

Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg in Lead, Lead Again

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HOFFMAN: When technologies become ubiquitous and essential, they also generate opposition. Take PowerPoint, a product I use almost every day. There's a whole cottage industry of PowerPoint haters online. They publish essays with headlines like "PowerPoint Makes Us Stupid" or "PowerPoint is Evil." They dabble in politics. Like Switzerland's "Anti-PowerPoint Party." Google it if you don't believe me. You'll find on their website a rousing slogan: "Finally—do something!" And if any party stalwarts are out there listening, I have news for you: Sheryl Sandberg, the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, finally did something.

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SANDBERG: I don't love PowerPoint presentations in meetings for me, because I want them to be more discussions. So I kept saying, "Please don't bring PowerPoint, please don't bring PowerPoint" at Facebook for years—but everyone kept bringing PowerPoint. So one day, probably more frustrated than I needed to be, I just said, "No more PowerPoint at any of my meetings."

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HOFFMAN: There was just one problem. Sheryl's words carry a lot of weight at Facebook—sometimes more weight than she'd like. Before long, she found herself squaring off against the PowerPoint enthusiasts. They're not as vocal. You might call them the silent majority.

SANDBERG: So then a few months later, I was getting ready to get on stage at the global sales conference—so all of our global people from around the world—and I looked at someone who was standing there—my friend Kirsten, who was in HR at the time—and I said, "What are the things you think they're going to ask me about?" She said, "Well, everyone wants to talk about the PowerPoint thing."

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I said, "What PowerPoint thing?" She said, "You know, the no PowerPoint thing, it's very hard to do client meetings without PowerPoint." And I said, "What 'no PowerPoint' thing for clients?" And I realized that my instruction, "No PowerPoint," got translated through this large organization as Sheryl says, "No PowerPoint in client meetings." So I got on the stage and I said, "One, I'm sorry, I didn't mean that. Two, it is on me that if you all thought that, and that was a stupid idea, you need to speak up and tell me. Of course you have PowerPoint with clients. Clients love PowerPoint. I don't." It was just a

really good lesson that I needed to be super careful that things didn't get taken too far, but also that I needed to make sure people could speak up.

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HOFFMAN: There are great uses of PowerPoint and there are bad uses of PowerPoint. I'd rather focus your attention on *how* Sheryl handled it. She doesn't just want to be heard, she wants to be challenged. She's not afraid to be wrong, and she's not afraid to change course. And that's what makes her a great leader at scale. Great leaders of fast-moving organizations don't just make plans, they break them.

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[THEME MUSIC]

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HOFFMAN: This is Masters of Scale. I'm Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn and partner at Greylock. On this episode of Masters of Scale, I'm going to test one of my theories on leadership. The kind of leadership you need in an organization that's changing fast—so fast that the office you leave at night is different from the one you walk into the next morning. I believe to lead an organization to scale, you have to be as skilled at breaking plans as you are at making them.

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Every day, there are new competitors, new threats, new opportunities. There's no simple, straightforward set of marching orders. It's more like a dogfight. You and your team will be flying upside down and at an angle sometimes.

Now Sheryl is one of those gifted leaders who's made daring decisions at every level of scale. She can run a team of four or 400 or 40,000. I wanted to talk to her about leading a company as it scales, because she is literally the archetype for this kind of leader. You'll frequently hear investors, like me, say to founders: "We need to find you your Sheryl Sandberg."

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It's funny, because if you had found Sheryl Sandberg at the beginning of her career, she probably would have turned you down.

SHERYL SANDBERG: The main thing I was raised with is, "Don't go into business," and "It's good to be a doctor." My father was a doctor. I have two siblings, they're both doctors, one of them married a doctor. Being a doctor was good, it was giving back.

Working in nonprofits or the government was considered very good. Business was a little suspect.

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I started my career working at the World Bank. I worked on leprosy in India, AIDS in India, blindness in India. If you had asked me the day I graduated college if I would ever work in the private sector, I would have thought you were insulting me.

