

How to be a thought leader... with integrity

It's been hard to avoid the word 'leadership' in recent months. From recent news of the Queen's death - a figure that has truly embodied the idea of 'leader' for many of us over the course of a lifetime, to the appointment of new PM, Rishi Sunak, and prior to that, the downfalls of Boris Johnson and Liz Truss.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Outside of the UK, Finnish PM Sanna Marin danced into the spotlight in a seemingly controversial display of humanity and was mired in scandal for videos shared online of her partying. Headlines asked "How much partying is too much for a leader?" but women across the world showed up online in support of her with the #dancewithSanna hashtag.

In the world of business, we've recently seen what bold leadership looks like, as the King of Purpose Yvon Chouinard put pen to paper and signed his \$3B brand Patagonia over to charity. He has quite literally put his money where his mouth is.

Taking a step back and absorbing all of this, offers us a lesson in leadership and communications - these public spectacles allow us to see how personal brand, leadership style, messaging and social cues play out through the media and online.

As the leader of a comms agency working with founders of fast-growth companies, we often act as the guardian of these individual's profiles, and one of our most common briefs is to support business leaders on their journey to be thought leaders.

We've all seen this being done well and we've all winced when we've seen it go wrong. In today's world, there's no space for thinly veiled attempts to self-promote, and Hypersocial's Braden Wallake felt the sharp end of this proverbial stick earlier in the month when he posted a selfie of himself crying and posted it on [LinkedIn](#).

The internet didn't like it - and it was, to use the technical term, just a bit 'gross' - self congratulatory, tone deaf and transparent as hell.

You only need to spend a few minutes on LinkedIn to witness how so-called vulnerability and "honesty" - what we like to call "constructed humanity" is a well worn tactic to secure likes and shares.

This authenticity rarely lives up to its promise, with damaging consequences in an online world defined by identity politics, trolling and rolling news.

So, as a leader, what can you do to share your vision and mission with integrity and crucially how do you share a point of view, in an authentic way, whilst still maintaining professionalism and credibility?

- What's your point of view? Find the white space - I'm yet to meet a founder who doesn't have an opinion, but forming this into a clear, succinct and valuable message for the world isn't simple. Try to find a 'red thread' or clear theme for what you care about and want to talk about then make it your own. It's incredibly noisy out there so try to solidify your thinking until it feels unique to you. This takes time. Stress test it. Imagine having a conversation with someone's granny, an editor on Radio 4, or a colleague - how would you engage with these people whilst staying on message?
- Build from the business - as Yvon Chouinard has proven time and time again, the way to build credibility as a thought leader is to start from the ground up. If you want to campaign or talk about gender equality

in business, you better be walking the walk when it comes to your own employment policies. The most powerful way to illustrate your point is by putting it into action in your own firm.

- Do what feels right for you - not everyone is an influencer - the cringe-factor often comes when someone isn't comfortable in their surroundings. Some leaders we work with feel the pressure to be "thought leader" but they don't really like doing it. There are lots of ways to cut this - so if consistently posting on LinkedIn is uncomfortable for you, then here's the secret - you don't have to do it. Choose a medium that works for you - if you're into long form writing, pitch in opinion articles or set up a blog, if you love talking, try to get onto panels or share your thoughts in video.
- Learn the tricks or get some help - if you want to raise your profile on LinkedIn, there's a science and an art to driving engagement. Pick up ideas from other people you follow, keep your posts short, easy to read and practically helpful. Keep it human, try including images or short video clips which help people engage with you.
- Be committed and patient - this stuff doesn't happen overnight and for many performance driven founders, the lack of clarity over ROI can be frustrating, but building a thought leadership platform, or profile takes time. Be consistent, set time aside each day or week to dedicate to writing, thinking, posting or reaching out to press.
- Know when your opinion isn't needed - there are some instances where you may feel like sharing your perspective, but where it simply isn't necessary. Ask yourself, am I adding to the conversation in a positive or impactful way? Does this further my personal or professional mission? If not, it may mean you can sit this one out.

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