

I wanted to share my summary of the insights I gathered from leaders in retail last week while being the chairperson for the event. When discussing topics like leadership, culture, and technology it became clear that the overall theme is the challenge of having 4+ generations as potential customers. Attention span dropping to seconds with a need for instant gratification. Not an easy challenge primarily as the internal workforce also exists out of different generations. All these generations have different values, beliefs and ideas.

What does it require from a leader to manage and balance these values, beliefs and ideas, and create a solid strategy? Here it becomes interesting, as leaders in the industry do amazing things today. Think about contactless payments, interactive mirrors, RFID tracking, self check-outs, etc. However, despite these great solutions, all this innovation comes often from a somewhat protected playground, meaning its origin and purpose fit within the current way of working of the company. It's about optimization, growth and driving revenue, versus the potential of revolutionary or groundbreaking change.

This is where newcomers or/and startups come in and challenge these leaders in the industry, with fresh ideas and approaches that are not supposed to work. They often pull these off because they are built organically to support this way of working versus the established company that has to foster change to get there.

It is here where the opportunity is. Established management or business strategies might not be working for your business anymore. Unrealistic or crazy ideas might be very practical and reasonable in the end. We need to think like a startup, one that might be part of a more prominent organization but ignoring the potential obstacles of the organization itself versus the possible solution. This is also where the differences but especially the insights of the generations can be a benefit.

Why not? - is probably the most persuasive reasoning to get there, why not? For many an annoying question as we tend to avoid it by indicating upfront what we cannot do before looking at new options. To explain 'why not' is extremely hard, especially if the idea is new or never tested. All unicorn businesses got where they are today because of different designs or approaches, believing it would work.

Coming back to the 'why not', if we embrace this, it means these are exciting times as we step into challenges we have not faced before or seek solutions that do not yet exist. It means we cannot fail; we can only try.

As a leader, you should optimize the strength of your team, and in this case, the power lies in the differences, the uncertainty and the ability to seek out solutions in an efficient and fast paced manner. Embed the 'why not' in your way of working and address challenges starting from the possibilities versus looking at the restrictions.

Thinking about steps never got anybody anywhere; it is by taking a step that you can enable change. Then evaluate the value of each step to drive growth. Good luck and enjoy this challenge!

by Sebastiaan Passtoors - 2019