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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 181: ELATIA ABATE – REGENERATIVE RESILIENCE

Female Speaker

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Ken White

Welcome to Leadership & Business, the podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. Sharing strategies, information, and insight to help you become a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host, Ken White. Thanks for listening. Well, there's no doubt change will play a major role in our future. We'll experience new business landscapes, new paradigms for leadership, and new approaches to work. The next 20 years in business in the world will be vastly different from the past. For many professionals, that constant change leads to uncertainty, which can increase burnout, exhaustion, and low morale. If not handled appropriately, it can adversely affect the bottom line. But our guest today says that does not have to be the case. She says we can take that disruptive uncertainty and turn it into productive possibility by embracing Regenerative Resilience. Elatia Abate is an entrepreneur and futurist who works around the world with top companies and organizations. She joins us today to discuss how leaders and professionals can thrive in challenging times thanks to Regenerative Resilience. Here's our conversation with Elatia Abate.

Ken White

Elatia, thanks so much for joining us. You and I have been waiting a long time to get together, so it's great that we're together. Thanks for sharing your time with us today.

Elatia Abate

Oh, my goodness. Thank you so much for having me. I am thrilled to be here inside of this conversation.

Ken White

As we were right before we were ready to record, we were talking about this world we're living in today. And it's not just post-pandemic, right? What are some of the reasons it is so different right now than it was previously?

Elatia Abate

Sure. Well, first and foremost, the pandemic simply accelerated a whole series of changes that were on the horizon. So you're absolutely correct in saying it wasn't just the pandemic, and the pandemic was simply a conduit for more of what was already coming and into what was already coming. We are at the precipice. We've sort of begun to walk into what the World Economic Forum calls the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Some might call it the first productivity revolution, like my friend Nancy Giordano in her book *Leading*. I call it the Quantum Revolution or the Energetic Revolution because of our advances in quantum physics, quantum computing. So if the world is already running on these more complicated principles, like things wave-particle duality, two truths can be true simultaneously. What happens in a world that's usually data-driven? And when we are only looking for one truth, how do we begin to loosen up our thinking? And in addition to that, the technological disruption. So we are, in addition to as part of this Fourth Industrial Revolution, or first energetic revolution, we are looking at a century of change squished into the next decade. And so, if you look at the evolution of horse and buggy to self-driving electric car, roughly over 100 years, give or take, right?

Ken White

Sure.

Elatia Abate

That's one product. So imagine this in healthcare, biotech, education, traditional manufacturing, literally everything that you can think of. What's the world going to look like?

Ken White

Wow. Total disruption.

Elatia Abate

Total disruption.

Ken White

So, where did you come up with the concept of regenerative resilience, then?

Elatia Abate

So regenerative resilience is an answer to a question of what does leadership look like in this age of continuing and accelerating disruption?

Ken White

Got it.

Elatia Abate

So I was observing the marketplace. I was looking, okay, first and second industrial revolutions. So much of what we understand and study as leadership was born in those places and spaces. Over the last 30 years, certainly more evolved leadership models have come into place. Agile leadership, servant leadership, these kinds of things. But what happens in a world where change is growing, it's accelerating, and there is no foreseeable end? And that was the initial question. And then, during the pandemic, I ran an experiment where I reached out to everybody with whom I was connected on LinkedIn to invite them into a 20 minutes conversation. At the time, it was like 4700ish people. I had no idea what was going to occur. But 161 conversations, over 80 hours of dialogue, people in 24 countries, academics, entrepreneurs, executives of publicly traded companies. And 85% of those conversations were about mental health and resilience.

Ken White

Wow.

Elatia Abate

And so I thought, okay, as we're looking at this unbridled change, how can we adapt our leadership to not simply survive and get through to the other side but thrive in the face of it? And that's where regenerative resilience was born.

Ken White

Fantastic. And leading people who are probably kind of tired of being tired.

Elatia Abate

I can't say everybody right now, absolute. But many, many people are tired of being tired. And I have been even just these last couple of weeks in conversations with hundreds of executives around the world, and sort of the behind closed doors is, I'm exhausted. What am I going to do? I don't see none of the tools that I have available to me for as much training, education, and everything else that I've had. It doesn't feel like it's working.

Ken White

That's so interesting. And not to go off on a tangent, but I, too, have had similar conversations with leaders who don't want to admit they're exhausted, but how do they stay up? How do they continue to motivate when they're exhausted? But I think half the battle is just realizing they're exhausted and then kind of go from there. Right? Yeah.

