

M-RCBG's virtual Business & Government seminar, "Brands on a Mission: How to Achieve Social Impact and Business Growth Through Purpose" with Myriam Sidibe was held on Thursday, September 10, 2020.

Scott Leland:

Hello, and welcome to the first webinar of the new school year, in our Thursday seminar series at the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at Harvard Kennedy School. My name is Scott Leland, I am the executive director of the center. Each Thursday this semester we will be bringing you speakers on social impact, regulatory design, big data, economic efficiency, climate change, and a host of other policy-related topics at the intersection of business and government. A quick word on logistics, we will be taking questions via the Q&A feature on Zoom, which most of you should see at the bottom of your screen.

Scott Leland:

The recording of this webinar and many others will be available on our YouTube channel. The link is at the bottom of The Center for Business and Government's homepage, at mrcbg.org. Our speaker today is Myriam Sidibe. To introduce Myriam, I'd like to turn the virtual podium over to Professor Leemore Dafny. Leemore Dafny is a professor of business administration at the Harvard Business School, where she teaches courses in healthcare strategy, and co-directs the PhD program in business economics. She is also on the faculty at the Harvard Kennedy School, and importantly for today's webinar she served for two years as Myriam Sidibe's faculty advisor while Myriam worked as a senior fellow at The Center for Business and Government, researching the topic that she'll be speaking about today.

Scott Leland:

Leemore Dafny, over to you.

Leemore Dafny:

Thank you very much, Scott. It's really a pleasure to be here today to introduce our fantastic speaker, a senior fellow, Dr. Myriam Sidibe. I'm amused at the description of my being faculty advisor, that is like touching base with somebody who has such a clear mission, so motivated to achieve an end goal, and to make change happen. She's really an inspiration rather than an advisee. But it really has been a pleasure to work with her. Among other things, some achievements of Dr. Sidibe include a doctorate from the London School of Hygiene, she's also ... We made such a long list here.

Leemore Dafny:

She's got a TED Talk that has been watched millions of times because she spearheaded a movement to establish Global Hand Washing Day by the UN, to inspire behavior change in hand washing for a billion people. And I hope we'll get a chance to hear more about that. Today's topic is one that Myriam feels passionately about, it's about using brands to achieve mass positive behavior change in public health. Dr. Sidibe has published a terrific article in the Harvard Business Review, and now a book. And this book is called Brands On A Mission, it's a pleasure to welcome her today for this talk, and look forward to entertaining questions after we hear the discussion of the book by the author herself.

Leemore Dafny:

Myriam, thank you.

Myriam Sidibe:

Thank you so much, Leemore. Thank you so much, Leemore. Thank you so much, Scott. Look, it's a real pleasure to be virtually back at the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government. I have spent absolutely two fantastic year, well supported, well guided in this transition from Unilever into academia, and trying to research what I think is very important in really changing the game. I'm very lucky, or fortunate I have to say, to say that my book is being published, a book which relates my two decades of work on hand washing with soap is being published in the midst of a pandemic, which where the only line of defense of actually hand washing with soap.

Myriam Sidibe:

And we have quite an inspirational cover, which is basically done by Helen Trevaskis, the book artist, but inspired from the Black Lives Matter movement. So, I feel like more than ever my purpose is coming to life and is actually being useful at the moment. So, I'm going to tell you a little bit why it matters for me, and what I've been thinking about over the last two years. And actually a summary of the last two decades of work. I have spent 20 years dreaming of ways to get people to wash their hands with soap. I mean, it's the most cost-effective public health intervention there is, and we've known this for a really long time.

Myriam Sidibe:

But it really took COVID-19 to get people to listen, or to give it importance. And hand washing with soap is the best line of defense against COVID-19. And it will remain so even after we discover a vaccine. Health and wellbeing is the foundation of social justice. The most rewarding business investment in every sense of the term. And I have spent years studying and working on brands with purpose, which have focus around health and wellbeing, and I've concluded what many have done before me. It pays to be good. And today, what I'm going to do is take things further and tell you how to make the good pay. Health and wellbeing ranges from promoting hand washing with soap, to general hygiene, Malaria prevention, better nutrition, safer sex, battling self esteem due to body confidence.

Myriam Sidibe:

But I would go further to say that racism too, is a public health issue. A disease that has to be treated and tackled with the same level of consuming energy. And if you look at the recent events of the U.S. they only make this more apparent. The deep roots of centuries of inequalities must be tackled, and I believe in pioneering new ways to address health and wellbeing, and I've experienced firsthand what commercial brands can do to address them. I call these brands that stand up, brands on a mission. And brands that do will come out of this well. Others will fall fast, and they'll fall far.

Myriam Sidibe:

In the past few weeks on the streets of America have taught us that it takes years of commitment and dedication to be a brand on a mission. Ben and Jerry's ice cream, and now you're going to laugh, why is she talking about Ben and Jerry, and ice cream here in health and wellbeing? But they can speak with confidence and authority on America's current reality, because since the civil rights movement, they have supported work towards racial equality on several fronts. Education, housing inequality, income inequality, and the criminal justice system. And this sensitivity is reflected on their board. They have supported work among indigenous Americans, too. Financially, and with legal aid protest, again to Dakota access pipeline, for example.