HOFFMAN: So Sheryl started out in the public sector. She spent seven years at the U.S. Treasury Department, as chief of staff to Secretary Larry Summers. And in that position she rubbed shoulders with the aristocracy of American business. CEOs from every industry. In the late 1990s, she started to notice a certain type of executive who challenged all of her preconceptions.

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SANDBERG: People came into Treasury all the time, and most people wore suits. But not Eric Schmidt.

SIRI VOICE: Eric Schmidt was CEO of Google from 2001 to 2011. He's now Executive Chairman of Alphabet, Google's parent company.

SANDBERG: He looked, he felt different. Jerry Yang would come in—

SIRI VOICE: Jerry Yan was the founder of Yahoo!

SANDBERG: Those were the Yahoo! days. They looked, they felt different. It really felt like they had this energy and passion around changing the world. I remember this one day, I was with Larry Summers, and we had a lunch in New York. It was all the bankers, everyone was wearing suits. It was very formal.

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Then we flew across the country. Eric Schmidt picked us up in his car, wearing jeans, and took us to a local pizza place with Jerry Yang. And we sat there, and they were talking, and everyone's eating off each other's plates. And the stark contrast between those two meals—the formality and the what felt very traditional about the world I was living in, and the informality and the big ideas that were discussed at that dinner of what seemed like the new world—convinced me that for-profit companies actually were mission-based. And that's how I got to Google.

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HOFFMAN: Sheryl took the job at Google in 2001 and moved to Silicon Valley. Her title was “Business Unit General Manager,” which sounds important. Incidentally, Google didn’t have any business units to manage.

SANDBERG: I remember my first week. Eric was busy and they were working on a big re-org for the engineering department.

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At the end of the week, I figured out what the reorg was. The reorg was every single engineer would report directly to Wayne Rosing, who was the VP of engineering, so about 200 engineers—that was the re-org. They were going to all report directly to him. It was a crazy thing. Saying 200-ish people should support directly one person was saying we don't want management, and that was exactly what they were saying. It was unorthodox and cool and had the property that we really trusted our employees to do the right thing. I learned it was different from the Treasury Department right away. Right away!

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HOFFMAN: Probably minute three.

SANDBERG: Minute three.

HOFFMAN: It's fundamentally not a good idea to have 200 engineers report to one manager. Among other things, you want your engineers to feel like someone’s paying attention to them. I’m sure Sheryl could name all of the reasons not to do this. But to her credit, she doesn’t. She adjusts to this strangely amorphous team by her third minute on the job. And that’s the reaction time she’ll need, because Sheryl is about to learn what every leader of a fast-growing startup knows: every plan is made to be broken.

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SANDBERG: My team was four people, and they were very worried we were going to grow. So my first day I said, “Don't worry. We're all going to interview everyone.” Two weeks later, the team was 12 people, and it was completely unreasonable to have a person interview with 12 people. Plus, you only had 12 people to do any work, so if everyone interviewed everyone—that didn't work at all. So this promise I had made to make them feel good about scaling, I took away in a week.

HOFFMAN: The path to scale always, unfortunately, includes some broken promises, as Sheryl would soon find out. Everything—from interviews to office space—changes as you grow. And even a small take-back can matter to a team.

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SANDBERG: I'll give you another silly example that I don't think is silly—birthdays. We celebrated everyone's birthday that day. Then it became that week. Eventually we had a huge sheet cake with quarterly birthdays. My team was 4,000 when I left, and everyone's name is on it. Now it sounds like that wouldn't matter, but it did—because if you started out and we celebrated everyone's birthday, and we took that away, that was a problem. Now I'm not saying, “Be mean and don't celebrate birthdays.” I'm saying, “Figure out what your systems are going to look like later, and do it now.”

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HOFFMAN: I want to note a crucial distinction here: When it came to hiring new employees, Sheryl failed to anticipate how quickly her plan would unravel. But in the case of birthday parties, she did. And she worked out a solution: sheet cakes. That's the key to leading through scale. You can't stop the onslaught of challenges. But you can identify the moment when they force you to pivot—and start buying bigger cakes.

