

Leah Meranus Transcript

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Matt: It's a thriving and rapidly evolving landscape, brands must move at an ever-increasing pace. I'm Matt Britton, founder, and CEO of Suzy. Join me and key industry leaders as we dive deep into the shifting consumer trends within their industry. Why it matters now and how you can keep up. Welcome to the Speed of Culture.

Matt: Up today, we're going to be speaking with Leah Meranus, Chief Media Officer for Dentsu X and 360i. Leah's worked for some of the biggest advertising agencies since the mid-2000s. I'm excited to have you on board at Speed of Culture today, Leah. Welcome.

Leah: Thanks so much, Matt. Great to be here.

Matt: Absolutely. You're in a very cool role, chief media officer for one of the most innovative agencies on the planet. 360i is an agency that we often went up against competitively when I was running my agency MRY and I always had a great deal of respect for both 360i and Dentsu. Would love to hear about your career journey and the steps you took to lead you to where you are today.

Leah: I'm an accidental agency person. I started my career as a management consultant. After a few years of that, I decided my passion was really in marketing. I decided to go back to business school with every ambition of becoming a brand manager at a CPG company. That led me accidentally to an agency role at Omnicom. They did a wonderful rotational program. I had some wonderful mentors and coaches there and I was hired into a media agency, and never looked back.

The past three years at Dentsu have been wonderful. As you mentioned, I started at 360i. We've taken that brand and merged it with Dentsu X where I am currently the chief media officer.

Matt: One question I have to ask you based on your background is, was business school worth it and what lessons did you learn in business school that you actually apply to your job today?

Leah: Business school, I did it at a perfect time in my career. I think if you're going to go in there, you have to really invest and lead into it. It is an incredible opportunity to re-immense yourself in education, in thinking, and in networking. That's really the best part of business school.

Do you need business school to do this job? I don't think so. I think we've gotten so involved and there are so many industry events and such great communities that it's not critical and essential. At that turning point in my career, because I was what we call a career switcher, it was an incredible opportunity to skip a few steps along the way.

Matt: Right. I would imagine in business school, they're not really thinking about the innovative go-to-market and media strategies that actually exist and what brands are asking for. You're probably not learning a lot of the tactical things, but to your point, it's more of the fundamentals and most importantly meeting the people. Is that fair?

Leah: That's exactly right. It gives you a different frame of mind. It's about learning to ask questions. It's about challenging and it's about having the frameworks and toolkits to challenge problems as you approach them in the real world. Not to mention being on the agency side, a lot of my clients happen to have MBAs. It's a nice counter of heart to them and understanding how they think. I think it gives me a nice advantage.

Matt: Yes, totally makes sense. You've been in the agency world for the better part of two decades. We both have lived through a world where when we first went to the workforce, the internet was first starting. A lot of people are comparing the crypto crash of today to the .com crash of the early 2000s.

We can get into that separately, but then we've lived through the advent of social media and the iPhone, and the changes that have taken place as it impacts the consumer and the marketing advertising world are really unprecedented in the last 20 years. How do you think that's impacted the role of the modern advertising agency?

Leah: I think it's always about being ahead of what's next. That's really something that we've been thinking about very critically at Dentsu is, the world is continuing to change in these massive fundamental ways that impact the way that consumers interact and behave with our brands. It's fundamentally changing us.

What that means is you always need to be a moment ahead and the irony and interest of me being on this talking about metaverses and multiverses is that's not my area of expertise, it's not my day-to-day, but all of us have to understand this stuff. All of us have to push ourselves to understand the impacts that technology are having on our consumers. If not, we're not going to know where and how to find them, engage with them, impact them and connect them intimately to what we're providing as companies.

Matt: You mentioned the metaverse. I have no idea how to access the metaverse. I'm the CEO of a software company. I'm the person whose friend's already called them to help them set up their Apple TV, et cetera. I have no idea how to access it so there's no way the majority of consumers do. I say that in really setting up a question like "Isn't there a difference between cutting edge and bleeding edge?"

What I found in running an agency for 15 years is, often clients confused the two and they went to be on the bleeding edge where there was really no ROI, because they wanted a story in Adweek. Often, that came with the expense of really focusing on the business results that matter.