Myriam Sidibe:

They've worked with the LGBTQ community. In 1989, long before it was legally required, they extended health insurance, benefits to partner of the LGBTQ employees. They have credibility across the board. And that work has been rewarded. So, without making a long, elaborate statement on how the profits would be used, they launched a new ice cream flavor in the middle of the George Floyd protest, Justice Remixed. And the customers have welcomed it with open arms. I believe that brands need to get on a mission as the business imperative will be left behind.

Myriam Sidibe:

And in this talk, what I'm going to do is I'm going to show you how to distinguish real mission from mere purpose washing, or window dressing. And I'm going to show you how to do that. I think the mere fact that you're listening to me today means that you're already one of the believers, or at least you're curious about the purpose conversation. You're asking yourself, "Really? Is it possible to transform businesses from within?" And this is what this book talks about. The level of commitment required to drive this transformation. And what this book does is that it gives you concrete ways to translate ideals into tangible ways to be good.

Myriam Sidibe:

Obviously we have chosen to make that change through the power of business. And key to that is demonstrating that it pays to be good. In the two minutes since I've started this speech, 24 children under five have died. Largely or preventable diseases. And I think that's fundamentally wrong. But it's not just hygiene and sanitation. Malnutrition, including obesity, effects one in three people. Oral disease, such as cavities, are the biggest cause of school absenteeism and lower productivity. 37 million people are still living with HIV AIDS. 80% of girls express body dissatisfaction, which often leads to self esteem, low self esteem, depression, and substance abuse.

Myriam Sidibe:

Toxic masculinity and unhealthy stereotypes are fueling a rise in depression amongst young men, alongside domestic violence. Among these issues can be addressed by changing the habits and attitudes. An estimated two third of healthcare costs can be driven by lifestyle change choices. We know that people at risk of HIV infections should use condoms, that we should all be washing our hands with soap, and we should be brushing our teeth before we go to sleep. That we should exercise more and eat better, yet often we don't behave in our own interest. We know what's good for us, but often we act otherwise. And this disconnect between desirable health promoting behaviors and our actual day-to-day habits is a source of many of the world's pressing public health challenges.

Myriam Sidibe:

And I think this is where Brands On A Mission can right these wrongs. Marketing as a discipline can make consumption conscientious, and improve both society as a whole and individual consumers. So, many brands have come to the idea of having a purpose. Everybody's talking about purpose at the moment. The Business Roundtable recently issued a statement on the purpose of appropriation signed by 181 CEOs of the largest U.S. corporation. It concluded, "Each of our stakeholders is essential. We commit to deliver value to all of them for the future success of our companies, our communities, and our country. This represents a real clear move from shareholder to stakeholders, ranging from employees to communities in which they operate."

Myriam Sidibe:

BlackRock, Larry Fink's BlackRock, recently told the companies in which he invests that profits are in no way inconsistent with purpose. In fact, profits and purpose are inextricably linked. While some corporations are becoming larger than [inaudible 00:11:01] states, we need a new model of enlightened capitalism. How do we link real business model we alleviating real suffering? And what can brands and marketing do to help? Profits, while essential over time, are not people's main motivator. Stating a purpose for a brand is one thing, but there has to be action, too. The billions of marketing dollars from food companies, for example, have contributed to rising obesity and heart diseases. Today corporations are arguably responsible for the most serious emerging health problems that people face.

Myriam Sidibe:

And I believe that they alone have the global power, reach, and authority to change that. And if we could show them an alternative in which doing good is still profitable, then we could change that dynamic. And the purpose journey that I'm going to share with you today, just that. Brands on a mission go beyond talk. They strive for direct impact. I like to distinguish between brand say and brand do. Those are terms widely used at Unilever where I have worked for 15 years. Brand say involves communicating to consumer about the social purpose. Brand do is about translating that purpose into actually addressing social problem. And what I'll do is I'll use the baobab tree on the wall behind me, hopefully you can see it, but it's coming on the screen as well, to help you understand how you transfer this commitment into a practical reality.

Myriam Sidibe:

Brand say into brand do. The key is learning how to translate your purpose into meaningful actionable objectives, which I call a mission. This will allow you to think deeply about your purpose, and start to live it. But first I want to tell you a story. So, this is the baobab, you'll see it a bit more. But this is me and my youngest siblings, [Anisa 00:12:59] and [Yasil 00:12:59] in Mali, in 1984. I don't know whether they're listening or my parents are there, but it'll take us back a long way. I was 10 years old at that time, and I fell into a septic tank. I couldn't get out. I flailed around in the dark, I was screaming for help, I was sure I would die.

Myriam Sidibe:

I nearly drowned in shit. And I still remember the taste, the smell, the shame, like it was yesterday. It remains one of the worst days of my life, but it also was one of the best days of my life because it kicked off my career in health and hygiene, a career that has taken me all over the world, from Boston to Bujumbura, from London to Mumbai, from public sector to private sector. But because I fell in that septic tank, I was inspired to do what I'm going to ask you to do. I was motivated to spend decades of my life literally getting rid of shit. Literally. Whether by building toilets or washing hands. That is the do good part.

Myriam Sidibe:

Of course, I didn't want anybody to have the same sensation, the same near-death experience, that same burning shame. I could relate to the two billion people that still lack a toilet. But there's more to my career than that. I was fortunate enough to study in some of the world's greatest university. I started up an American NGO in Burundi building toilets, and hand washing facilities in war zones. May of them remain unused, as people preferred open air to our toilets after using them for storing dry grains.