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As the team doubles and triples in size, a skilled manager keeps a vigilant watch for systems that are failing. But the best managers? They don't spot changes on their own. Their team surfaces problems for them. The trick is getting them to speak up.

SANDBERG: When our team was growing, I interviewed everyone who joined globally. And when we were at 100 people I noticed that the queue for my interview was a kind of holding up our hiring process.

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So I said in a meeting with my direct reports, “I think maybe I should stop interviewing,” fully expecting that they would jump right in and say, “Absolutely not. You're a great interviewer. We need your personal recommendation on anyone on your team.” You know what they did? They applauded. And I thought to myself, “I've become a bottleneck, and you didn't tell me—and that's on me.”

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HOFFMAN: Notice what Sheryl focuses on here. She isn't bothered by her team applauding her decision to step aside. She's disturbed by the fact that no one told her the truth. She knows she needs *everyone's* honest input to make the frequent, fast decisions Google's business demands. And that kind of openness doesn't happen on its own. Leaders have to embrace truth-telling. Especially when they learn that they are the problem.

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SANDBERG: I thought my interview was that important, no one else did. I was their boss, I was their manager. If they didn't tell me, that was on me. I realized I had to make it safe to speak up when I'm messing up.

HOFFMAN: One thing you should know about Sheryl is that she basically built Google's engine for growth. Her team powered AdWords, they ran the business that displays ads next to search results. It may not sound like a thrilling breakthrough.

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In fact, it became the lifeblood—the capital—that funds nearly all of Google's innovations. In essence, Sheryl and her team were building the infrastructure for global online advertising. The pressure to scale was immense. As her team swelled from dozens to hundreds, she learned to lead in a fast-changing environment. One essential skill, as we've seen, is to spot unsustainable systems.

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But there's a second skill that Sheryl would learn: how to hire people for roles that never existed before. She learned about this when she interviewed for a role like that.

SANDBERG: When I was interviewing for jobs, I had a really nice experience with Meg Whitman. I was interviewing at eBay.

SIRI VOICE: Meg Whitman is the CEO of Hewlett Packard and the former CEO of eBay.

SANDBERG: When I got to see her, I just said, "I don't have any relevant experience." And she said, "No one has any experience, because no one's ever done this before." I really took that lesson to heart.

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I did not go look for people with online ad sales experience. And that's a good thing, because there was no one with online ad sales experience.

HOFFMAN: So Sheryl had to hire people for roles at Google that had never existed anywhere before. But she also had to hire them without knowing what she'd need in just a few weeks or months. Changing organizations have changing needs. It can be hard to predict just how long you'll need a given skill set. And that's one of the hardest challenges of managing through scale.

I asked Bill Gates—who you might have heard of—how he wishes he had handled hiring in the early days. He shared some wistful advice.

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HOFFMAN: If you were to call your younger self and tell yourself, “OK, here are some principles by which you should hire differently.” What would that phone call to your younger self be?

GATES: When I was young, I always hired thinking our organization would grow a lot. But the notion that these intelligences were as specialized as they are—I was so wrong—I thought, partly because of myself, or misperceptions of myself, that, “Hey, I can learn sales, what is that?”

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You know, profit/ loss—you take the sales, you subtract the costs. Do you need to go to business school? I don't think so. I didn't have enough respect for different, deep knowledge, I didn't have enough respect for good management—what really good management is.

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HOFFMAN: Bright young founders, listen carefully: you have to start swapping out what I call “generalists”—those jacks-of-all-trades—with “specialists”—experienced executives who know how to lead massive teams. I've seen companies swap upwards of a third of their managers in *18 months*. Let me tell you, these are not easy conversations to have with the people who fought alongside you in the trenches.

It's one thing to make and break company plans. It's another thing to make and break commitments to human beings. It takes practiced diplomacy to navigate those decisions.

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My friend, Selina Tobacowala, has that type of diplomacy. She's a serial entrepreneur who co-founded Evite.com, an early online invitations service, and is now co-founder of a startup called

Gixo. I asked her how she thinks about hiring people who can scale with the company.

