IDEAS PEOPLE PLACES STRONGER COMMUNITIES ISSUE 1 | OCTOBER 2026

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THE BRIEF

WORTH YOUR TIME.

Ideas From Real Conversations On Our Podcasts.



A more thoughtful, connected, human America.

IDEAS FROM REAL CONVERSATIONS ON OUR PODCASTS.

"A community listens, and great things happen."

A NOTE FROM CHARLES

Your time is the most valuable thing you own.

You can make more money. You can acquire more things. But none of us gets to manufacture another hour. And in an attention economy designed to make us click, scroll and keep moving, I think respecting someone's time has become an obligation.

That's the idea behind The Brief.

In the conversations I listened to recently, I found myself thinking about some surprisingly connected ideas: that uncertainty doesn't necessarily have to frighten us; that belonging may be as important as preparation when someone is starting over; that trust is becoming a form of civic infrastructure; that opportunity depends not only on talent, but on access; and that asking for help can sometimes be an act of courage rather than weakness.

Those ideas came from very different people having very different conversations. Put them next to one another, though, and something interesting happens. They make us think differently about leadership, community and the places we call home.

That's what we hope to do here.

We won't try to tell you everything. We'll try to find a few things genuinely worth your time.

Charles Parisi
CEO, Cloudcast Media

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THE BIG IDEA

THE WORLD ISN'T GETTING MORE UNCERTAIN. IT'S GETTING FASTER.

For decades, organizations optimized for efficiency. Gary Lynch argues that an unpredictable world requires something different: optionality.

We talk about uncertainty as though someone recently invented it. Wars. Technology. Political upheaval. Artificial intelligence. Supply-chain shocks. Markets that change before the strategic plan gets through committee.

It certainly feels as though the world has become less predictable. Gary Lynch offers a more interesting possibility. Perhaps uncertainty hasn't fundamentally changed at all. Maybe what has changed is its velocity.

Lynch, whose work examines how organizations can turn uncertainty into competitive advantage, defines true uncertainty as the complete unknown - the point at which we simply don't have enough information to assign reliable probabilities to possible outcomes. Risk is different. Risk can be modeled. Managed. Priced. Uncertainty can't.

According to Lynch, the problem confronting modern organizations is not merely that uncertainty exists. It is arriving faster, from more directions, with multiple disruptions occurring simultaneously.

That matters because much of modern management has been built around a very different objective: efficiency. Remove redundancy. Consolidate suppliers. Lower inventory. Eliminate waste. Optimize the system. That works beautifully when the world behaves. When it doesn't, efficiency can become fragility.

Lynch's alternative is optionality - designing organizations so they retain choices when circumstances change. In supply chains, that might mean understanding not only whether a direct supplier can fail, but what could happen two or three levels upstream. It means asking where the next failure could come from before it arrives.

But this isn't really a supply-chain lesson. It's a leadership lesson. When disruption occurs, effective leaders ask more than How does this affect us? They ask: Who else is affected? What has changed for our customers? What has changed for our competitors? Has this disruption created an opportunity that didn't exist yesterday?

Lynch reduces the leadership challenge to something remarkably simple: See sooner. Understand sooner. Decide sooner. Act sooner.

Perhaps that's the larger lesson. We spend enormous energy trying to make an uncertain world predictable. Maybe the competitive advantage belongs instead to people and organizations that accept that it isn't - and prepare themselves to move anyway.

WORTH REMEMBERING

Efficiency is powerful when the world is predictable. Optionality matters when it isn't.

From a conversation with Gary Lynch on Vitals.

SERVICE & COUNTRY

WE TRAIN PEOPLE TO ENTER THE MILITARY. WHY DON'T WE TRAIN THEM TO LEAVE IT?

Dr. Abby Kinch asks a deceptively simple question about military transition - and exposes a much larger one about how society prepares people to start over.

Think about what happens when someone enters the United States military. There is structure. Training. Culture. Physical preparation. Social preparation. A deliberate process designed to transform a civilian into a service member.

Now consider the other end. Dr. Abby Kinch, Vice President of Research at Student Veterans of America and an Air Force veteran herself, describes military transition out as far more piecemeal.

And then she asks the question that changes the conversation: What if the transition out of military life were commensurate with the transition into it?