Something just didn't feel right. We kept talking about beneficiaries, a term that bothered me deeply as did the constant focus on the donors who pay for everything.

Myriam Sidibe:

Our success depended on writing grant applications for funding, and those grants measured success by how many toilets we built. And I kept seeing a lot of empty toilets as the beneficiaries were not using them. So, you can see me here in Buzanza, Burundi, in 2000. And I kept just seeing those empty toilets. And I kept wondering, "Was my career going to be constantly chasing donor money to build unused toilets? Was I going to make decisions for powerless people?" Now, as a young African woman, I wanted to be part of the development of my continent, but my work felt undignified for the beneficiaries, and unsatisfying for me.

Myriam Sidibe:

So, if the humanitarian route wasn't for me, what else was there? I went back to school, equipped myself with a doctorate in public health from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, with Professor [Val Curtis 00:15:28]. Then spent a few years researching and monitoring children washing hands, or rather not washing hands. I observed 4,399 kids coming out of the toilets. I could tell you none of them were washing their hands. And then I presented my findings to the company that had funded my research, which I didn't know. Unilever. They offered me a job. And very soon I fell in love, not with a fancy marketer but with a word. Crazy as this is going to sound, the word was consumer.

Myriam Sidibe:

I realized that Unilever didn't treat its audience as beneficiaries, but as consumers. Instead of offering these hand-me-downs and pity, Unilever treated consumers, however vulnerable they might be, with respect and dignity. That's because consumers have a choice. They choose with their wallet what to do with their money. The same young African woman in rural villages that the AIDS sector was calling beneficiaries, Unilever was calling consumers. And dedicating all its time and resources to understand what color of soap appealed to her, what fragrance might get her to wash her hands, and the same company was spending time thinking about her toilet cleaner, and the fact that malodor was a key reason for not using toilets.

Myriam Sidibe:

It was an exciting moment for me that changed everything. I went from giving resources to beneficiaries in Burundi, who had no choice, to making solutions attractive to consumers who did have a choice. However humble their circumstances are. And by doing so, I believe I have achieved so much more that I could have done if I just stayed in the humanitarian route alone, or in the public sector. I joined the marketing team instead of the CSR, or corporate communication team, which I believe at the time replicated the same donor aid mentality. I wanted to learn everything about the four P's, the product, the price, the place, the promotion. I wanted to understand the packaging that would trigger a mother to want to wash their hands.

Myriam Sidibe:

How to understand how you influence affordable but profitable pricing. The right advertising that will get her to wash her hands. Of course, my training in public health and engineering, and upbringing, had not predicted me practicing public health in a corporate. My parents worked their whole lives to help people escape from poverty. And they just could not see what kind of career I would have in a

corporation. To be honest, I'm still trying to figure that one out myself. But one thing is certain, I could fulfill my purpose. And my purpose is to pioneer and inspire new ways to address social justice through sustainable business.

Myriam Sidibe:

And I'm going to refer here to Chadwick Boseman who said it the best when he talked about purpose at Harvard University graduation when he talked about purpose. He talked about purpose crossing discipline, and this is what I believe he meant. Whilst I'm clear on my purpose, my mission has been, and continues to be, to get more brands and businesses to address health and wellbeing in the business model, as a way to address social justice. Many have called me competent, difficult, the guardian of the good, but I believe saving lives and working in public health requires some passion. And more importantly, an [inaudible 00:18:39] and dying belief that you can't solve the issues in isolation.

Myriam Sidibe:

Not with one grant, not with one company, and not with one set of individuals. I spent 15 years in Unilever, and this has given me a fantastic platform from which to combat the naysayers. And 10 of those, I have spent on Lifebuoy, the world's largest antibacterial soap. In 2008, we co-founded Global Handwashing Day, an advocacy day now recognized by the UN and celebrated every 15th of October, by 500 million people in over 100 countries. I have to say, 2020 gave us global hand washing year. We developed the School of Five, this is the superheros you see on the slide. In our hand washing program that has been translated into 19 languages to reach 415 million children in 35 countries.

Myriam Sidibe:

I spearheaded a movement to change the hand washing behavior change of one billion people over the past 10 years, and its been achieved, by a joint team who believed and continued investing to make it happen. But most importantly, the company put the best minds to the challenge of solving the one billion goal. By setting these enormous goals, and using them to motivate a vast corporation, I've been able to fulfill many of my life's dreams of using brands to reach people, at scale and with impact. For me, driving a social mission has been about making a different through a brand aligned to the needs and aspiration of the society. The core challenge is to bring these two together. A profit-oriented brand, and real suffering in the world.

Myriam Sidibe:

And purpose-driven marketing is the art and science of infusing values in promoting a product to address a major social challenge, while still engaging consumers and staying relevant to the corporateness of the brand. I can't claim to have seen COVID-19 coming, but the messages we have created have become increasingly important in the context of this pandemic. Washing hands does indeed save lives. And the soap makers in their own rights are frontline workers. They're the makers of hope. Lifebuoy was created in 1994, in response to a Cholera outbreak in Victoria, England, still saving lives. Those brands are living their purpose to the fullest over the last one year, and bringing hygiene around the world.

Myriam Sidibe:

So, to get back to the septic tank incident, that sinking feeling, the taste, the shame, took me from [inaudible 00:21:05] to New York City, to Geneva, to Nairobi, and as I traveled with Unilever, my company of 15 years, I learned a very important skill. I had the skill of persuasion. I mean, I persuaded

many anti-capitalists, many people in my boards, persuaded many people in the non-profits, I even persuaded our competition to join me in creating global hand washing day. And I think we persuaded them all to put the hand washing for health at the forefront of their corporate strategy. And it worked, because Lifebuoy has grown fivefold in the last 10 years.

