

Episode 326: Why Smart Leaders Embrace Disruption with Terence Mauri

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00:00

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

It is common knowledge that we are living in a time of massive disruption. With the expanded global talent pool and artificial intelligence and machine learning, the list just goes on and on. But while we're busy trying to navigate all these changes, it's also important to pause and wonder, should we be seeking to disrupt ourselves even more? Well, today's guest says yes. It is time to capture the upside of disruption. Today's guest is Terence Mauri. Terence is a global expert on the future of leadership, AI and disruption. As founder of the future trends Think Tank Hack Futurelabs, helps leaders find the upside of disruption and rethink leadership for a post AI world. He has been described as an influential and outspoken expert on the future of leadership. End quote. By thinkers 50, the global authority on today's top business thinkers.

00:51

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

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01:25

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Are you a manager, boss or team leader who aspires to level up and unleash your team's full potential? You're listening to The Modern Manager podcast, and I'm your host, Mamie Kanfer Stewart. Each week I explore effective strategies and provide actionable insights that supercharge your management abilities, optimize team performance, and foster a healthy workplace culture. Become a rockstar manager and help your team thrive at themodernmanager.com/more.

01:50

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Thank you so much for joining me today, Terence. It's really a pleasure to have you. I'm super excited to talk about disruption and the title of your book, Upside of disruption. Right? We think about disruption as being like, so scary and kind of forget about the fact that it can lead to really awesome new things. So welcome and I'm looking forward to our conversation.

02:10

Terence Mauri

Thank you so much, Mamie. It's a pleasure to join you today.

02:13

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Why does disruption have this bad rap? And kind of what's the framing and what does it mean to have the upside of disruption?

02:21

Terence Mauri

It's such an important question and in terms of framing, I think everything's being disrupted right now, even job titles. I recently came across director of disruption. She confessed to me she was as popular as a funeral director, innovation Sherpa. But my personal favourite is head of uncertainty in scenarios. Imagine the expectation every time turning up to the office as head of uncertainty. But the point is, we're all heads of uncertainty. And when we think of this word disruption, often we think of negative words, negative outcomes, too much risk taking, for example, we think of defeat. For me, disruption is source code for re imagination, curiosity to learn, courage to unlearn, clarity, to focus, the opportunity to say yes to new possibilities and new adventures. And on the other side of disruption is learning and growth and renewal.

02:50

Terence Mauri

So I'm on a mission to really find the upside in disruption and debunk this myth that disruption just has negative connotations.

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Mamie Kanfer Stewart

We look at disruption as being bad, but only in the sense that it's bad for the way that we currently are. And if we think about the future as being something better than what we are now, we need to change

and evolve. And so those moments of disruption, or the kind of ongoing disruption that we experience, that's actually part of getting to a new, creative, better, brighter possible future, but only if we know how to get to the other side, right? If we hold on to the past, as you say, that's when disruption is bad, because we haven't evolved and grown with it.

04:08

Terence Mauri

I love that in Japan there's a word called henka. It means embracing perpetual evolution. It's a bit like nature. Caterpillar to a butterfly, it's lead to gold, it's oil to water, Henker. It's really a spirit of renewal and reinvention. And we're all under pressure. We're under pressure to execute for today, perform for today, while reimagining and transforming for tomorrow. And so I agree with you. This disruption, it's time to sort of repackage disruption as a catalyst for resiliency, pro resilience, agility, adaptability, flexibility. And look, here's the point. This is the slowest it will ever be. AI is the slowest it will ever be. Now, depending on your personality type, that's either exciting or terrifying, but I think we all need to. It's an opportunity now. I think this is a great reframing moment to reframe disruption as a tailwind for strategic courage, laser like focus and renewal.

05:15

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

I want to pick up on something you just said, which is that we have to be managing for today and kind of planning for the future or kind of working for the future. Can you say a little bit more about what that means?

