be?

**Andy Murray:** Well, what Agile's done to a lot of organizations for senior leaders that haven't worked in it, it's really disrupted them, because for it to be done properly, you let the teams come up with the ideas. You really give them the vision and the outcome. And so, you have to be more of a visionary leader to shape that and let the "how it gets done" happen amongst the teams. And that's not the way most senior leaders have been trained in organizations, to be there to remove barriers, listen, and then

trust the people on the front lines closest to the problem, who are really there listening and doing it, to come up with the ideas, versus having the idea come from the top. And you're just so many layers removed from reality that you'll never be able to do that well, in my opinion.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah. So, I find it fascinating, and this it's indicative of how we've been educated and how we've grown up. I'd be interested to hear about what you're doing at the Sam Walton College because I remember doing a bit of a brief survey of all the major MBAs around the world. Just wanted to better understand how many of them taught courses that we would include soft skills, as it were, like sales, leadership to an experiential level, or customer service, and managing complaints and all that type of stuff, dealing with people. And I've been through an MBA, so my own experience is very little, but when I did this survey, I was horrified. But the results, they were like: "Most people don't teach this stuff."

**Andy Murray:** No.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** But this is really important stuff, but we teach analytics and we teach rational thought, reason, and financials and everything else. But what is starting to show up now is that actually, we're wanting. And many leaders are wanting, and not necessarily because they're deficient as people. It's almost like how we've been trained.

**Andy Murray:** Well, yeah. And so, the most important or most sought-after class at the Harvard Business School is one that teaches from the book *Remains of the Day*, the story of the butler, and it's fiction, right? It's a fictional story, but what a powerful story. And I had a chance to listen to ... I forget the professor's name who teaches this course, but it's the most sought-out course to go to. And what he basically said is that, "If you want to be successful in business, read more fiction. Forget the nonfiction. Read fiction, because that's where the plot lines of life and the real truths of life have to work their way through, and you'll learn more from that."

**Andy Murray:** And so, the butler, Anthony Hopkins did a great job in the movie of, "Look, you know what? I've spent my whole life being dutiful, trying to do the right thing, and then all of a sudden, how do I square that if this guy, the owner, the boss, is a corrupt person? What was my life worth?"

And what they taught in the class is how to ask better questions and observe life and understand how people make decisions are based on human condition, more so than models and frameworks and concepts. And to be a student of literature, a student of fiction, is probably your best way to be prepared in the business world or the real world. That's a bit of what you're saying, isn't it?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah. I mean, sorry, another conversation I had recently, or a few months ago, rather, was with a gentleman by the name of Olof Schybergson, who is the chief experience officer, I believe, at ... It was Ford, but now it's Fjord, rather, and is now Accenture Interactive. And they run programs to help, as you say, some of these leaders actually learn or unlearn some stuff, and then learn sort of new

behaviors and mindsets and things. And it's a full-on sort of experiential program where they combine some of their team with some of the client's team, and they do it all together.

Then normally, they would have a big day and they would be like, "Right, fine, let's go for a beer." ***Most of the executives turn around and go, "I just want to go home. I just want to lie down, because it's like melting my head.***" But it's absolutely transformative because they're a bit like, "Who knew?"

**Andy Murray:** Yeah. Wow. Well, yeah, when you stop and think about it, I do think with the pandemic, a lot of people are sitting home and having more time to reflect and think. And it's scary, probably, for some who don't spend a lot of time on the right-brain side reflecting and thinking, and that muscle's in atrophy. It's a bit probably more scary than not. And it's the mind-blowing, "Who knew I would be able to decompress and do this, and then not have really good thinking to process?" That's a scary place to be.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah, and I think that's right, but I think what's actually interesting, empirically, what we've seen I think over the last few months, or particularly throughout the height of the pandemic, we've seen those leaders that have been openly vulnerable, that have been open to their own fallibility and not needing to display the idea that, "Oh, I have all the answers, follow me. It's all going to be fine." It's a case of, when they say, "We're in this together," going, "We're in this together, right? And we don't have all the answers, but we're going to work really hard, and we're going to be straight with you and transparent with you about how things are going on."

And we've seen example and example of people around the world that have been in leadership positions that have displayed these types of behaviors, these types of characteristics. And whether they've got it right or not, and their performance might be not that much different to many kind other leaders, the level of trust that they have with their population is just through the roof, because people want to believe.