I know the media is where a lot of these innovations come to bear. What's your think about that?

Leah: It depends on the client and it depends on the brand. Even if you don't have that quantifiable ROI, for some clients it is worth it at some point to start learning and leading into those lines, because it is representative of future consumers that they're trying to attract. It becomes aspirational or ambitions that they're trying to lean into. The more you practice, the better you get and you become a step ahead. It's part of their DNA and fabric. Certain brands are always leaning in.

That said, from our day-to-day, I come from a portfolio of clients, it's quite retail-oriented. We have very strong business results that we need to deliver on a day-to-day and week-to-week ambition. Not everybody needs to be the leading edge.

Is like a spectrum of innovation. Innovation differs for different clients. For the last few years, it's been getting into CTV or connected television products. For others, it is dabbling in a metaverse or Web3-like object. You really need to know what your ambitions are as a brand. You really need to know what you're trying to impact in your consumers and find the right time to test into those, in organized and calculated ways.

Matt: It's interesting with media innovation because at first, the medium is the idea. When Facebook first came out, the big idea was, let's get on Facebook or let's get on Twitter. That was the idea, but now, in order for you to execute well on social media, it's not about the medium, it's about the message behind it. It's about the content and the creative behind it.

That's the curve I often see. Now the idea is the medium of the metaverse where ultimately it's going to be about, how do you add value, how do you activate it? The creative really has to pay off and deliver for the consumer. You're not going to win just by being there.

Leah: It's the experience. We talk about value exchanges. This notion of an experience is a value exchange. You can't just be there punting something at them because if they're not open, willing, and wanting to receive it, it's not going to do anything for that consumer. This notion of building experiences is critically important.

The reason that we're tapping into things like these multiverses and metaverses is because that's where consumers are going, and the expectation or the crossing lines between digital, physical, and these multi-experience spaces, they're emerging. That's where people are having new experiences and we just need to be ready to experience them in those places.

Matt: I've often found that it's been hard for agencies to really be able to differentiate because ultimately, agencies are made up of people and for a long time the best people weren't even going to agencies. They were going to Google and Facebook, et cetera.

Now, agencies are obviously making a strong comeback and some of the big tech companies are really struggling right now as we've read about. This year agencies are doing okay, at least the holding companies are. Given that we're all just made up of people, as agencies, how do you find that you guys can differentiate? What makes you different than the company just down the street, Madison Avenue, when you're talking to these big clients?

Leah: I think it's about the culture and environment that you're setting forward and how people can build and elevate their careers and their own personal growth. What I love about the agency world is that we get exposed to so much, and I think that's always going to be an advantage of the agency space. We're touching all the platforms, we're touching all the channels, we are exposed to all the industries. That's exactly right.

These are the different areas that you don't get client, you don't get platform side. I think that really creates an incredible opportunity to diversify, to be more horizontal. The program that I originally joined when I got into a holding company role was there was this notion that advertising people came in through one channel.

You were creative, you were a media person, you were a PR person and more and more, those lines are blurring.

I think within the holding company space, you have the opportunity to stretch and flex across all of those, becoming more holistic marketers and partners to clients. For those people who like to have variety, who like to test different things, who want to be experts in multiple areas, agency really continues to provide the best feeding ground for that, in my opinion.

Leah: It's interesting you talk about blurring the lines. I'm a huge fan of the show, *Mad Men* as many people in the ad industry are. Back then, creative and media were intricately tied together, and then for a while, they broke apart and you had your hot creative agencies and you had the large media buying agencies. Now, we're starting to see it become cyclical again, where they're coming back together, where creative and media have to be really tightly connected at the hip because data is such a big part of it.

What are your thoughts on that combination, and how does that impact your role as a chief media officer?

Leah: Everything that's old is new again. Don't we see that all the time? We see that in fashion, we see that in the agency world as well. I do. They're coming together, but I think in interesting and different ways. I don't think it necessarily needs to be in one house like it used to be.