SELINA TOBACOWALA: I think that one of the biggest learnings I had is, how much are you hiring the right person for that time, and then, how much are you hiring the person who's going to be the right person in 18 months or 24 months, as you're growing?

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And I'm not sure I always made those right decisions, but those were decisions you had to keep revisiting—because you had somebody who was crushing it at that moment. Then two years, three years down the road, they're a manager—is super unhappy, or isn't capable. But then at the same time, there were certain situations where we sort of hired somebody who couldn't get their hands dirty. Then it was a very frustrating 18 or 24 months, if they made it that long. So I think there's this question—which I feel like I don't necessarily have the answer to—but it is balancing, hiring the people who can get the job done *now* versus hiring the people who will also be successful later.

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HOFFMAN: This balancing act between who you need now, and who you'll need later, is no small feat. In the early startup stage, you need all-rounders who love to get their hands dirty. Later on, you need polished managers who know how to delegate. Not everyone makes it through every company turn, and not everyone is destined to be a manager. Some people are best as individual contributors—as an engineer, not as a VP of Engineering.

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The key to keeping a happy team as you scale is to give your employees a frame to understand what's going on. You need to give each employee multiple ways to tell their own story of heroism, so they can say to themselves, “I'm a major contributor, I matter here. I may not be an executive, but I am making progress in my career.” Because the reflexive story that people tell themselves is, “I'm the first product manager, so I'm going to be the head of product from the time we're five people in a garage, until we become a 10,000 person company.”

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And that's actually pretty unlikely. Sheryl's team at Google was about to grow from four to 4,000. She had to hire for uncertainty—being ready to make and break plans. And she had to hire *fast*.

SANDBERG: We needed to hire really quickly. So we started that “temp-to-hire”

program. We just hired people as temps. And then we would evaluate them over the course of the first month, two months, and then we would convert the most successful of them to full time. It was a great way to scale in those very early days, when we needed a lot of work done very quickly.

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It also got us to hire people we probably would have otherwise not hired: people who didn't necessarily interview well, people who didn't necessarily have the background that Google was always looking for. But they came in and did great work.

HOFFMAN: Hiring temps is a great hack when you need to hire quickly. But not every company can rely on hiring temps. And there's also a tension in every growing company between hiring fast and hiring well. Founders have different philosophies on which to emphasize and when.

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My friend Mike Cassidy has some rules around this which I asked him to share. He's now launching his fifth technology startup, Apollo Fusion. I want to tell you the secret sauce of his new company, but I can't—he's in "stealth mode." And he's hiring quickly—but not hastily. There's a limit, he says, to how fast you should go.

MIKE CASSIDY: If you count the hours in the day that you're looking at resumes and doing interviews, and then onboarding people—it's hard. If you've got six people in the company, you can probably only hire another six people in three months, and then another 12 people three months after. That really is challenging.

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HOFFMAN: What are some of your rules in early hiring?

CASSIDY: I think one of them is, a bad hire in the first 15 is fatal to the company. So really watch out for those bad eggs. I have a whole set of interview questions and techniques that I am a really big believer in—trying to determine if someone is a team player, versus, "I got my stuff done, the other person's gotta get their stuff done."

HOFFMAN: Mike Cassidy isn't the only founder who puts a premium on each early hire. Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, tells me he believes in setting the highest possible standard for each role.

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ZUCKERBERG: So the single most important thing is to get the best people you can around you. When I look at my friends who were running other good companies, the single biggest difference that I see in whether the companies end up becoming really great and reaching their potential, or just pretty good, is whether they're comfortable and really self-confident enough to have people who are stronger than them around them. I've adopted this hiring rule, which is that you should never hire someone to work for you, unless you would work for them in an alternate universe.

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Which doesn't mean that you should give them your job, but just if the tables were turned and you were looking for a job, would you be comfortable working for this person? I basically think that if the answer to that is "no," then you're doing something expedient by hiring them, but you're not doing as well as you can on that.

