



Andrew Stanleick

People Should Not Just Tolerate Change, But Have A Passion For It



Adam Bryant [in](#)

Senior Managing Director at The ExCo Group; Author, "The Leap To

September 6, 2023

Andrew Stanleick, CEO of The Beauty Health Company, shared his key leadership insights in my latest "Art of Leading" interview. Subscribe [here](#) to receive future interviews.

Q. What's your playbook for leadership?

A. It's important to establish a clear vision, assemble a strong team, and then set clear KPIs, because you get what you measure. But honestly, the only certainty in business now is change, and I've always sought out roles that have opportunities for transformation and change. Those roles bring risk, but also a lot of learning.

Q. What are the top do's and don'ts for driving transformation that you've seen in your career?

A. The first rule of navigation is to know where you are and then articulate a compelling vision of the future for the team. It's so important to have that anchor of a shared understanding of the current situation. Then it's about executing the transformation with energy and focus.

This became more clear during Covid, but companies tend to underestimate the amount of communication they need with their associates, especially in a hybrid environment. I spend a lot of time in meetings with people across our company repetitively communicating our strategy and the journey we're on.

Transformation is not a straight line. There are ups and downs, and twists in the road. You have to bring team members along, keep them engaged in that journey, and communicate the early wins to build momentum.

A big part of the message to everyone is that they should not just tolerate change, but have a passion for it. There's a quote by Alan Watts, the English writer, that I share often with my team: "The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance." That is the sentiment I want to reinforce all the time at every level throughout the organization.

Q. What were the important early influences that really shaped who you are as a leader today?

A. I grew up in a tiny fishing village in Devon, England. I spent a lot of time working on a commercial fishing vessel out at sea. We were out for days on end, working with people from all different backgrounds and countries. These experiences had a profound impact on me. They taught me patience, and the importance of teamwork and embracing differences. Over my career, I've worked in nine countries on four continents.

Q. Commercial fishing is dangerous work.

A. You have to be extremely self-disciplined and organized. If you don't have things ship-shape and tied down on the boat, people get hurt. Thankfully, in our business here,

people are not getting hurt. But it's still important to have self-discipline, governance, and the right steering system to ensure that we remain on track for our strategy and bring our team along.

Q. What are a couple of key leadership lessons you've learned over your career?

A. A key lesson I learned early on is to really listen generously. The companies I worked in early in my career had very aggressive, performance-driven cultures, and I wasn't listening generously. Over the last decade or so, I've learned to be a more effective leader by listening. If you make time to go to the front lines, spend time in factories and be out in the field with sales reps, you get the best intel.

You've got to make things happen with what you know today.

I say this often to people at all levels of our organization, but leaders need to have a bias for action. Earlier in my career, I wanted all the information I could get before making a decision. But I learned that you have to become comfortable making decisions with imperfect information. If you wait until you have everything you want to know, you'll miss the opportunity. You have to be willing to make an educated decision. You've got to make things happen with what you know today.

Q. How do you make sure your teams operate like true teams?

A. I am very clear on articulating the vision for the company and my expectations, including that people collaborate and role model our values. I expect leaders to seek each other's counsel, leverage their colleagues' strengths, and be transparent and open with each other.

We also believe in the concept of alignment over agreement. We can have, and we encourage, fierce debate behind closed doors, but when we leave that room, we go out and we're unified. Our number-one team is the executive committee, even though all of us on the committee are on

many other teams in the organization.

Q. How do you hire?

A. I look for people who are smart and have relevant experience. I look for people who can come in and build on our company values. I don't want to work with divas or meanies, and I do want to work with people who have low ego/high EQ, because EQ is such a competitive advantage and differentiator in today's global business environment.

I look for people with passion, because I want to work with people who bring energy rather than being energy vampires. I also ask questions that assess people's agility and their nimbleness, and I need to know that they understand that change is constant, and I want to see their excitement about the idea of building and creating something together.

I'll ask them to tell me about a project they worked on — what didn't go according to plan and how they managed that. I can tell from their answers and body language whether they would like a rapid growth environment. No one likes to talk about times when things did not go their way, but I can understand so much from a person based on their attitude about a pivot or what they've learned from difficult periods. I'm often struck when people stare at me with a blank face when I ask them this question.

I also like to understand when people have been on top of their game and they were really delivering. What was the best role of their career? What did that feel like? What was the culture? How did they show up? That's always very revealing, as well.

[Subscribe here](#) to get future "Art of Leading" interviews.