We talk about being the most integrated network in the world. I know a lot of the agencies are talking about the same thing. That to us means finding the best and right people together with the right capabilities and the right moment. I don't even know if I would call it creative versus media in those biggest forms anymore. It's about delivering on client objectives and how do you really define where gaming lives or where strategy lives. We really pull from the best of everything in order to meet client needs.

The notion of coming back together is more important than ever, especially because we're so fragmented. Things are moving so quickly. Not everybody can be an expert in everything. I do believe in this power and collective collaborative strength and thought to bring better offerings there for clients. You're not going to get in one place.

Matt: Talking about differentiation, how competitive this space is, I was on the executive leadership team of Starcom Mediavest for several years, after my agency was acquired. One thing that struck me was just how much time and effort is spent on pitching new business and how it's such a big part of agency life. What have you seen be the consistent things that make the pitches you've been involved in that you want successful?

What are the commonalities when you're— I don't want you to give away any trade secrets here. What are some of the things where when you leave that room, you're like, "We nailed that?" What usually is the case when that happens?

Leah: I think it's showing the client that you're in it with their business. There is definitely a level of chemistry and chemistry comes across in a few different ways. One is the actual people in the room. Two is understanding what they're really looking for. The third is, you've got to see it. Did you challenge the brief in the right ways? Have you really dug and uncovered what the crux of the task is, not just reading the brief and delivering on those words on the paper? I think that's really important. The third one, I think there's authenticity that's really critically important. It's very difficult to recreate yourself every single time in a pitch and try to be something to those individual clients on a one-on-one basis.

You have to know who you are. You have to know who the clients are that you want to go after because that's also going to make for the most fruitful relationships moving forward because you know who you are.

Matt: 100%. I found that as well. Do you also see in this new economic environment that clients are more focused now on hardcore business results than maybe they were three, or four years ago? They want to understand how you can move units or get them better retail shelf space or whatever it may be, versus impressions and buzz. Has the focus moved further down the funnel in this environment?

Leah: Everyone wants everything. I do feel that lately there has been a rush to the bottom. There has been a lot of that.

Matt: The bottom of the funnel, you mean, like focus on conversion, pure ROI?

Leah: Focus on conversion. Yes. Impressions and efficiencies. All of those things but every time we get down there, the smart marketers, the modern marketers, the marketers that we want to partner with are coming back and questioning that. They know that's not the end all be all. They know that's not going to be the future of their businesses and what's going to enable them to grow.

I appreciate and admire that we can have those bigger conversations. It's super important right now going into the R-word. We know a recession's probably coming. We were facing economic headwinds and how many times can we go back to empirical research that says "Continue to invest in your brand during these times? Don't go dark, don't bottom-funnel."

Those partners who we have, we're trying to elevate that conversation and remind ourselves that there is more to it. It's a long game.

Matt: Absolutely. Leah, you've also spoken a lot about focusing on attention as a metric. When you're quantifying results, now often, we're in a position where big CPGs, it's very hard for them to track directly the results of the advertising because they're selling through a Walmart or a Target. A lot of times companies can't even really drive a direct ROI correlation for a lot of the media, especially. When you talk about the metrics that matter, why is attention so important, and why have you gravitated towards that?

Leah: We have to push those conversations. You talked about impressions and all these things, for an industry that is evolving so much and so quickly, there are so many things that have not changed. We're still looking at GRPs, we're still looking at impressions. We're still looking at the same CPMs we always have.

At some point, we need to rally together and hold hands and know that we have to keep evolving the business. You know what? It's hard and it's going to take a lot of collaboration and coordination to get there. Attention is that next level. It shows us and proves to us that not all impressions are in fact created equal. We know that because of the research that we've been doing, Dentsu is in its fifth year of attention economy research. We're looking at it not just on a channel basis, not just on a platform basis, but on an actual placement basis.

There are differences and ways that we can create greater attention, and get a better return for the client's money based on this research and information. Attention is the next conversation that I

think we need to tackle. I think we need to identify what attention means. That's one of the challenges is we all have different definitions of attention.

Matt: Is it mind share or is it like you have x amount of waking hours in a day and where the mind share goes? Often your attention isn't on brands, isn't on advertising, it's on your kids or your diet or your job or whatever. There's only so much I think mind share that's able to be even captured by an advertiser or a brand.