Elatia Abate

So it's seeing it and naming it. And that's another reason why regenerative resilience comes to play in this space. Because when we talk about resilience, and this is what we see in the popular business press right now, the importance of being resilient. But when the connotation of that word, particularly in American society, is sort of, I'm going to force through and do it anyway, no matter the cost, no matter how tired I am. And that's not sustainable. So regenerative because not only does it bring us back or restore us to whatever state we were in in the first place, but gives us the tools to expand beyond that from survival to thriving.

Ken White

Excellent. So you have three core principles under the umbrella. First one is clarity. Can you tell us about that?

Elatia Abate

Absolutely. So like any good model that comes out of a structure strategy framework, right, three pillars. The first one is clarity, and clarity is subdivided also in the three buckets. But when we look at clarity, it's from a personal leadership perspective. What do I want to create? What kind of impacts do I want to have? How do I want to use my life and career? And from the answers to those questions, how do I define clearly the things that I value? How am I exercising those values in my day-to-day? And then finally, how am I protecting the space where I am allowed to live into those values, whatever they might be? So that's the purpose of clarity because most of us are bumbling along. We don't know what I mean. We think we do, but when we sit down and ask, what are the three things that you find most important right now? Most people take a little while to get there. So if you have clarity of purpose, why you're here, what you're up to, the things that you value the most, and then you can protect that space and even evaluate, am I in a role right now that's allowing me to exercise those? Can I find that in the organization where I am, or should I be looking somewhere else?

Ken White

So it's personal and organizational?

Elatia Abate

Yes. So Regenerative Resilience, as a side note, exists as an individual leadership model. How do I develop my own leadership and then also as an organizational strategic model? How does my organization become regeneratively resilient? So it exists on those two planes.

Ken White

Interesting. But start with the leader, which makes sense. Yeah. Fearlessness is the second.

Elatia Abate

Yes, fearlessness and not courage. Right. So the third pillar also starts with the C, and the alliteration would have been beautiful. And though courage is a fundamentally extractive action, I'm going to feel the fear and do it anyway. I'm going to jump off of, dive off an airplane, or whatever, and that's fine in the moment. Courage has its place. But again, sustainable leadership, when change is going to continue, and the disruption is going to grow, that's not going to work. And so fearlessness is how we first and foremost identify, control, manage the chemicals and what feel like automatic processes that are running around in our body that creates stress and these kinds of things. There's actually plenty of techniques that we can utilize to manage that. But then, secondly, intellectually, how do we build the resources around ourselves and the projects that we're running so that we don't run into burnout? And how do we name, define and challenge the assumptions that we have about what is or isn't true about our world? Because oftentimes, fear comes, or this anxiety comes because we don't think we have options. And we don't think we have options because of the assumptions that we're making about how we're operating in the world. So if we can challenge the assumptions, and I call it a kaleidoscope of questions, right? If we can sort of turn the kaleidoscope around and begin to look and examine and explore it, what might we be thinking is true that may or may not be? We begin to find more options, the fear reduces, and we can empower ourselves and our teams.

Ken White

I think I saw you had written something that said it's a way to discover an alternative to exhaustive strategies.

Elatia Abate

Yes.

Ken White

So it's opening up, in other words.

Elatia Abate

Yes, exactly. Because in my former life as a corporate executive, I was on 100 hours a week burnout train. And so many of us were taught to that that is the prized way of going forward, and it's simply not sustainable. So we move from that exhaustive again over into regenerative.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with Elatia Abate in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business. If your business or organization is interested in retaining your best people, consider enrolling them in one of our MBA programs for working professionals. William & Mary's online MBA, part-time MBA, and executive MBA programs are designed for the professional who works full-time, so both the employee and the organization benefit. Show your employees you care by investing in their growth. Check out the MBA program at William & Mary at wm.edu. Now back to our conversation with futurist Elatia Abate.

Ken White

And then the third pillar connection.

Elatia Abate

Connection. Yes. Hello, fellow human beings. How are we going to connect with each other? And particularly in this world that's increasingly hybrid? Minimally. But I think we'll go to asynchronous sooner rather than later or as we evolve over time. And the connection also includes how we communicate about who we are and what we're up to. So, language, I can't stress enough the importance of language because language creates our reality. There's a distinction in there between problem-solving and solution-seeking. If I come to you with a problem that I have to solve, it's usually complaining. It's usually asking some form of the question, why is this happening to me, to us, in the market? It pushes the lens to externalities that we can't control. However, if we go to solution seeking, okay, fine, it's not Pollyanna. We don't ignore the fact that there's a challenge here. We say, okay, given that this is a challenge we're facing, what is it that we want to create? The language that I utilize in connecting with you about something that I'm solving. A solution that I'm creating is different from a problem that I'm solving.