05:26

Terence Mauri

Well, now, what I mean by that is quarterly earnings targets, day to day meetings, emails. We're all kind of now is wear this, now is hat. We're leading and managing in the moment. There is a downside to that because what it means is we're spending 90% of our energy, our cognitive bandwidth, our focus on the now at the expense of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. It's really important for folks that are listening and watching our interview today to look at where their attention is going. The Nobel laureate Herbert Simon said, too much information leads to a poverty of attention and we're drowning in too many meetings, too many emails. Even bureaucratic misery is at record levels. For example, at city hall in San Francisco. It takes an average of 252 days to organize a first interview. The US tax code has gone from 400,000 words to 4 million words. And a recent poll by Hatfuture Lab, which I lead, showed that one in three meetings is considered a complete waste of time, costing over \$60 trillion a year in lost productivity, lost engagement and lost innovation. So this is a great example of what we should be disrupting, ways of working, ways of thinking that have gone off like yogurt in the fridge.

06:53

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Well, what you just said, too, is we can be disrupting ourselves, which is not how most people think about disruption. Right? Disruption is coming from the outside. It's from our competitors, it's from the economy, or it's from policies, it's from AI. But what I just heard you say is all of these ways of working that we currently have are not necessarily the best ways of working, and we need to be disrupting them proactively so that we can get to better ways of working. Am I reading this right?

07:20

Terence Mauri

Maybe this is spot on. So, rather than let disruption be enforced on you by new trend lines, new inflection points, changes in the market, unlocking your inner disruption muscle is a great way of taking control of your destiny. Look, we talk a lot about uncertainty and the unknown, but also, what are we certain about? So, counterintuitively, part of disruption is saying, what am I certain about? Because you can form strategies, personal strategies, around what I'm certain about. For example, I'm certain that if I adopt a kind of beginner's mindset of open curiosity, I'm going to be a learner and that's going to create resiliency and new opportunities. I'm certain that if I grow my networks and my social capital, that's going to be a great foundation for fresh perspectives.

07:41

Terence Mauri

I'm certain that if I iterate with AI, I'm not going to fear it anymore, because I'm going to have a point of view and I'm going to have a sense of how to use these types of technologies. Part of this disruption narrative is being clear about what you're certain about. And then another part of the disruption narrative is adopting this iterative attitude. So we need to move from preservers of the status quo to challenges of the status quo, from checking to coaching, for example, from infrequent evaluation to continuous growth engines, from spreadsheets that are soul sucking to self service analytics, from a wait and see attitude to a challenge and grow one. And so when we start to frame disruption in this way, I think it's exciting, it's galvanizing, it's a call to action and a call to mobilization.

09:12

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Yes. I love this. Do you have any stories you can share from your own life or from your clients or people who have embraced this mindset and how it's played out for them?

09:22

Terence Mauri

There's some great inspirational stories out there around the world, from non for profits right through to the magnificent seven, the big tech companies. But I want to start with a non for profit, because I think a non for profit is a great story in terms of every organization is facing headwinds, constraints, budget constraints, talent scarcity, industry convergence, AI, everywhere that presents risk and opportunity. And so for the non for profit that I've been partnering with for the last two years, one of their big challenges was adding complexity to complexity. An important question to think about and ask ourselves is, am I a complexifier or a simplifier? If most of us are honest with ourselves, we're complexifiers. And if most organizations are honest with themselves, they're complexifiers. And the data tells the story, the average complexity score. So I call this the bureaucratic misery indicator.

09:48

Terence Mauri

That means excess complexity, excess bureaucracy, excess processes, best practices that have become broken practices. The average BMI score for many organisations is just too high. It's over 76%. And when we have high bureaucratic misery and complexity, it becomes a tax on agility, a tax on innovation, a tax on doing intelligent work rather than bureaucratic work. So if we go back to the non for profit, as part of their disruption mandate, they decided to go Marie Kondo. And what I mean by that is introducing a Marie Kondo quarter, where once a quarter, they identify the biggest sources of bureaucracy. Excess bureaucracy. So too many meetings, perhaps a process that's broken, perhaps a protocol that should be automated, but we're still doing it in a manual way, which is taking up too much bandwidth.

10:49

Terence Mauri

And so by creating this kind of company wide Marie Kondo spirit of fighting complexity with simplicity, what they've been able to do is remove a lot of this excess complexity, actually by eliminating it, simplifying it, automating it and getting rid of it. The takeaway here from this story is, don't underestimate that elimination is one of the finest forms of disruption. We're great at adding complexity to complexity. So the bias in leaders and managers across every organization, big or small, is that we're lousy at subtraction. We have a bias against letting go. And so part of this disruption narrative is asking yourself, in my home life, in my personal life, in my professional life. What do I need to say goodbye to that's holding me back?