There are all these things that Sheryl, for example, is just much stronger than me at, and that makes me better and makes Facebook better. And I am not afraid or threatened by that—I value that. That's what makes Facebook good.

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HOFFMAN: So there are times to hire fast, and there are times to hire slow. And in 2008, Mark began a very slow professional courtship of Sheryl Sandberg. By this time, Sheryl had scaled Google's online sales team to more than 4,000 employees. Collectively, they brought in two-thirds of Google's revenue. This fact wasn't lost on Mark when he first met Sheryl at a friend's Christmas party. And Mark also made a fast impression.

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SANDBERG: I met Mark, and I was just inspired. I had been using Facebook. I saw its potential to make us who we were—putting yourself and your picture and your real friends and your real connection and your real birthday online—was such a big leap, but it was one that really resonated for me, because it enabled us to have personal connections. I believed in the mission, and then I just really believed in Mark. He had energy and passion and big vision. He said, "Everything's going to be social." Sounds obvious now. Nothing was social then.

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HOFFMAN: But how do you bring in a senior exec of Sheryl's caliber? Patiently. Mark knew he couldn't reverse the engine on *this* hire. He had to get it right the first time.

SANDBERG: To say I had multiple conversations with Mark is kind of the understatement. He was a late-night guy. He didn't come into the office particularly early, so he would come over for dinner at eight. I would literally have to kick him out at 11:00 or 12:00. We had dinners once or twice a week for months. I think way earlier than he decided he wanted to work with me, I decided I wanted to work with him.

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That was the only way I was going to have six hours a week of time I didn't have of endless conversation. But I think he was right, because by the time we worked together, we had really talked about who we were, what we believed in, what we thought the potential was of Facebook to scale, how we would scale.

We also got the world's best advice from my husband, Dave. Mark and I didn't agree on a lot of substantive things at that point. Dave told me, "Don't work any of those out. You never will." He said, "What you want from Mark is process agreement on how you will work things out. Because even if you work all the questions you have out now, they're going to change."

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HOFFMAN: I'd like to take a moment to reflect on Sheryl's awesome husband David Goldberg, whose death in May 2015 came as such a shock to everyone who knew him. He was the CEO of SurveyMonkey, and a generous mentor. This piece of advice is just one of the ways that he lives on.

SANDBERG: So we agreed we would sit together, we agreed we would always do the first meeting of the week on Monday, and the last meeting of the week on Friday. I asked him for feedback; he made it mutual. We would always give each other feedback every week. And it will be nine years next month.

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HOFFMAN: Notice how Sheryl and Mark take disagreements as a constant feature of their working relationship. If Mark and Sheryl had made promises to each other around specific solutions to specific challenges facing Facebook at the time, they would have inevitably broken those commitments. By promising they would always be frank, and work through disagreements—that was a promise that they have kept.

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It's a promise that sustains their relationship to this day, and underpins their company culture.

You have to be intentional if you're going to encourage debate. And there's no one better to talk about this dynamic than Margaret Heffernan—former CEO of five companies. She gave a TED Talk called “Dare to Disagree,” and she offers a simple advice to leaders: “Show, don't tell.”

MARGARET HEFFERNAN: I think constructive conflict is essential. It's how organizations think. One of the huge problems of running any kind of an organization is, how can you create an environment where people feel it's really safe to do that, where they're allowed to do it? And where people have, if you like, the robustness or maturity not to take it or make it personal.

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HOFFMAN: Sheryl, too, believes this focus on respectful disagreement and fast feedback is what makes Facebook resilient as a company.

SANDBERG: We all need resilience. We need resilience as individuals, and the way you build a resilient organization is, you learn from failure. You don't hide it, you embrace it.

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So, what does that mean? You have to get real feedback for yourself, for each other. You have to be open to feedback. You have to ask for feedback. You have to build in a culture where, when I think you need to do something better, or you think I need to do something better—we tell each other, and tell each other directly, and work it out. You have to embrace organizational failure. You have to sit down and debrief when things go wrong.