Myriam Sidibe:

I have spent the last two years at HKS, refining intuitively what I knew. And what I've been using to work directly with the brands. And what I use as an inspiration is this baobab tree. A baobab tree? What does a baobab have to do with a brand? The baobabs, from my part of Africa, is known as the trees of life. Baobabs provide shelter, clothing, food, and water. Baobabs are not only majestic, but they can live up to 1,000 years. There's even one in South Africa that dates to 6,000 years. All major decisions are taken in their shades. Brands are powerful, so I water the roots of my trees, fertilize them, and nurture them as necessary. And you should too.

Myriam Sidibe:

And here's what's the roots for me stand for. The root number one that I look at when I think about my baobab, which is very deep, is behavior change. How can marketing drive behavior change and instill positive norms? How can you get, with every marketing dollar, is to drive a real positive change? I think about a couple of examples that I've worked on for the years that I have studied in this book. I look at Knorr, for example. A billion cube which divides the brilliant campaign to address anemia, which used local celebrities, TV advertising, song and dance, encouraged mothers to cook beef stew with their daughters, showing them how to use iron-boosted cubes with plenty of green, leafy vegetables.

Myriam Sidibe:

I've been working also on my case studies, and if you've read the Harvard Business case, you'll see our business review article. I looked at Carling Black Label, and what can a beer do to address gender-based violence? What exactly can you do to get values to address and tackle mass community when the same beer is the one who actually drove a lot of these values? By changing it, by creating smart drinking squads, by creating champion men and equipping them with new values that are required so that they understand what it means to be a man of 2020. If you look at the root number two for me, is the partnerships. So, how do you develop a partnership that give you model, at your business model scale and depth?

Myriam Sidibe:

And I looked at a couple of brands, and I looked at a couple of companies, and there's some companies doing some great work. Like Durex, for example, the condom brand. Partnering with MTV to encourage young people to talk about sex openly without taboos. But I'm going to return to Lifebuoy here. There's no way we would've reached the one billion without the partnership strategies that we setup, with companies like Sightsavers, governments around the world. And there's no way we could've done this alone. By being a partner of choice to the public sector, we can not only reach millions, but we could get an impact and a depth that is unprecedented for a brand.

Myriam Sidibe:

And this is not by chance that an NGO thinking about eradicating trachoma, the leading blind eye disease, we come to Lifebuoy. Because washing your hands and face can reduce trachoma by 60%. Fortunately, many non-profits are coming around to the power of brands. Rather than pushing

companies to be conventionally philanthropic and writing that check, they're realizing that a profit motive can add scale and momentum to their own efforts. And a profit motive keeps company and brands in check. So, if I look at my roots number three, which is brand advocacy, which means standing for causes that are bigger than yourself, and that I call driving a real systemic change.

Myriam Sidibe:

I'm going to go to Discovery, a financial service group in South Africa, which is a great example of this. I mean, they have used their vitality insurance brand to encourage good health behaviors, they incentivize people to go to the gym, to eat healthily, to track their health and wellbeing, and engage in communal support. And depending on how they comply, then they get a reduction in their premium. But what's really interesting also, is how they've pledged to support the WHO goal of 100 million people by 2025, to be 20% more active by 2025, and you know what? They did that with other insurers. And this is what it means to do real brand advocacy.

Myriam Sidibe:

It's to create systemic change, and this is how we created Global Handwashing Day, and every year competitive brands celebrate that day. Although, as I said, COVID-19 has been ... Has brought global hand washing year. So, root number four is the measurement, and I'd like to think about I think that you measure what you treasure, and it is really hard to measure in social impact and business growth from the company perspective. So, I look at three different levels where I think brands need to be able to measure. So, there is the normal business measures, obviously. And to make sure that purpose can actually drive something that's profitable, whether it's driving penetration, volume, brand love, in a way that the purpose is actually driving the purchase intent.

Myriam Sidibe:

All the key business measures that you should be looking at. But there is what you do at company level, because it is an investment, it's not just a cost. Is it helping you to retain employees? How long are your brand managers really staying on your brand? I believe that if you get this right, you will see the change now. Another level is obviously the public sector. Are you really driving impact? Or are you just doing this to find a new way to market your product? So, how are you trying to track your impact? How do you measure the behaviors and the norms? How do you track the awards that you get? How do you track the fact that you're being called at the table now with other lifesavers?

Myriam Sidibe:

How many blended financing model have you created? The brands that have embraced this, as you can see, and as you'll know a bit more, the brands that have embraced this are doing much better than the ones that haven't. And if I look at my root number five, which is winning corporate support, we were being very lucky at Lifebuoy to have had CEOs Paul Pullman, Alan Jope on our side. And I can't tell you the number of red tee shirts have put on Paul Pullman. He traveled the world washing his hands with school children, and shaking hands with first ladies, going to fashion event thinking about hand washing with soap, promoting Lifebuoy brands with government and thought leaders, going to our concerts.