I think that's what we're starting to see now where clients are having to make hard decisions because people can only have so many streaming services. They can only have so many products in the home. Especially again, in the wake of the economic downturn, we're going to. I do think attention's worthwhile. The question is how do you measure that and how do you ultimately measure that up the business results, right?

Leah: Yes, you do research. We have to come together as an industry, we have to share that research. We've been doing it in isolation, we've been doing it in pockets. How do we bring that together so that it does create a way forward?

I know the idea of a common currency around attention is there are polarizing sides on it. I want to believe that we have to push towards something like that because there's no other way that we're going to actually change this industry if we don't push for something new. I think there are so much amazing things that are happening right now with the evolutions in our space. Let's talk about addressability. We can measure more things than ever before. It's the combination and the force multiplier of all of these things coming together.

The notion of identity and being able to find people, the notion of attention and the notion of context, that's what we're looking at in Dentsu and how all of these things are coming together. That's really where we're seeing what's next. Thinking smarter about the investments through those lenses to change the game in media buying.

Matt: Often a huge focus of media buying has been on television. Recently Nielsen announced that for the first time ever more people are streaming than watching linear television, which is obviously a big moment. When you talk about addressability and measurement, it all starts with streaming versus traditional linear TV.

How do you see the evolution of TV impacting media buying as a whole? Are your clients still holding onto that old-world upfront buying CPMs or are they really trying to shift to more CTV-based models when it comes to TV? Is TV any different than online video at this point?

Leah: We think about it as a video. We talk about TV holistically.

Matt: The device doesn't matter?

Leah: The device doesn't matter. It's long-form content in whatever form. You can watch from your TV, on your desktop, on the big screen in your living room. We are seeing those come together more under this notion of video. The more people are watching "television" through their smart devices, the more addressable that medium is becoming as well. We can buy TV like we buy digital in a lot of cases, and that's really the direction that we're moving.

Matt: We had a conversation with Google on this podcast a couple of weeks ago, and what we found out was that the top two things that people watch on television are Netflix and then YouTube. Not YouTube TV, but actually YouTube, which actually shocked me because as a couple of years ago when I would show friends YouTube on the big screen, on the television, they'd say, "How did you get YouTube on this TV?"

Now more and more televisions are coming out, smart TVs becoming more intuitive, and that's really changing the games. I think the evolution and the form factor of television itself because they control the rails— Samsung controls the rails of those people who have Samsung TVs. They're going to be the ones that shepherd that in because your Gen Xs and especially boomers, it's not intuitive to them on how to access anything but the traditional TV stations.

Leah: I have two kids under the age of 10 and they'll find YouTube on the "television" for you. You're right. The form, the format, and the device itself is evolving as well. The next generations of consumers are only going to know that.

Is TV dead? People ask that question. No, it's not and there is definitely a role still even for linear television, but it's changing all the time. You're seeing the day parts mix, changing a little bit. You're seeing prime and the value of prime changing. We obviously have supply constraints that have been happening in the industry as we're seeing ratings go down. It's changing, but it's evolving because of the digital streaming formats that complement the long-form of video.

Matt: We talk about supply, now you have Netflix selling advertising, so now all of a sudden they're going to take up so much more supply. The band's certainly not going to go up in this market. A lot of companies are already starting to cut their media budgets. Maybe not as big as the headlines might lead you to believe, but that's definitely going to put a strain on the traditional networks because there's going to be more supply out there. All of a sudden you can shift your media dollars to something like TikTok, which is emerging, or something like Netflix, which up until now, you haven't been able to buy media on.

Leah: I think it'll be really interesting to watch that space. We all talk about streaming fatigue or app fatigue or subscriber fatigue and overload, especially with the upcoming year that we have. How many services are consumers actually going to support and be able to sustain?

It'll be interesting to see, one, does consolidation happen, is that a way forward? We know that that's coming and the other one you've even been seeing in the recent upfronts is the bigger media companies proposing all of their offerings together. It is not in a silo. They are selling all of their ecosystem. NBCU, it was all about peacocks.

Matt: That's front and center versus saying "Buy 32nd spot during—" I don't even know what show runs on NBC anymore, which is the point.