**Andy Murray:** Yeah, you do. It's interesting, I think that's also a good news story a bit for people that are really focused in the customer experience space because to do well in customer experience, you better get good at empathy and having empathy and being empathetic. And if you get good at that, it's what the work does to you. All of a sudden, you become a more empathetic leader, which makes you more vulnerable and transparent, and more fit for the board as you go up, because that's the kind of leadership it's going to take. Things aren't going to get less complex or less disruptive.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** No, no. And I absolutely ... Right. And I can't remember the exact numbers, but there was a piece of research that was done about boards that highlights this problem. I spoke to one of their partners, it was over a year ago, about a piece of research that was talking about exactly that: boards are predominantly left brain, but there's a massive need for right brain thinkers, particularly as we've got this developing workforce, and particularly the younger, the millennial, the Gen Zs, the workforce

that are looking for this type of leadership. And so, the demand is absolutely there, therefore the imperative is there.

The problem is that we've got people that are in this one way of doing things, and it's about being right and being in control and things. And it's almost assuming that it's a binary switch, and it's not. You just have to embrace it as a journey, right?

**Andy Murray:** Yeah.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** And it starts with, "I might not have all of the answers, but I'd like to hear your opinion."

**Andy Murray:** Right. Yeah. You'll get much better ideas with that.

Adrian Swinscoe: Yeah, and the problem is that people will say, "Oh, we did that." I'm like, "Okay, and...?" And they're like, "Well, we didn't get much back." And you're like, "Why did you not get much back?" And they're like, "Well, people didn't tell us very much." And you're going, "Why is that, do you think?" And then you dig in and dig in and dig in, and then you get to the heart of it, which is, "They don't trust you."

And then you have to think about, what can you do to build that trust? And it's like, "Well, maybe you have to start by showing up, and then keep showing up, to show that you care." You can't just say that you care. You have to demonstrably show that.

**Andy Murray:** Yeah, that's a great-

**Adrian Swinscoe:** That requires you to make the space to display that.

**Andy Murray:** Yeah, or that connection.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah.

**Andy Murray:** When you look at a company in your consulting practice and they say, "We need to improve our customer experience," or whatever, how often do you first look at and say, "Well, how's the employee experience going?" I mean, you almost could pull yourself into the HR consulting practice, because a question I have is, how much does the employee experience, or colleague experience, as you'd say in the U.K., translate and directly correlate to what customers are going to feel or see or believe?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** I mean, I think they are intrinsically linked. And I don't think you can necessarily have one without the other. Logically, it doesn't follow that you'd have a great customer experience and a crappy employee experience. I mean, that's magic, if that happens, right?

**Andy Murray:** That's magic.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** And some people will focus on one thing or another. And I guess it all comes back to, what are the outcomes you're trying to drive? I think you're absolutely right, you've got to set the conditions for both things to transpire.

But I think what we've also got to appreciate, that experience is an evolving domain. So, I use the idea of experience like everybody's experience is this big set. And I think that there's different sub-domains in that. So, there's the customer experience, which is more of the external side of things. Then there's the employee experience, which is the experience of the people that are doing the work that are on your payroll, that are inside the tent, as it were. But then there's the experience of all the people that support the delivery of your broad experience, whether it's the worker, whether it's the agencies, the contractors, the-

**Andy Murray:** Yeah, the total ecosystem.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah, the total ecosystem, which doesn't always get included in the employee experience, but it should be, right? What I've been seeing, there's also this other emerging domain which is around the stakeholder experience, which sort of includes the purpose thing.

What we've seen over the last few months, that many people are looking to organizations to exercise their agency on their behalf, whether they are customers or employees or just the community at large, to address some of the big questions that we're facing, whether they are social, political, environmental, economic, or whatever. And so, they're looking at organizations as agents of change. And I think they don't have to do that, but they should consider it.

And then there's this one final thing that I think that's very central to what we're talking about here, and that's become more apparent over the last few months, is the stresses and the strains of our operating models have been put to the test. And that is we need to look much, much more closely at the experience of the leader at all levels of the organization, whether they are at the board level or all the way down to the person who's running that frontline team, because they are hugely important connective tissue in our organizations.