Imagine treating departure not as an administrative event, but as another major life transformation requiring preparation. A service member could begin with a clearer understanding of where to live, what to study, which career to pursue and how to continue serving in a different capacity.

Because the challenge isn't simply finding a job. For many veterans, Kinch says, the immediate questions are more elemental: housing, food, childcare, transportation and financial stability.

That produces a particularly troubling reversal. Education is traditionally supposed to help create financial stability. Kinch's research is finding that some veterans first have to become financially stable enough to pursue the education that is supposed to make them financially stable.

A newly separated veteran with a family may need an immediate job simply to put food on the table and keep a roof overhead. The interval between military service and education grows. The credential or degree that could lead to a more meaningful career gets pushed farther away. The transition stalls.

But Kinch's conversation reveals something else that is easier to overlook. People don't transition through systems alone. They transition through people.

Leaving military service means losing more than a uniform or job description. It can mean losing a structure, a shared language and a ready-made community. So perhaps a successful transition needs two plans: one for what you're going to do, and another for who you're going

to do life with when you get there.

WORTH THINKING ABOUT

We invest enormous effort preparing people for important beginnings. Perhaps we should become equally intentional about important endings.

From a conversation with Dr. Abby Kinch on Rally Point Actual.

THE CIVIC LIFE

TRUST MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT INFRASTRUCTURE A CITY CAN BUILD.

Roads connect places. Trust connects people. Our communities have reason to worry about the condition of the latter.

When we talk about infrastructure, we usually mean things we can see. Roads. Bridges. Water systems. Buildings.

But communities depend on another infrastructure that is nearly invisible until it begins to fail. Trust.

In a conversation about civic life in San Diego, one number lands particularly hard: only 34 percent of San Diegans surveyed said most people can be trusted, placing the region in the bottom half of cities nationally according to the research discussed in the conversation.

Another statistic is equally sobering: 61 percent of elected officials in a referenced survey reported experiencing threats or harassment. Those numbers describe more than political polarization. They describe the deterioration of the space in which people solve problems together.

A community can have extraordinary universities, nonprofits, businesses, philanthropists and public agencies. But if those institutions - and the people inside them - stop trusting one another enough to sit in the same room, the collective capacity of the community shrinks.

One observation from the conversation deserves to become a civic mantra: we don't have time to be uncomfortable with difficult conversations.

The point isn't that disagreement disappears. It shouldn't. The point is learning to remain in the room when disagreement arrives. Listen. Ask another question. Try to understand how someone came to a conclusion you don't share.

Trust, in other words, isn't soft. It is productive capacity. It allows information to travel. It allows resources to be shared. It allows people to ask for help without first negotiating institutional territory. And it allows a community to attempt things that no single organization can accomplish alone.

Perhaps we should begin thinking about civic trust the way we think about roads. We notice when roads deteriorate because eventually traffic stops moving. When trust deteriorates, people stop moving toward one another.

THE QUESTION

What would change in your community if the first goal of a difficult conversation wasn't agreement - but understanding?

From conversations recorded at One San Diego for Live Local, Give Local.

THE LOCAL

ARTS AND CULTURE AREN'T EXTRAS. THEY'RE INFRASTRUCTURE.

What if a community's creative life isn't decoration added after the important work is finished - but part of what makes a place work?

When budgets tighten, language reveals priorities. Some things are called essential. Other things become extras. Arts and culture frequently find themselves in the second category.

But listen to the way Vanguard Culture founder Susanna Peredo Swap describes San Diego's creative community during COVID and another picture emerges.

A museum had a building it couldn't fully use. A dance company needed space. A filmmaker could capture the work. Someone had a projector. Someone else had volunteers. Someone had a red carpet. Separate resources became shared infrastructure. And suddenly, as she put it, more was possible.

For more than a decade, Vanguard Culture has brought leaders from film, theater, fashion, dance, visual arts and music together, encouraging people who might otherwise remain in separate creative silos to collaborate and share resources.

That model raises a larger question about what communities choose to value. We readily understand the economic importance of convention centers, hotels, transportation and sports venues. But what makes someone want to visit a place? What makes someone want to stay? What gives a community texture, identity and memory?

Very often, it is culture. A performance. A gallery. Music. Architecture. Food. A neighborhood. A story that could only have happened there.

The deeper argument is human. Arts and culture are described as the connective tissue flowing through the ethos of a city - as much a form of infrastructure, in their own way, as the physical systems we instinctively recognize as essential.