Leah: That's the point. You can see it anywhere and they're —

Matt: I was going to say *Will & Grace*, or *Friends*.

Leah: I bet you can find it somewhere. You can find it somewhere—

Matt: Exactly. Right.

Leah: -but they're sending you toward their streaming platforms because that's becoming the center. We are seeing a bit of a shift in the center.

Matt: They're also doing it because they want a subscription-based model. They want addressability, they want the data. There are a lot of reasons why.

Leah: 1000%. Then they're leveraging that data. We've partnered with NBC amongst others in order to gain a greater advantage, better marketability as we mentioned before, and a better understanding of what our consumers are watching. It's very powerful to combine these data sets and get back to that point of attention and addressability, and context. That's a very powerful combination.

Matt: 100%. The other powerful combination we heard in our conversations with Google, how they're combining YouTube with Shopify. Now, all of a sudden, they really are creating the convergence of content in commerce. You can't really escape that in your world. It's not only not about impressions, you're talking about attention, but you have to go all the way down to the bottom of the funnel. If it's possible to buy through these platforms, then all of a sudden you're in the commerce game, right?

Leah: Yes, it's one of the things I'm most excited about. I love this whole notion of— I'm going to make up a word, commercification. The shoppability of all of these platform, we're making everything shoppable and—

Matt: Shoppable.

Leah: Yes. What's really interesting and fascinating about that is to think about what that means for the funnel. We talked about the race to the bottom and that implies a funnel. We are collapsing the funnel. We have smashed the funnel because anything that was a traditional brand-driving medium you can then click straight to purchase. What does that mean then? Is it a brand-driving activity or a performance driver?

I think that's also going to fundamentally change the way we think about KPIs and what "matters" to the advertisers of supplying media.

Matt: Absolutely. Let's talk about Web3 a little bit. I was teaching a class at Columbia that I do once a semester and it was a business school class. A bunch of the students were asking about crypto and about the Blockchain and is it dead. I gave them the example dating myself to the .com crash.

When pets.com came and imploded, a lot of people were saying, "See, the web is not going to be what everyone says it's going to be," It went away and Amazon's stock went from \$100 to \$3, and then the real work began.

Now, we have Amazon words today and so many other companies. Is that the innovation curve that you see the Blockchain and Web3 going down because I would imagine a lot of people, especially with recent news and what happened with FTX and the crypto crash. Do you see the innovation curve happening now with the real work begins once it's out in the headlines? How are you advising your clients about Web three and the Blockchain?

Leah: A couple of questions there. I do think these innovation cycles happen and I don't think the vision and the ultimate vision of Web3 is going away because of what's happening with crypto right

now. It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when. The direction of Web3 where we really have this interoperability, single decentralized identity, wallet, currency, whatever it is, I think that's where we're going to go. That vision's been put up there. It might just take a few iterations to get there.

Matt: We need to build the application. It's all about the applications of this technology in ways that are easily adaptable for consumers that aren't on the bleeding edge. That's ultimately what it has to be about.

Leah: We equate this a lot to mobile. We talked about the year of mobile for how long, a decade? It was the decade of mobile. In order to get us there, it took so long. Who would've imagined that when you were on your flip phone and even on your Blackberry, that you'd be watching Netflix on your phone taking off on an airplane?

Matt: I still remember the first time I showed somebody a video on the first iPhone in 2009. They're like, "No one's ever going to— Can you even see it with your eyes?" That's what people said. No one's ever going to watch long-form on this.

Leah: That's what people said and the same way that you're like, "I don't even know how to get into the metaverse." You know what? Eventually, we will. Eventually, we all will because we need to get the accessibility, we need to get the tech and the devices to all come and sync at the same time and it will. It will happen and we will go through these economic cycles.

Matt: It needs to meet consumers where they are, right?

Leah: That's exactly right.

Matt: Let's talk about another huge trend that has crossed over with advertising which is gaming. Gaming's worth over \$300 billion in the industry. Over 3 billion people are playing video games. It's interesting because more people are talking about the metaverse than gaming, where Facebook is pouring billions of dollars into the metaverse to no avail and has reportedly 50,000 users. Here you have 3 billion people gaming and I don't hear enough about it. I see that as such a massive entry point for brands to get to the younger consumer. What are your thoughts on gaming and how have you guys brought it to life for your agency?