Myriam Sidibe:

And this has allowed us to show the benefits of our mission across the company. We had an all-in approach, and we have been the poster child of this company for a really long time, because we knew the whole corporation supported us. I believe that if you address all these five roots of the purpose tree,

together you can really grow your purpose tree from brand say to brand do. And for that, I think we have an amazing framework in the UN SDGs, right? If I think about where we started on Lifebuoy, for example, we've been working about only SDG goals before we knew the SDGs even existed. And now it's called the SDG 6, and we thought about clean water and sanitation. We even lobbied to have an educator of hand washing facilities included.

Myriam Sidibe:

Because we knew that that would drive hand washing use, and I'm glad today, actually, that we did. But we were very lucky. We had a headstart, as I said. We were born in Victoria, England to address a Cholera epidemic. So, you already had a DNA that was geared towards that. So, it is somehow easier to get a soap to think about hand washing with soap. But the devil is in the detail. It is in the affordability journey to make sure that ever African rural woman can afford the brand, and that the brand can live up to its purpose of helping family fall ill a little less often.

Myriam Sidibe:

The devil is in the wider company support. In Unilever, we've been blessed with amazing blueprints, inspirational bosses who took chances on goals, on me. And have been proven right, I believe, and that's really, really important. So, it may sound very cynical to take advantage of COVID-19, a pandemic that has killed many and affected us all. But if ever there's been a time to turn a crisis into an opportunity, that time is now. COVID-19 and George Floyd shows us how it pays to be good. Now is a time for a reset. Brands must have moral values to survive. I live in Kenya, between Kenya and when I was in Boston. And we have a rich entrepreneurial culture with millions of young people create and embrace technology, a huge resource for Africa.

Myriam Sidibe:

We have found ways to battle the pandemic, we've created a national business compact for COVID-19, brands on a mission at large, COVID-19 has presented us with a ready-made mission where you could pull together Kenyan businesses. But the key question remains, how we going to keep that same compassionate capitalism that is being displayed at the moment in partnership as business travel in the economy? By partnering with what they do best. And I think for me goes back to what does it take to really achieve credibility on an issue? On a social issue? Right now, if you look at the news, there are many brands that have been caught flat-footed, and that are scrambling to talk about race, when they have no moral authority to do so.

Myriam Sidibe:

Short-term supports, for racial minorities, may mean statements of support and donations to social justice movement. But I think it's important that brands need to look into longterm measures. They have to start in-house by reexamining the composition of their boards, their leadership team. It means recruiting black professional and proactively creating safe spaces to work effectively and thrive. It's not about buying the black talent from the outside. It's about growing the black talent inside. I think of entrepreneurs as dreamers who do. People like me, and many of my colleagues that are listening, you are the people that lead the brands from brand say to brand do, by keeping them true to their purpose, and accountable to their publicly stated mission.

Myriam Sidibe:

For me, brands are critical contenders in the fight for social justice, because they have the most powerful weapon at their disposal, their consumers. It's important to remember that corporations are also made of people who themselves are consumers, and play an important role in this journey. So, we're going to have to keep proving that it pays to be good. I wrote this book to help those working in public health to harness the power of brands to do good. But also to position what it means to be a purpose-led marketer. A public health marketer, and I believe that's a practical career path that's likely to become a longterm corporate necessity.

Myriam Sidibe:

The world is going to need more mission-driven people, and more companies that are going to be pulling out their swords to actively address social challenges, rather than merely putting up their shields to defend themselves. Being a force for good, and waging effective altruism will be essential as a way for corporations to preempt competition, build cross-company and public/private partnership that will create lasting corporate collaborative and impactful solutions. Brand can not do everything themselves. But I believe that they can kickstart a purpose revolution, challenging governments, multilateral organizations, civil society to keep them at the table for good.

Myriam Sidibe:

And in return, we're going to keep them accountable. If you would realize this baobab tree that I have shared with you today, those five essential roots, you can make positive change in the world. CSR is not enough. Writing a check doesn't cut it, neither do the likes on Twitter or Instagram. Today we're looking for brands on a mission, brands on a mission are the future of corporate America. The future of corporate India, the future of the corporate world. And if you use my baobab tree to inspire a brand, you'll be able to track real impact, prove that it pays to be good, and using this purpose tree will make sure that transparency and honesty become the norms as consumers expect more from the companies and the brands that they choose.

Myriam Sidibe:

And they will love the ones that align with their personal values. Aligning a fusion of commercial and social ambition is the only way businesses and brands will survive in the coming decades. And in addition, you'll be able to reduce the number of childrens who die, second by second, day by day, year by year. For no reason that cannot be fixed. Thank you very much.

Leemore Dafny:

Myriam, thank you so much for this presentation of your ideas, as captured in your book. I believe we're taking questions from the audience, and I'll be tracking the Q&A here, so feel free to type them in. I'll get things started, and just ask you a question about the global hand washing campaign that you described, targeting a billion individuals. The question I have is what were the messages that were most effective in generating that behavior change? And why are they so well-suited to a brand as opposed to a public health initiative, say by a government?

Myriam Sidibe:

I think the government is getting better, but for a long time government educational messages were focused around blaming the victim. You have to do this. And very much lecturing. Whereas, the brand has been very ... It tends to be very aspirational, will try to do ... Infuse a lot of role modeling, a lot of inspiration as part of how you drive the messages around hand washing with soap. And I think that

works particularly well, because you can use influencers, you can also be a constant reminders, because you have a ... You can communicate. And the beauty is when the brand alone, and the brand presence alone reminds the consumer that they need to wash hands.