12:23

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

I love this. And I'm thinking about a client that I worked with that took a similar kind of approach where they decided to get rid of their weekly team meetings because they didn't seem to really be serving anyone and they were a huge waste of time for the entire team meeting for an hour every single week, not good practice. So they decided to get rid of them until there was a moment where they missed them, where they felt like, oh, now we know what's lacking, and now we're going to bring back this

meeting, but we're going to do it in a way that is serving this need that we have discovered that we have. And it was fascinating. It took them like multiple weeks before anybody felt like, oh, we actually need this meeting back.

12:27

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

And the interesting thing was what they wanted out of it was just a chance to all be together. It was the only time as a team that they came together as a full group. Everything else was project oriented and kind of one ones and things like that. And they actually just wanted some time to be together as a group. And what they figured out was it didn't have to be every week, it could just be once a month, that would be plenty. And it didn't have to be like right in the middle of the workday. They actually decided to move it to the end of the day because it was a much more just relaxing time to kind of just check in with folks and kind of be together and have an interesting, fun conversation. And they started designing them around learning opportunities. So, like, each person would kind of share something that they were learning about and wanted to share it with the team as a source of conversation. And I just thought that was such a cool discovery that when you take the approach of elimination, something new and better can come out of it.

13:53

Terence Mauri

It's a key message, a headline message in the book. The upside of disruption is the reductionist mindset, having a reductionist DNA and this idea of simplification, doing a simplification month. So very practical example for everybody to take away today is question 01:00 a.m. I a simplifier or a complexifier?

Question two, do this as a team activity. So get everybody together in the room for your team, for example, to identify, to vote for some of the biggest barriers to doing our best work, our highest, most intelligent work, and then think about what can we do over the next month? Do we need to simplify it, eliminate it, reimagine it, automate it? Augment it. By doing that, you focus on ROI, not just return on investment. A new human metric, which is about human brilliance. I call it return on intelligence.

14:16

Terence Mauri

Imagine an organization where you've got everybody's return on intelligence, ROI at 100%, where everybody can come to work and say, hand on hard. I have highest returns of intelligence within my organization. I'm closer to value creation. I get to do intelligent work more than bureaucratic work. And we have a culture of curiosity, which embraces ideas that challenge the status quo, not a culture of compliance, which rejects ideas that challenge the status quo.

15:24

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

So let's talk about how do you build that? Because I can imagine that some folks will hear this and go, yes, and bring it to their team, and their team will be excited, and other folks will say, yes, and bring it to their team, and their team might say, yes, and then go, no, no. What do you mean, we're changing that process. What do you. Wait, that was not what I intended to hear. How do you work with your team, or people who maybe are a little more resistant to change, even when the current system is not serving them right, even when the processes are broken and there's too many meetings that are unproductive, and yet people are kind of stuck in their ways. What do you do with that?

16:02

Terence Mauri

At least half the global population are change resistant. Fear of change, conservative about change. And we underestimate that at our peril. I recently worked with one of the world's largest credit card companies. And as you can imagine, within the organization, there were a lot of analytical people who are naturally more risk averse. And there's a reason for that, and it's a good reason. However, what was happening in one particular part of the business, the finance department, was that they were drowning information, drowning in data, drowning in meetings. And this was manifesting itself in a couple of ways. For example, more people reported at risk of burnout. One in three meetings was considered not productive or effective, and personal engagement and productivity scores were going in the wrong direction.

16:20

Terence Mauri

So my point of the message is, I think, step one, we need to get on the same page in terms of the framing, the language, the trust. This is about we, not me, and a kind of respectability around how are we going to decide what we change and how we change it and why we change it. And if you can get everybody thinking and aligned and respecting that, a good place to start is what are the biggest pain points that are universal, that we can agree on, that are stopping us from doing high value work, intelligent work, agile work. So at the credit card company, they had a series of meetings, surveys, and they did a poll. It was a very sort of democratized activity.