Leah: We're very bullish on gaming. We call gaming the gateway to Web3, the gateway to the metaverse. It is one of these multiverses that it is one of these entities where consumers are experiencing multiple realities in an immersive space. It is and what's amazing about gaming is that it's scaled. All of those numbers that you presented are very, very real and only getting bigger.

The opportunity is very real. We've leaned into in-game advertising, that market's growing. I've read statistics over 15% growth year on year until 2025. We have lots of eyes and this is an area where we are specifically— This is cutting edge, bleeding edge. This is where we're leaning in for some of that innovation because we know that it's working. We know that it's scaled and we know that there's opportunity to measure and grow.

Two other areas that we've learned in gaming are attention. Going back to attention, we're partnering with companies like Twitch and Frameplay to understand attention metrics within the gaming universes. We're getting great responses in those spaces. We're finding that there is great brand affinity, the great connection for brand affinity, and consideration in those spaces. When it's done right and it's not intrusive, it's adding value to the gaming experiences. Is it about giving an

extra power or giving an extra point or what are you getting in those universes that are endemic and inherent to the way people game and play?

Matt: Tapping into gamification, right, as a communication module?

Leah: Totally. The other thing we're thinking about is also understanding gamers better. Another thought leadership piece that we've done recently across Dentsu is partnering with GWI, which is a leading market research company. What we've done is we've embedded their data on gamers into our panel, which we call CCS, in order to have a more robust scaled view of gamers that we can then put through all of our planning tools.

Matt: I can see why it's important especially given how quickly gaming is involved and the technology and how people use it, especially driven by the pandemic. We're recording this today, the second week of November. By the time this comes out, maybe a month from now, I'm sure your answer may be looked at in a different context. What are your thoughts on what's going on with Twitter? How are you advising your clients relative to everything that's happened since Elon Musk has taken over? What is the role of an agency such as yours, in stepping in and having a strong point of view?

Leah: At the moment, we're evaluating on a case-by-case basis with clients. I think agencies have an important role to play as partners to their clients. I think those conversations happen one-on-one, not in public forums. I think it's important to have that confidentiality and trust with clients, knowing their sensitivities, their risk tolerances.

First and foremost our ambition is always to make sure that our clients are in brand-suitable environments, that we are protecting the integrity of our client's brands. That goes both ways. It's very difficult not to conflate politics with a lot of things that happen in these situations. I think we want to be very mindful of that.

Matt: It crosses over, right?

Leah: It does, indeed.

Matt: Absolutely. Let's look ahead to 2023. I was introduced last week to a tool called Jasper.AI, which absolutely blew me away. It creates copywriting on demand, and you can basically describe any picture and it'll make the picture for you. I'm sitting here thinking, "This thing is like an ad agency that's basically in your computer." I'm starting to think about what the implications are for Madison Avenue, et cetera.

Obviously AI, it's going to change the world. It's one of those things where I was like, "What's the application of it?" It was the first time that I actually saw an application of AI and started to get it. Including or besides AI, what are some of the trends that you have your eye on heading into 2023 that are emerging alongside something like the metaverse?

Leah: Yes. Is Jasper AI on ai the one that has the blue jay on the rainbow macarons?

Matt: I think so.

Leah: Is that the one?

Leah: I saw it too, and I was like "That's awesome." Yes, AI and automation I think are really interesting and powerful tools and they might go in concert and in combination with each other. I think the more we evolve, the more we stretch human capability. We get to shed some of the mundane and repeatable tasks that we have. I would love to see us lean into technology in those areas, not as a threat, but as a push for us to be smarter, better, and more creative. Because ultimately and at the end of the day, a machine will still be a machine.

We did this research that I really loved. We call it the consumer 2030. One of the trends is we call it the synthetic society, and the other one is called the human divide. These are two out of the four trends we talk about. I love thinking about these concepts because one of them is about more tech, more virtual, implanting chips in people's heads, it's next-level futuristic stuff. The other side is about humanity and the importance of human connection and the ability of humans to feel and emote.