Myriam Sidibe:

So, in itself you are creating, whenever you come out of a toilet, if you see a red bar, which is a Lifebuoy bar, you see, "Well, yeah. That's true. I've just seen that message that I need to wash my hands after the toilet." So, I think there is an element on how do you make sure that the brands are being used as constant reminders, that they're using aspirational messages, that they're using messages around role modeling, peer-to-peer interactions, product placements at the right moment? And also, the ability to target media messages at the time where it matters, because a brand can give you the message just before most people know ... About to have dinner.

Myriam Sidibe:

Reminding you that it's time for you to wash your hands. And I think these are the subtleties of branding and marketing, which I think this is where the products in itself drives a lot of the behavior change as well.

Leemore Dafny:

It's really interesting because it resonates with what you described of an asset of companies and thinking of people as consumers, and the choice. As opposed to you should, you must or else, it's here's what you want to do because either it smells great, or it's fun. That sort of just a shift in the message. I'm curious, and I'm sure many others are, we are, right now, around the world, trying to figure out not just how to get people to wash their hands, but how to message things like take the vaccine, take the regular flu vaccine. When we get the vaccine, take the vaccine. Isolate.

Leemore Dafny:

And so, it's interesting, if you could just take a moment based on your learnings, and of trying to generate behavior change, what advice would you offer those who are trying to get that to happen in a whole range of ways now?

Myriam Sidibe:

No, I think that that's exactly what ... I mean, we've been thinking about this, especially with the National Business Compact, and how thinking about how do you get people to want to wear their masks? How do you get people to do physical distancing? How do you make sure that you're equipping ... In some of the countries that we're talking about, lockdown is not really an option because if you lockdown then you can't have your daily food, and therefore the choice is between dying of hunger or dying of COVID-19. So, I think there is some essential behavioral element. And I think one of them is norms.

Myriam Sidibe:

If we start making it completely unacceptable, and that the new normal is that everybody's wearing a mask, then you feel the odd one out and you will want to wear a mask. And I think this is something that is really important that we start communicating. But I think one of the things that's really important, and that I have seen lately, is how do you keep those messages surprising and changing? And this is where I

like to call brands to come in more often, because if you put the poster out there, after a week the poster has lost its value because you've seen it 10 times in that week, and that's it. There's no more surprise with it. And this is where brands have the ability to cut through the communication clutter and constantly make the messaging of behavior change dynamic.

Myriam Sidibe:

And I think that's an element that becomes absolutely critical. And one of the key driver has been about protecting others, so we found that that's driving more than just you as a single individual. So, you're not wearing a mask to protect you, you're wearing the mask because you're protecting others, because you don't know if you have it. Because we know that a lot of the disease can be asymptomatic for quite a lot of people. So, I think that's something that's somewhat these messages. And I mean, I've written recently quite a lot about COVID-19 norms, and ways how we reopen the school prevention, and COVID-19 proofing fore the schools, and it's going to take segments and audiences. We're going to need to motivate these little guys.

Myriam Sidibe:

It's not that simple that you send them with a mask and then ... On, and then the mask come back at the bottom of the bag sometime. Or you come back with somebody else's mask. I mean, it's like there's going to be a real education of understanding what exactly how the transmission is done, proving to them that soap really matters. Because I think it's about also demystifying the use of soap, and that soap can really drive a real difference. Because most people don't believe that something as mundane as hand washing with soap really removes some of those pathogens and viruses from your hands.

Myriam Sidibe:

So, I think there's a lot of experiment, there's a lot of role modeling, there's a lot of peer-to-peer interactions, and there's a lot of not exploiting the situation, but really encouraging consumers and showing that it's the new ... It's normal. This is how we do it. We protest with masks, we go to restaurants with masks, we meet with masks, we actually have fun with masks. So, I think this is-

Leemore Dafny:

We get our hair washed with masks. I don't know if you've seen that.

Myriam Sidibe:

Yeah, exactly. I mean, I think this is the real questions about ... And the more we see people doing it around us, the more it becomes ... Well, actually I never thought that Kenyans would be complying with masks. And funny enough, we're seeing a lot more compliance that I never thought would be possible.

Leemore Dafny:

Well, the Kenyan experience, I just looked it up, I confess, while you were speaking, has been quite positive. But let's pause there because I have a couple questions from the audience. So, actually more than a couple. I'll start with the first, and then I'll read through some of the others. How do you push brands to select the appropriate social impact issues, and hold them accountable?

Myriam Sidibe:

Yeah. Yes. And that's the reason why I wrote this book.

Leemore Dafny:

Very good.

Myriam Sidibe:

With makers, there is a fundamental difference between brand say and brand do, and marketers, they understand very quickly. And never understood the concept of shared value. Very quickly, and this is a subsegment of shared value [inaudible 00:42:02], where what you're trying to do is to tell the marketers, and educate the consumers, to go skin deep. Just to not just look at the surface of saying, "We are doing this," but really ask the questions how are you doing it? Who are you reaching? And I think this is where the company supports, and the why the company support becomes really important. Because we want to make sure, for example, that if you communicate and externally goal, like one billion people, reaching one billion people, you can get out of it.

Myriam Sidibe:

For the 10 years that we had, we had 10 years, Paul Pullman had gone out there, it was externally communicated that Lifebuoy was going to reach one billion people. So, even when business was not where it was supposed to be, there was no choice but there was ... Everybody had to keep thinking about ways in which ... Whether it was a digital approach, or whether it was an on-ground approach, or whether it was ... We needed to think about ways to keep the goal going, because we were committed to driving this mission in order to achieve the purpose of the brand.