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Why did they go wrong? What can we learn, and what can we do better? It's organizations that hide things under the rug that don't create the resilience, because they don't learn.

HOFFMAN: This willingness to acknowledge failure and embrace disagreement is a critical advantage in a fast-moving industry, because it allows you to see mistakes earlier, so you can know what to tear down and what to build up.

Thoughtful scale leaders thrive on disagreement, because it gives them the information they need to test their ideas before they make and break plans. Indeed, they seek out colleagues who won't share their point of view.

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SANDBERG: The lesson everyone talks about, but I really mean, is you really do want to hire people who are better than you are, and who are different than you are. This is where we talk about diversity. I don't just mean racial, national, age, gender. All of that diversity is super important. In addition to that cognitive diversity, which you get from all those backgrounds, but also just personality diversity.

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If you are a white male who likes to code and sci-fi movies, you probably don't want your whole team to be that. I think about David Fischer. David Fischer and I have worked together at Treasury, at Google, and at Facebook. Personality types were just very different. I'm much more up and down. I will get nervous something's not moving fast enough. I will be exuberant, and I will be down. Not David. David is absolutely calm. Over decades of working together, that balance has really been important, because sometimes I'll look at David and say, "This is an emergency." He'll say, "No it's not Sheryl, calm down."

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And sometimes I'll say, "David, you're not moving fast enough," and he'll say, "You're right." I think Mark and I have that too. We are very different. We are separated by—obviously gender, 15 years, he's my boss, he's 15 years younger. Completely different personalities, completely different working styles—and I think's that served Facebook well.

HOFFMAN: You can't over-estimate this kind of diversity. You have to have colleagues who offer calm to your chaos, or put the occasional brakes on your speed. And it's fortunate that Sheryl and Mark balance each other out, because they would soon face one of the trickiest transitions in Facebook's history—an existential threat, requiring a rapid change of course.

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We have a word for these kinds of evasive maneuvers here in Silicon Valley. We call it an OODA loop. That's a fighter pilot term. It stands for observe, orient, decide, act. The fighter pilot who has the fastest OODA loop wins. The other one dies. If you've ever watched the movie Top Gun, you'll have a basic understanding of how an OODA loop works.

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Tom Cruise's character, Maverick, has a few bad guys on his tail. In a split second, he orients

himself to the enemy's formation. Then he decides to perform a crazy aerial maneuver—he acts, and he confounds everyone. Score one for the free world. Now I'm not suggesting that tech executives secretly want to blast each other out of the sky. What they do want is to perform slightly crazy, super-fast maneuvers, again and again.

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You'll often hear founders asking: What is the OODA loop of an organization or an individual? Because speed matters in combat, and also in fast-moving industries. In 2012, Facebook had to perform the mother of all OODA loops. Its users were migrating from desktop computers to mobile devices at a startling rate. Sheryl and Mark faced a tough decision.

SANDBERG: Our products were designed for the desktop. We realized the mobile transition was happening; it was happening way faster than we thought. It kept outstripping our predictions. So Mark did this company all-hands, which he still does when he wants to reset, or make sure we're on the right path.

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And he stood up at the company all-hands and said, "We're going to be a mobile-first company"—and he did it incredibly well. But then you know what happened the next day? Nothing. People still came in with their desktop screenshots, because that's what they knew how to build. So a couple of meetings in, Mark just said, "You know what? No more meetings, unless your mobile screenshot is first." Just by making that shift, he made the shift in the company—and we really had to force it. The company really got on board, but it meant retraining a lot of engineers.

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HOFFMAN: So a shift on this scale tends to make your board members and shareholders a bit antsy. Mark Zuckerberg shared their concerns. But the greater risk, in his view, was to take only a half-hearted step toward a new market.

ZUCKERBERG: We made one really important strategy decision, which was, often when companies need to take two years or so to rewrite their whole app or software for a new platform, they believe that they can't slow down feature development. So they do two things at the same time: they try to design a new product, while rewriting the existing product.