I think AI automation, it is art and science and that's exactly where I think about these AI automation areas. We'd be silly not to lean into them,

Matt: Of course. We have no choice. We're not going backwards.

Leah: We're not going backwards and it will enhance and evolve what we are able to deliver. I think at the end of the day, we— And I hope that we continue to be humans. We are still emotive beings. We are rational beings, that's what makes us people. That's where the human ability will continue to stretch and complement what tech can bring. Yes, that's one big area.

Matt: Let's wrap up and switch gears, and wrap up with you, Leah. Obviously, you've been very successful in a very competitive industry. What advice would you have to somebody starting out, getting to the advertising industry, that might be one of our listeners, in terms of how to work your way up the corporate ladder, to get to where you are? It's competitive and you also have to obviously always have your finger on the pulse of what's next, which isn't always easy when you're working with these major demanding clients. What have been the come threads to your success throughout your career?

Leah: The successes around relationships. This continues to be a people business. The way you get opportunities is by talking to people, understanding where there are gaps, learning about yourself, learning about how other people have grown, and then finding opportunities to zigzag balance and find gaps for yourself.

The kicker comes in today when it's a different world and we're not always in person. I think we have a lot of conversations about what a future of work reality looks like, especially new people coming into the advertising industry, they've never worked a five-day week in an office. It's glorious not to have to go into an office and to have the ultimate end all be all flexibility.

My answer has evolved a little bit in the past couple of years, and I'm going to say even more so in the last 6 to 12 months because I love not going into an office for a while. I would say "Remember that human contact really does matter and in order to build those relationships, being in person makes a difference."

Going back to business school, one of the classes I took was power and politics. One of the things we talked about is where you sit in an office makes a difference. If you're not in the office, you can't have that visibility. If your boss is in the office, think about whether you should be there, too.

Matt: That's a great point. Couldn't agree more. We just reopened an office. Our lease ended in May 2020. We didn't have an office for a couple of years. We just opened up an office in New York and it's been a game changer for us to be around people again, and still offering a certain degree of flexibility but having a mixed world.

Leah: It's both. It's both.

Matt: Yes, it is both, I agree. Totally agree more. As a last question, Leah, obviously, you must work very hard and you're always thinking about what next, and running around really fast in a demanding world. What do you feel is worth slowing down for you personally, that gives you that yin and yang and allows you to get some sanity in this world?

Leah: Family and friends. It's probably cliché, but it doesn't matter if we're not able to share anything with those around us. Again, it goes back to humanity. I love talking about tech and I love talking— The fact that we're even living the lives that we are in this hybrid society is awesome to me, but spending it with people is really unparalleled.

I think it's really hard to say, "Slow down" when you work at an agency and have 2 kids under 10, but being present is critically important. Its presence versus speed or even solitude or silence. For me, it's enjoying the moments that you're in, even if it's a 30-minute conversation with us and not even looking at the phone or maybe it's my-

Matt: Even this podcast is an escape, right?

Leah: It's an escape, right?

Matt: Yes.

Leah: It's my Saturday morning ritual where my husband lets me sleep another hour, and then I go work out on my own while he watches the kids. That's slowing down and it's always accepting that invitation to have dinner with friends or take that trip despite the other things that are going on.

Matt: Excellent. Fantastic advice. Thanks so much for that and thanks so much, Leah. This has been an incredible conversation. I cannot wait for our listeners to hear it. On behalf of Suzy and the Adweek team, thanks again, Leah, for joining us. Be sure to subscribe, rate, and review the Speed of Culture podcast on your favorite podcast platform. Until next time, see you soon everyone, take care.

Matt: The Speed of Culture is brought to you by Suzy as part of the Adweek podcast network and Creator Network. You can listen, subscribe to all of Adweek's podcasts by visiting adweek.com/podcast. To find out more about Suzy, head to suzy.com and make sure to search for the Speed of Culture in Apple Podcast, Spotify, and Google Podcast or anywhere else podcasts are found. Click follow so you don't miss out on any future episodes. On behalf of the team here at Suzy, thanks for listening.