Ken White

Which then changes your mindset.

Elatia Abate

Which then changes your mindset. And it enrolls to the point of connection. It enrolls others in supporting you in ways that are much more productive, as opposed to sitting around the proverbial water cooler and complaining about what isn't working.

Ken White

So in your workshop, you work with six weeks in teams. Generally, how big? Is there a nice number you like to work with?

Elatia Abate

Sure. So that's one of those things where it just depends. Right. I've done from groups of ten, strictly the C-suite or a couple of members of the board. To workshopish of several hundred or a few thousand. For me, I love the individual interaction that comes with smaller groups. So up to 40 inside of a classroom is a really great way to get into a little bit more personal interaction as opposed to solely lecturing.

Ken White

And as you're doing that, what kind of reactions are you getting? Because this is new. This is a new mindset.

Elatia Abate

This is new. Sure. The first thing that happens when I walk into a room, usually because I talk about disruption and change and all the things that are happening, is that there is a moment where we need to recognize that that can feel scary, and that's okay. It's normal to feel scared in the face of uncertainty. The game then becomes, how can we learn to shift this into seeing that there's way more opportunity inside of this change? Once we shift over to that, the receptivity tends to be pretty great, especially because there's data behind all of it, on some level. Yes, I created and thought when we're looking at the importance of having clarity, purpose, and direction, the academic research will support that yes, that is a good thing. Psychology research will tell us that. Yes. Learning how to create and construct firm boundaries around your time, your talents, and this sort of thing is a healthy thing for us to do as human beings. Right. So the data is there, and my job is to combine sort of this out at the edge disruption with the data that people already have access to and are familiar to and create a bridge to the future.

Ken White

How do you see the new leader in comparison to one maybe 20 years ago? What's that new leader? What are they like? What are they thinking about?

Elatia Abate

Sure. So I think one distinction that could be useful for folks to understand is there's a big shift from subject matter expertise to becoming a subject matter student and subject matter experts was in the old model, right? The unquestionable authority about the economy, about finance, about fill-in-the-blank, whatever it is. And we kowtowed to that knowledge without questioning it. Today, no matter how much we know about any given thing, you may be the world's most knowledgeable person in a given thing. So we're not saying it's not important to learn, but even if you know all the things, there's going to be something else because of the rate of change. So what else haven't you thought about? What else haven't you seen? And so a willingness to learn, unlearn, do redo and become and continuously and constantly evolve.

Ken White

Which I guess is the same as your advice to those who want to lead. Those are the things to embrace then. How will it be different as we hire leaders? Because there was a pretty set way, a CEO was hired. If things are evolving, and they are, then I think the hiring process could be different.

Elatia Abate

Yes, and so well. First and foremost, the hiring process for most organizations needs to change across the organization, from the C-suite down to the interns, if for no other reason than for diversity, period, point blank. This is a nonnegotiable as we're moving forward in the world. And so, our hiring processes and promotion processes need to change in order to reflect that. So there's that. And then secondly, in the search for right, people aren't going to fit into one neat box. Nontraditional thinkers or nontraditional MBA folks or business folks are likely the ones that you're going to want to put into leadership positions because of the ability to navigate and to be okay with I might not know the answer, and it's okay if we're still in search of the answer, but then what are the criteria for searching for leaders like this? Are they curious? Are they willing and able to say that they are wrong and that they screwed something up and help their team and support their team in doing the same thing?

Ken White

When you look at the next ten years, 20 years, optimistic, pessimistic, excited, where are you?

Elatia Abate

If you couldn't tell from my tone up until now, right? I am incredibly optimistic because inside of this disruption, there is more opportunity than we've ever seen. The very technologies that are creating this disruption are technologies that can help solve all of the big challenges that we're facing. And I mentioned that conversation experiment when I

reached out to all these folks, the variety of answers that I received. Some people were having the best years of their lives. Many people were having the worst years ever, meltdowns and family and everything else. But no matter how good or bad the situation was, every single one of the people with whom I spoke was using their life, their time, their intellect, their talent to help somebody else. Being in the listening of that much power in a beautiful way, we're going to be fine. We're going to be great.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Elatia Abate. And that's it for this episode of Leadership & Business. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business, home to the MBA program. Offered in four formats the full-time, the part-time, the online, and the executive MBA. If you're looking for a truly transformational experience, check out the William & Mary MBA program at wm.edu. Thanks to our guest, Elatia Abate. And thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Wishing you a safe, happy, and productive week ahead.

Female Speaker

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