Myriam Sidibe:

And I think this is where making sure that you bridge the divide, and you give them a clear framework and you give them ... And this is why I think the SDGs are a really interesting framework, because it's not just about aligning yourself to SDG free health and wellbeing, or SDG 5 gender equality. It's about drilling down to the indicators, and seeing how your business model contributes, and then what is ... How you're tracking those impacts. And I think this is what I'd like to continue working on to do that.

Leemore Dafny:

Myriam, I have so many fascinating questions to ask you. So, I'm going to rattle some of them off. But first, can you tell me what SDG stands for?

Myriam Sidibe:

Oh my goodness, are you asking me this? Oh my God, I've failed miserably at my job [crosstalk 00:43:51]

Leemore Dafny:

I know so many acronyms.

Myriam Sidibe:

Sustainable Development Goals, by the UN. The entire framework for ... That's supposed to unlock the economy and change the world in terms of impact, Leemore. Oh, wow.

Leemore Dafny:

But you know, I don't think my lack of ... That's funny. Somebody's saying you should point to it, because it's behind you.

Myriam Sidibe:

Yeah. Well, it's right behind me. Thank you very much.

Leemore Dafny:

And I see, Sustainable Development Goals. All right, so from this great commentator, I'll ask you the question that she posed, which is how do you address NGOs that don't trust the motives in private sector?

Myriam Sidibe:

You get bullied, you get punched, you get called sold out-

Leemore Dafny:

Have you sold out, Myriam?

Myriam Sidibe:

Completely. I've been told all sorts of things. Yeah, if you read my book, and I won't say it right now because I want you to go buy the book, you'll read a bit about the stories of how things have evolved over the last 15 years, and how difficult it was at the time when we were saying, "Look, we're not going to give you money. We want to co-create and work together to make something impactful at scale." And it seemed impossible for some, especially some of the big UN organizations, who were used to just look, you're going to give us money, we're going to go stand, we're going to take a PR pictures, and that's what it ends. That's your main role.

Myriam Sidibe:

You have nothing else to do there. But I think, as we're starting to realize, that there's only so much also that the public sector can do completely on its own that the private sector has a role. And if you think about hand washing with soap, and I keep saying that. The public sector will never get more people washing hands than the world's largest soap companies. That is just the reality, because that's their job. That's what they do for a living, that's what they thrive on. And if you look at, for example, COVID-19, the number of factories, the number of local factories that have been established on sanitizers, on soap, that we all thought was impossible to get the pricing done, to get it done, it's accelerated.

Myriam Sidibe:

It's given us 20 years of business development in one year of COVID-19. So, I'm not going to fund COVID-19, but I have to say it's done amazing work. Now, the question is how do you drive this to make it longterm systemic change? How do you make sure that schools have hand washing facilities, water, a toilet, so that it doesn't just stay skin deep? And only focus on that. And this is where the collaborations and the partnerships need to be really in built. So, how do you convince that? You convince them with examples over and over again of your attempted commitment to actions. Because I think that is the only way you can do that. But I don't believe that we should stand forever convincing them. They should also come to the table and they should get off their high horses.

Leemore Dafny:

I hope somebody will quote you on that. It's a difficult message, but an important one. I'm hoping we might be able to get this participant to ask her question live, Laura Swapp. Scott, can you unmute her? She has a really interesting question about what to do when not all your consumers agree.

Scott Leland:

Let me try to unmute her. I have to find her first. Okay, Laura's unmuted.

Leemore Dafny:

Almost.

Laura Swapp:

Okay, am I unmuted now?

Leemore Dafny:

Yeah.

Scott Leland:

Yes.

Laura Swapp:

Okay, great. I'm enjoying this so much. Oh, we don't want to see my picture, but oh well. I recently just did a work for a well-known Seattle-based company who has a lot of commitments around racial action in the wake of the current unrest in the U.S., and work which preceded that, in fact. And so, had doubled down on some commitments. And one of the things that we found in going deeper into kind of a landscape analysis of how business is responding to racism, is that this is an area where customers actually are not united, and so I kind of had a two-part question.

Laura Swapp:

So, one is isn't this about companies really knowing their purpose and soul, and being willing to stand by that even when their consumers might be divided? Or even when they might have to give up revenue? So, as an example, Amazon, IBM, and Google all deciding to pull facial recognition software from police departments lost them revenue, but they knew that that was the thing that they had to do to stand by their purpose. So, I feel like in the case of racism, it's ... And maybe there's other issues like this, Myriam, brands have to know their soul and not just their profit.

Laura Swapp:

So, my question sort of revolved around what you do with that tension when, say 60% of consumers support brands fighting racism, but that means 40% don't. Thank you.

Myriam Sidibe:

No, that's a good question. I think it's a really interesting question, and it's not simple. I'm going to try my best to answer this, I don't know which other top market here. I don't know whether Steve [Miles 00:49:27] is on the call, but anyway, if he is you should jump in, Steve. I mean, I've had to look, and I've

looked quite a bit at what the U.S. businesses are doing at the moment to tackle racism. And from Walmart giving 100 million dollars to fight racial inequality. But then, and this is the part where I also look and say, "Well, it's good for Walmart to do that, but they still sell guns. Which killed some of the black people in America."