17:07

Terence Mauri

That's important because when you democratize an initiative, you empower everybody and you go big on psychological capital, the safety to speak up, the safety to experiment, the safety to challenge. And so by democratizing the exercise and getting everybody to share their opinion of what the biggest pain points were, it automatically reduced resistance and fear of change. And then part two was again democratizing the solution. So, democratizing the pain points, getting everybody to listen and buy into that, and then giving everybody a platform to think about and democratize what the antidote might be,

what the solution might be, and then celebrating success. There's some research coming out of Hat Future lab, which shows that when we're together in person, we released three to four x more relational energy that makes us feel good in terms of endorphins, we release discovery muscle. So, an opportunity to discover new perspectives, new learnings, different insights. And we also reinforce cohesion, which is high execution certainty and high trust certainty. So this is an example, I think, of an organization with high analytical conservative to change, that was able to overcome those internal barriers to make sustainable change happen.

19:07

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Those two pieces you just mentioned around democratizing the problems and the solutions, I think I just want to reinforce that, because as you're saying, people are more comfortable with change when they feel like they're in control of it, even though none of us are really in control of change. But when we feel like it's our choice to disrupt ourselves, to change a process, to try something new, it feels so different than when someone is telling you we're changing that and you feel like you're at their whim. So just such an important lesson, even.

19:37

Terence Mauri

Saying the word change, if somebody wants to impose change, or we're going to change management or change initiatives, the eyes glaze over. And so this spirit of co creation, shared ownership, and there's too much fake empowerment in the world. I remember I had one boss. I won't say who it was, but he had a nickname, and most bosses do, by the way. We have the know it all, the perfectionist, the back stabber, the front stabber, the invisible boss. My boss's nickname was the shadow. And I'd be working away, and all of a sudden, when he would come in, the temperature of the room would drop, and I all of a sudden would hear this breathing in my ear, and he would whisper, what are you doing? And this is going back about 25 years, but he thought he was coaching. And a key lesson for me, even 25 years ago, for all of us to think about is most of us are over managed and under led.

20:37

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Will you just unpack that a little more for us?

20:41

Terence Mauri

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it still happens. This idea that actually when we're over managed, it means that we're preserving the status quo rather than challenging the status quo, which means that we're spending more time checking rather than having really great coaching conversations. It means that we're

spending more of our week on transactional interactions rather than transformational interactions. And it means that we're using power and coercion more than trust and care. And this is a big problem in the world because organizations face this paradox. They want to be faster, more agile, more nimble. They all use the right language. But when you go into those organizations, often they're still using 200 year old industrial mindsets. Mindsets for an industrial age, a 20th century age, not a post AI age, an age where it's about networks, it's about trust, it's about social capital. This is what it means. Over managed and under led.

21:48

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

That's such a great phrase. And it makes me wonder for folks who have to report up to someone else in their organization where you might not feel like you have the ability to change a process or the ability to just disrupt yourselves in certain ways. Any suggestions for how we can sell this upwards and talk to our leadership and convince them that, yeah, these processes that maybe they designed or maybe they rely on really aren't serving us so well anymore?

21:40

Terence Mauri

It's a brilliant framing. I mean, we have five different generations working in the office now. Generation Z, even generation alpha, the key word here is three letters, my m. And what I mean by my is managing your manager. And this is managing upwards. And we have to do this in an intelligent way, not in a kind of a reactive way. So it needs to be intelligent, it needs to be personalized, it needs to be sensitive, it needs to be trust based. So there's a couple of steps to think about here for everybody tuning in today. Step one is know your manager's style. For example, are they results focused or detail focused? Are they a people person? Are they more extrovert or introvert or ambivert a bit in the middle? Know their working style. Number two, respect and understand their context.

22:14

Terence Mauri

Context is king, context is queen. So what I mean by that is, you know, what's their operating context, their constraints, their pressures, their priorities, and what's on the top of their agenda, because if we're not in tune with that, we don't show empathy to that and understanding to that, and high levels of relatability to that. It's going to be very difficult to position our managing upwards, our idea, our question in the right way. It's like different radio frequencies. We need to get into the right radio frequency with our manager and their manager. So step one, step two, and then finally step three is choose the right environment, the right moment. Sometimes we overuse email. So it might be. Email might work, by the way. It depends on the individual, it depends on their persuasion style, their receptivity style.