**Andy Murray:** And they're often left out. I mean, usually, it's a lot of frontline, maybe senior stuff.

It leads me to my last question, which I'd love to get your point of view on. And it's the word agency. And in my belief, there's a lot of opportunity to lead change for good or for better, whether that's not just philanthropic, but to take the new customer value proposition or do some stuff. That's hard and difficult, but yet, too many leaders wait to be given agency or appointed agency from the top. And that seldom is how those ideas are born.

A passionate leader will take agency, or they'll develop agency. And they know that agency includes the ability to influence multidisciplinary functions, not, "They all have to report to me." And if there's one thing I would love to see more, is more leaders take that agency that's there. It's like the chalk that they

could pick up and take, but they just don't have the confidence, or there's fear or there's some reason that they're not picking that chalk up and taking it.

What do you believe to be true about that, in terms of how many leaders need to be given permission, and how many great leaders that you see doing cool things have all been appointed that, versus they've taken it?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Truth is that everybody's an agent. And when they decide to do something, then that creates agency. And that's the difference, is that we are, and then it's when we decide to do something, we create it. Rather than we start just with ourselves, then we decide to do something different or that's important or that matters, and that creates agency, and that can grow from there.

I think there's a great story of a guy by the name of Dan Price, who is the CEO of a company called Gravity Payments in Seattle, a technology firm. They do merchant services, type stuff. And he was reading a paper about ... Oh, I think it was from Daniel Kahneman and a fellow academic about at what point in an earnings scale do we start to achieve diminishing returns in terms of money as a contributor to happiness?

And the number they got to was effectively around about \$70,000 to \$75,000, in U.S. terms. So he said, "Well, I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to set a minimum salary in our organization of \$70,000." So, the lowest paid person, everybody would just get elevated to that point, and then people would have that . Because he said, "Here's the thing. I want to remove all the barriers that stops you bringing the best version of yourself to work."

Now, he got slammed in many parts of the media as being a communist, disruptor, a freak, he's going to bankrupt the company, blah, blah, blah. And it got into a lot of things. But then here's the thing, counterintuitively, perhaps, that they were already doing well in their satisfaction scores. But actually, the number of leads coming into their business grew tenfold over the first month and kept going. The number of people that wanted to work for them just went out the front door, around the corner, down the block, and just kept going-

**Andy Murray:** Of course.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** ... right? Obviously. And actually, the amount of disruption it caused internally was actually relatively small, but all the metrics went the right way. And it goes back to the very first point you talked about, this blue ocean thing. It's like, ***it's not about necessarily what you create, sometimes it's about what you do, and what that creates.***

**Andy Murray:** That's right. Well said.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** And I think it's a beautiful story which in our current sort of way of operating, our left brain way of operating, as it were, to do something which is hugely risky in our current paradigm, but then offers fantastic results.

There's another example, if I may, quickly, that I'll tell you another example. There's a guy that runs a standup paddleboard company, and I forget his name, down in ... I think it's San Diego, called Tower Paddle Boards. And he was concerned about employee wellbeing and how we get caught up in this idea that more hours is better. And so he said, "I want to make sure that people aren't spending extended hours in the office, and so what I'm going to do is I want us to now work only five hours a day. So I'm going to take out all the fat, what I think is fat in our working day, and we're going to come in at 8:00. We're not really going to have any breaks or any lunch breaks or anything, and we're just going to smash it through until 1:00."

Now, he was fully expecting that the business was going to take a hit in terms of top line growth and things. But what actually happened is the opposite was true, because he applied constraints to the way that people worked. It forced them to think creatively about how they did their work and what they delivered. And because it also forced them to communicate to their customers about what they were doing and why they were doing it.

So, the shop was open only five hours a day. The warehouse was only open five hours a day. The office only opened five hours a day. The website was open 24/7, but it was like people were only around the five hours to actually do stuff. So, the business grew, customers responded to it really well because they understood why they were doing it, and they thought that was great. Now, I think for me, the point is, is that you can do some of this stuff, and it can feel counterintuitive, but it can drive some really, really creative and very, very innovative results.