Maybe the mistake is asking whether a community can afford culture. A better question may be: What kind of community are we building if culture is something we believe we can do without?

WORTH REMEMBERING

> *Maybe the real question isn't whether we can afford culture - but what kind of community we're building without it.*

From Live Local, Give Local with Kimberly King.

ACCESS

SOMETIMES THE GAP ISN'T TALENT. IT'S ACCESS.

Opportunity is rarely distributed evenly. Neither are the relationships and information that help people recognize it.

We tend to think of society's gaps as things we can measure. The literacy gap. The wealth gap. The education gap. The health gap.

The Gap Minders deliberately expands the list to include food, housing, hope and opportunity - and starts from the belief that large outcomes can begin with small steps.

But a conversation between host Jose Cruz and CONNECT's Trey Brickett suggests another gap that is harder to quantify. Access.

Brickett makes an interesting distinction in describing his role as Chief Brand and Engagement Officer. Brand may involve marketing. Engagement means building community. It means considering the experience from different seats in the room and asking whether what you're creating actually feels meaningful to the people you're trying to reach.

That distinction matters because communities don't become inclusive simply by announcing that everyone is welcome. People have to find the door. They have to understand what happens behind it. They have to feel comfortable walking through. And once inside, they need relationships that allow them to participate.

This is particularly important in an innovation economy. We celebrate entrepreneurs, scientists, founders and breakthrough ideas. But behind many successful people is an invisible architecture of access.

Someone made an introduction. Someone explained how the system worked. Someone invited them into a room. Someone answered a question they didn't know whom to ask. Someone helped them understand that they belonged.

Another person, with every bit as much talent, may never receive that invitation.

Perhaps closing an opportunity gap can sometimes begin surprisingly simply. Invite someone in. Make the introduction. Share what you know. Explain how the room works. Then make sure the person who just entered has a reason to stay.

Because talent may be everywhere. Access isn't.

WORTH THINKING ABOUT

Because talent may be everywhere. Access isn't.

From The Gap Minders with Jose Cruz and Trey Brickett of CONNECT.

WORK & PURPOSE

THE COURAGE TO SAY YES TO HELP.

One accomplished leader's story suggests that strength isn't always demonstrated by doing more yourself.

Dr. Wendy Broughton runs operations for a large behavioral-health organization. But one of the most instructive leadership moments in her conversation has nothing to do with an operating plan.

It begins years earlier, when her own life wasn't working. A friend named Tom Herman intervened. He offered to arrange treatment. He would take care of the details. Broughton had one job. Say yes. She did.

Looking back, she describes the hardest part with striking simplicity: accepting help is humbling. We all need it, but asking for it, accepting it and then taking action requires something from us.

It's tempting to categorize that as a recovery story. It is. But it's also a leadership story.

We have constructed an image of leadership around certainty and self-sufficiency. Leaders know. Leaders decide. Leaders solve. But mature leadership may require the opposite capacities too: to acknowledge uncertainty, to accept guidance, to admit that another person can see something we can't, and occasionally to let someone help carry us.

Broughton offers another idea that belongs on a Post-it note above a desk: Bring what's missing.

See something that bothers you? You can complain about it. Or you can ask what is absent - and bring it yourself. Her advice is grounded in service: look at where your feet are planted. If you are in a position to do some good right now, do it.

Those two ideas belong together. Accept what's missing in you. Bring what's missing around you.

One requires humility. The other requires agency. Maybe leadership requires both.

WORTH REMEMBERING

Accept what's missing in you. Bring what's missing around you.

From a SheEO conversation with Dr. Wendy Broughton of TURN Behavioral Health Services.

THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE

THE BEST EDUCATION MAY CHANGE WHAT YOU CAN'T UNSEE.

Kevin Petti doesn't merely teach anatomy. He uses Italy to make students cross boundaries between science, history, art and interpretation.

There is a moment in Kevin Petti's teaching when a student looks at Michelangelo's Creation of Adam and can no longer see it the same way.

Petti has introduced an anatomical interpretation of the work. The student is almost irritated. Now, she tells him, she can't unsee it. Mission accomplished.

Petti's educational work through Anatomia Italiana brings anatomy into conversation with Renaissance art, Italian history and place. But the deeper idea isn't about Michelangelo. It's about how we learn.