23:31

Terence Mauri

So I think there are two or three steps to really think about here. It's a strategic approach. And the key point, the final point to take away is none of this can happen without high levels of trust. I define trust as the trust leap into the unknown. It's where every action and relationship happens. And so creating those high trust moments, the more of those you create with your manager, the greater the chance that they'll listen. And of course, listening as well is listening, questioning, trust. These are all the building blocks, I think, that can help you manage upwards.

24:45

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Oh, yeah, I can see how. If your boss doesn't trust you, they're never going to let you break a process and create a new one, right? They're never going to let you just stop having certain meetings or stop showing up to meetings. But if they trust you and you understand how to message the changes that you want to make to serve their needs, in addition to your needs and your team's needs, and the customer's needs, or whomever's needs, I can see how that can be very persuasive and make.

25:11

Terence Mauri

It low risk, make it a low risk commitment. So what I mean by that is, if you say, look, I want to change this process, their resistance is going to go up straight away. Even if your idea, your solution, is much superior, a far better approach is to test the hypotheses. Say, look, I've got an idea. I'd love to run an experiment, get your buy in on some of the metrics that we can use. Zero cost, cheap, easy to run it alongside and then share the results. That's a far more persuasive approach. And don't fall in love with the idea, fall in love with the problem.

25:47

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

I think this is the perfect place for us to wrap up, then. So, Terence, tell us about a great manager that you worked for and what made this person such a fabulous boss.

25:54

Terence Mauri

This goes back many years I used to work in the advertising industry and I had an incredible boss, something. He's passed away now, but what made him this is before kind of management and leadership lexicon became so popular in the world. And, you know, if I think about some of his traits, one was he was a true role model. Even though he'd never studied management or leadership, he cared about the

person. He was fully present. We have to ask ourselves, how often are we fully present these days? We're distractible creatures and the technology doesn't help. Technology is very good. I mean, I'm a fan of technology, but also it has a downside, it has a dark side. Technology is very good at making the trivial seem urgent. And so for my manager, he was fully present. You felt truly cared for and listened for, and because of that, you wanted to work 100 times harder for him. You wanted to not let him down. What he did was he really was the embodiment. Human brilliance. Human brilliance. He was a mentor. He wore a coaching hat, a mentoring hat. And he was there to help me grow. And because of that, I had really incredible levels of loyalty. And of course, my engagement and productivity was so much higher as well. So in the end, it was the human side that made him an incredible manager. And I think that's my final takeaway, which is despite AI and automation and industry convergence and talent scarcity and chat GPT and all these different multiplying headwinds around us, the question we need to ask ourselves is, how do we elevate what makes us more human? And if we can achieve that with our teams and our organizations, we're going to be in a great place, a resilient place for the long term.

27:54

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

What a great manager, what a great lesson and insight. And where can people learn more about you? Tell us the name of your book and where people can find that.

28:01

Terence Mauri

My book is called [The Upside of Disruption: The Path to Leading and Thriving in the Unknown](#). The founder of Shazam has described it as breakthrough thinking to unlock huge potential. So I'm very grateful for that. And really as a kind of five second overview, it's a blueprint for helping all of us turn disruption into a platform for learning, growth and courage over comfort. People can reach out to me on LinkedIn. So [Terence Mauri on LinkedIn](#) or my website, terencemauri.com. It's been such a pleasure to have this discussion with you today. I've really enjoyed these talking points and I hope our audiences around the world take away those practical, actionable ideas that their future selves and their teams and their organizations will be grateful for.

28:49

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Thank you so much for sharing the insights and the wisdom that you've gained and spreading the word for how we can better managers and not just let get stuck in our old ways, but really be building that better future.

29:00

Terence Mauri
Thank you so much.

29:01

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Terence is providing members of Podcast+ with a discount on his book [The Upside of Disruption: The Path to Leading and Thriving in the Unknown](#). In this book, you'll find the future ready insights and tools you need to lead for today and I prepare your organization for tomorrow. To get this guest bonus and many more, and the extended interview with Terence where he shares more about the importance of learning how to unlearn become a member at themodernmanager.com/more. All the links are in the show notes and they can be delivered to your inbox when you subscribe to my newsletter. Find that at themodernmanager.com. Thanks again for listening. Until next time.