**Andy Murray:** And you need those constraints. You need those constraints. I can tell you, in marketing, it's not uncommon to have a much larger female associate pool than male. And the most productive, creative workers for me, almost always, were single-parent moms, working mothers, because their value of time and the perspective of time was so important and precious that you really were careful about how you spent it, and made it work in the constraints, through creativity, because you didn't want to be working late at night and everything else, because the demands on them are so huge, as people.

And so for others that had a low appreciation of the value of time, maybe because they had so much more time available, there was so much wasted. And so, I think that idea of constraints -- I love that idea of saying, "Okay, it's five hours a day. That's all we're going to work." You think about that five hours so much more intentionally and productively than you would if you said you had eight, and then you don't think about it at all. That's brilliant.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** And if it's eight, and that's the normal, but you go, "Well, I can stay for longer, because if I don't get it all done." But he's going, "No, it's five. In at 8:00, out at 1:00."

**Andy Murray:** Done.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** "I'm going to kick everybody out."

**Andy Murray:** Yeah, love that.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** And I think it's Stephan Aarstol, is his name.

**Andy Murray:** Good. We'll look it up. We'll look it up.

Well, Adrian, this has been fantastic and stimulating conversation. Is there anything else that you want to talk about? We didn't get to talk much about your book. What is the most provocative thing in your book that you think is the most provocative?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** I am going to say, the most provocative thing in the book, forgive me, I'm just going to try and find it, is this bit. And it's got a back page, and it's designed like a postcard. And what it is, it's a letter to CEOs around sorting their team out.

**Andy Murray:** This is a letter to a CEO?

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah, so it's from somebody that basically did it for a piece of fun. It was basically a piece of research that came out of London Business School, and it said that, "Senior executives that they spoke to said that nearly 60% reported regular conflict and infighting amongst the senior team." And I just basically wrote this letter that says, "Well, if your people see this, then they think it's okay, right?" And so the bit at the bottom is, "Please sort it out." And they invited people to sign it and then address it and send it to them. Now, nobody's actually said that they've ripped it out and sent it to their CEO, because they're probably going to get fired.

**Andy Murray:** I love it. Yeah, it took me a while to get what you were talking about, yeah, but you basically wrote a form letter that anybody could rip out and send-

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Sign it and send it.

**Andy Murray:** ... that tells the CEO to sort it out.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** I mean, and so, the book is there to be ... I always say it's the idea of being punk, it's an attitude and a mindset. It's not a method. That's up to you. I'm trying to show people, by being slightly provocative and being a bit more matter-of-fact about it, that, you know what? This is important. This work matters to both customers and also to employees. And so, if you care about it, then roll up your sleeves and jump in, because people are waiting for you to show up.

**Andy Murray:** Oh, that's great. We only get one trip around this big, blue marble. And so you might as well make it count and do something meaningful.

Well, thank you, Adrian, for everything you're doing to make the world a better place and encourage people to take on bigger challenges. It's the right thing to be doing. I hope people do read your book or follow your podcast. Your podcast is great.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Thank you.

**Andy Murray:** And so, it's one of my shortlist of podcasts to listen to, because you cover a lot of ground, and you're not afraid to be a bit provocative.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** You're going to love the next one that's coming up, by the way. I don't know when this is going to go out, but look out for the one, it's going to be entitled How Racist is Your AI? And that was the subject line of the email that got sent to me, and I was like, "What?"

**Andy Murray:** Okay, you're definitely wading into it. Good for you.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** So, I was a bit like, "Oh, that's super cool." And so, yeah, I got a chance to speak to some people about that, and they've got a fascinating take on some of that sort of stuff. And I thought it was super interesting and important. And it was a bit like when I saw that in the email subject line, where somebody pitched the idea to me, I'm like, "I'm all over that."

**Andy Murray:** Well, that worked. They're a very good email marketer. Well done.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Yeah. No, brilliant.

**Andy Murray:** It was brilliant. Well, thanks, again. I really appreciate it.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** It's absolutely my pleasure, Andy, and maybe we'll get to have a game of tennis at some point. And, well, I don't play tennis, so I'll be crap, but it's fine, because we can wave some rackets around.

**Andy Murray:** That would be your second disappointment, would be actually playing me in tennis.

**Ben Ortlip:** You could have told people that you beat Andy Murray in tennis.

**Adrian Swinscoe:** Oh, no.

**Andy Murray:** That's a story worth telling.