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I think that that ends up dragging everything out for longer, and increases the chance that you fail and die. So we made what was a pretty hard decision at the time, which was basically, no new features for two years, which is kind of a crazy thing.

HOFFMAN: Fortunately for Mark, he retained a controlling interest in the company. He famously turned down a \$75 million buyout offer in 2005, followed by a \$1.5 billion offer in 2006. This afforded his team the latitude to perform some truly daring OODA loops.

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SANDBERG: Mark's control enables us to have a long-term view. We were a newly public company. We disappointed a lot of people in our near-term revenue. That's because we only had so many engineers, and if we wanted to make money in the near-term that quarter, we should put it on desktop ads, and we did not. We were giving up a lot of current revenue for the promise of future revenue.

Mark and I sat in a room one day, and he looked at me, and he said, "We're going to do this," and I looked at him, I said, "You really can't be fired, and you're the only person who can fire me. If you're in, I'm in." It was a joke we had, but it's an important joke.

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HOFFMAN: This ability for a leadership team to joke together, to think together, to take risks together—it's what holds an organization together. It allows them to work towards the same goal, and orient thousands of people in the same direction. The constant course correction and OODA loops—the making and breaking of plans—feels less disorienting in the hands of great scale leaders.

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And to be clear, you're not going to achieve consensus on every decision. Employees may disagree passionately about a dramatic change of plans. What matters is how you have the debate, and what happens afterwards. Margaret Heffernan has a great example of this.

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HOFFMAN: And that's the truest sign of effective leadership—you invite discord, you welcome a noisy, feisty debate. But you ensure everyone understands and works towards the same goal. And this is where we reach the counterpoint.

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Leaders at scale have to be ready to make and break almost every plan—that’s the general rule. But there’s one plan you can’t break, one variable that must stay constant, and that’s the company’s mission. It’s the North Star that everyone orients around. For LinkedIn, it’s connecting people with opportunity. For AirBnB, it’s “Belong anywhere.” For Facebook, it’s “Connect the world.”

SANDBERG: The thing about leadership is you need people to follow you enthusiastically. People will do what they’re supposed to do if they work for you.

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But that's not what you want. You want to have an aligned mission. Rather than tell people to march four steps, you want to tell people, “We're heading there, get there as quickly as you can.” You have to repeat your mission and your purpose and the values you care about over and over and over. Sometimes you’re like, doesn't everyone know this? It doesn't matter. Starting out your meetings with, this is the Facebook mission, this is the Instagram mission, this is why WhatsApp exists, is so powerful—even if everyone knows it by heart—because it reminds you where you're headed and why you're going there.

[31:33]

HOFFMAN: The repetition of mission is extremely important, and I've seen it in all good scale leaders. It's actually one of the things that I had to learn myself, because I had a tendency to think, “Hey, everyone knows our mission. We’re all smart. Let’s move on.” I used to be somewhat skeptical of putting your mission statement or values on posters on the wall. It seemed controlling and vaguely Orwellian—like fascist marketing. But I had it backwards.

[31:59]

Those posters? You find them also in the most freewheeling companies—the companies that grant the greatest measure of autonomy to their employees. Now whenever I see mission statements plastered on every wall, stating, “Here’s our goal,” or “Here’s where we’re going.” I recognize that there can be an unwritten footnote: “Get there however you’d like.”

[32:21]

I’m Reid Hoffman, thank you for listening.

For additional insights and practical lessons based on my theories, go to entrepreneur.com/mastersofscale.

Next week on Masters of Scale:

[Episode teaser]

[CREDITS]

Masters of Scale is a Wait, What production in association with Stitcher. Our Executive Producers are June Cohen and Deron Triff. Our producers are Dan Kedmey, Jennie Cataldo, and Ben Manilla. Special thanks to Jessica Johnston, [?Syeda Sepulveda], Elisa Schreiber, Chris Yeh, David Sanford, Jai Punjabi, Stephanie Kent, and Rafeena Ahmad. Original music is by the Holladay brothers.

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