Myriam Sidibe:

So, I keep thinking about the fact that we're going to have to be really honest with standing for ... If that's your purpose. Doesn't mean that you have to jump on every social issue to express yourself. If you're a bar of soap, and you're selling soap, and you're trying to get people to wash hands, you have no business standing up necessarily for racial inequality. I mean, you can mention that you stand, and that you're going to take active ... Be an actionist brand around making a real difference, and checking within your board and your leadership team, and trying to check that you are addressing, and you're trying to be as inclusive as possible.

Myriam Sidibe:

Because it is reflected in the richness of your advertisement, it's reflected in the richness of the way you propose, and you talk about that. But I do think that I'm not sure whether you address all the consumers. I think you need to be honest and authentic to woo to what you are. So, if your purpose is to improve hygiene, or improve sanitation, and you're a toilet cleaner, you're not going to come out necessarily for racial inequality even if that is the right thing to do and you should probably look at your HR policies to make sure that that is addressed. So, I think it's a question of a brand like Ben and Jerry's has always stood for racial inequality, and inequalities in all its form. And that's how it was created, even as a brand.

Myriam Sidibe:

So, in the mixtures of their flavors and all this. And I mean, yes. And I think about, for example, Aunt Jemima, for example. That's a brand, for example, that has changed finally, its name and its logo because it was built upon a slavery imagery. And there were some really strong persona, including my father-in-law, by the way, who thought that that was not the case. That Aunt Jemima had evolved, and then somehow you have to keep the history. But a lot of people were against what it represented. And personally, I think it's a good thing to rethink about the brand imagery, especially if it is built on an exploitative vision of what ... Of the racism, or disparities and inequalities that existed.

Myriam Sidibe:

So, that's my perspective. I just think we should try to avoid hypocrisy, and try to be honest and transparent, and then knowing that there's not many ways to do right or wrongs. It is wrong, it is wrong. It shouldn't happen. And we are going to try really hard. But to try to rectify those wrongs is the real standard I'm trying to say that brands should have, but that doesn't mean that that becomes your primary purpose, basically. I don't know whether I've done a great job answering that questions, but ... Can you hear me? I can't hear you.

Leemore Dafny:

Yes. Yeah, sorry. You have done a great job with some really, really hard questions. I'm going to give you one that I think, I think, will be a little easier than some of those, partly because we're at almost at the top of the hour. But the question, it comes to you from a listener from Weston Baxter in London. Says hello. And he says that his students want to join purpose-driven organizations, and what guidance could

you offer in identifying said organizations? There's a lot of window dressing everywhere. So, in mission statements, how do those seeking careers with a purpose identify the right homes?

Myriam Sidibe:

That's a good point. Hi Weston, very good for you to ... I'm very happy to hear that you are on this call. Look, I think this is why I distinguish between brand say and brand do, because I think a lot of the programs, when a brand talks, and I don't think brands should talk about purpose unless they can show several examples of what they've done. And they've even tracked some impact. Because I think otherwise that is just exploiting a social cause, and then transforming that into a way to be able to address. I think that's really important. And it's very easy to see whether or not the programs are just a simple little pilot of reaching 10 villages just to talk about look, we've given some, I don't know, some toilets somewhere in 10 villages, and we're saving the world from sanitation.

Myriam Sidibe:

For me, honestly if you are a brand of a couple billion dollars, and then all you can talk about is having reached 10,000 people, honestly I don't think you should really talk. So, I think the question is to find out what have you done? How many countries, how aligned is it to your business model? So, because that's also a guarantee that you're going to continue doing this, even if somehow it's difficult financially, because you are committed to it because it helps you drive. So, the key is to find out whether the purpose is aligned to the products, to what the product is supposed to deliver, whether it fits into the business model, and therefore if the social ...

Myriam Sidibe:

And also, if the social issue is big enough that you can see room. I really think that once you have your purpose, and then you have a mission, it's at least a decade journey. It's at least 10 years. This is not something that you change every two years because, well, today we talking about Black Lives Matter, tomorrow we're talking about prison, here we are talking about body and self-esteem. I think there's a real question about commitment. So, if you can talk and find out if that company has been consistent, committed and then transparent and honest about their learnings, also.

Myriam Sidibe:

Because it is not all about successes. Because we all know, having worked in development, that it is really hard. And that there will be failures. And that the journey to impact means that you're going to constantly reassess and reevaluate how you're progressing, and that you are open to that learning including external evaluations by academics. For me, this is how I check whether a company is not just fluff, and is just is really in that. But even in the best of ones, it's difficult. And I think this is why it is not a journey for the faint hearted.

Scott Leland:

Okay. I'm sorry, but I have to jump in because unfortunately, very sadly, we've reached the ... Our time limit. Myriam Sidibe and Leemore Dafny, thank you both so much for being here today. Myriam especially, thank you for kicking off our seminar series this semester with such a wonderful and thought-provoking seminar and session. So, to our audience, we hope you'll join us next Thursday, at the same time, for the next seminar in this series when we'll hear from Malcolm [Sparrow 00:56:59] and his new book, Fundamentals of Regulatory Design. And again, thank you very much Myriam, and Leemore. Its been a wonderful session. Thank you all, stay healthy, and stay well.

This transcript was exported on Sep 14, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Leemore Dafny:

Thanks, Scott.

Myriam Sidibe:

Thank you.

Leemore Dafny:

Thank you, Myriam.