Modern education is remarkably good at creating categories. Science over here. Humanities over there. Art somewhere else. Petti deliberately disrupts those boundaries.

He asks students to look at evidence that may be incomplete. To make inferences. To consider interpretation. To become uncomfortable with the possibility that there may not be one clean answer.

And he believes that discomfort matters. Exposure to humanities, science and art together, he argues, can teach students to think differently when they eventually enter their professions.

That may be increasingly valuable in a world obsessed with answers. Search engines give answers. AI gives answers. Experts give answers. But education at its best may do something more enduring. It teaches us how to behave when the answer isn't obvious.

There is something worth preserving in curiosity without an immediate commercial purpose. Learning because the connection between two ideas is irresistible. Travel not simply to see something, but to understand it differently.

Perhaps that's a useful definition of learning: you know it worked when you can't unsee what you've discovered.

WORTH THINKING ABOUT

> *You know it worked when you can't unsee what you've discovered.*

From a Spotlight on the Community conversation with Kevin Petti of Anatomia Italiana.

A LIFE WELL LIVED

MASTERY ISN'T ALWAYS ABOUT FINDING SOMETHING NEW.

Cheryl Morrow offers a counterargument to a culture obsessed with reinvention: sometimes growth means going deeper.

We are constantly told to pivot. Reinvent yourself. Find your next thing. Start over.

Dr. Willie Morrow's life suggests another path. Go deeper.

His daughter Cheryl Morrow describes Grandmaster, a project inspired by her father's life and work, as a “360 degree elevation” of the subject he began with.

The important part is what she says next. Not away from it. Not abandoning one field to find another. The same subject. The same art. The same science. A new level and dimension of the thing you already love.

That is a quietly radical idea in an era of perpetual novelty.

We tend to celebrate beginnings. The new company. The new career. The new technology. The new identity. But mastery belongs to a different clock.

It rewards repetition. Attention. Depth. The willingness to remain with a subject long after its novelty has disappeared.

Earlier in the conversation, Morrow reflects on the idea of being the author of one's own life - of having, metaphorically, one pen and one piece of paper with which to make your way.

Taken together, the ideas form an interesting philosophy. Own the page. Choose deliberately. Then stay with something long enough to discover dimensions of it that a beginner cannot see.

Maybe a life well lived doesn't require a constant succession of new selves. Sometimes the next version of you is waiting deeper inside the work you've already chosen.

THE QUESTION

What might you discover if you stayed with one thing a little longer?

From a Spotlight on the Community conversation with Cheryl Morrow about Dr. Willie Morrow and Grandmaster.

WORTH HEARING

THREE IDEAS WE COULDN'T LEAVE BEHIND.

Small ideas can have long afterlives.

STORIES ARE LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE, TOO.

Some of the most interesting stories aren't happening nationally. They're happening around the corner, inside organizations and neighborhoods we pass every day. Listening locally isn't provincial. It's a way of noticing the extraordinary things familiarity teaches us to overlook.

COMMUNITY ISN'T A SIDE BENEFIT.

Dr. Abby Kinch wishes she had found Student Veterans of America earlier. Not simply because of its programs, but because earlier exposure to its people and opportunities could have changed decisions she made about school and accelerated her ability to realize her potential. Sometimes the resource people need most is other people.

BIG OUTCOMES CAN START SMALL.

The Gap Minders calls its listeners “gaptivists” - people willing to help close the gaps around them. The premise isn't that everyone must solve housing, literacy, health or wealth inequality. It's that large outcomes can begin with small steps.

ONE LAST THOUGHT

Ideas become more interesting when they escape the categories in which we found them.

Uncertainty. Belonging. Trust. Access. Curiosity. Humility. Mastery.

There is a thread running through this issue. At first, these conversations didn't appear to belong together. Maybe that's the point.

A lesson about military transition can teach us something about belonging. A supply-chain strategist can teach us something about living with uncertainty. An arts leader can change the way we define infrastructure. A recovery story can become a lesson in leadership. An anatomy professor can remind us what curiosity feels like. And a conversation about closing gaps can make us wonder whose talent we haven't discovered simply because nobody opened the door.

That's why we listen.

Not because we need more content.

Because occasionally another person's idea changes the way we see our own world.

And that is worth our time.

WORTH CARRYING WITH YOU

More thoughtful, connected, human communities begin with ideas worth carrying with us.

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