

MoS Episode Transcript – Jeff Weiner

CHRIS TOMSON: To build a drumbeat 101, the most basic pulse of a lot of popular Western music would be the four-on-the-floor on the kick drum, you kind of build from there. Then you'd bring that snare backbeat in, probably going to add some high-hat stuff.

REID HOFFMAN: That's Chris Tomson, drummer for the indie rock band [Vampire Weekend](#). That four-on-the-floor beat is one that all drummers know well. It's the gateway rhythm to more complex beats. But it's also one drummers keep coming back to. And Chris is no exception.

TOMSON: How was that?

HOFFMAN: He's relied on the four-on-the-floor since the very beginning of Vampire Weekend in 2006. Well, almost the very beginning.

TOMSON: The first couple of rehearsals that Vampire Weekend ever had, which were in some dorm rooms in Columbia, I was supposed to be the guitarist. That ended up not happening, mainly because we couldn't find a drummer.

HOFFMAN: That's right. Chris first joined the band to be the guitarist. But when the band was in need of a drummer...

TOMSON: We had a gig booked, I said I'd give it a shot, and here we are.

HOFFMAN: Because Chris never spent the years that most professional drummers spend honing their craft, he was forced to rely on simple, effective beats.

TOMSON: Another technique from early Vampire Weekend was playing just a really fast, kind of sloppy reggaeton beat. There's no drum fills, there's no ornamentation, it really is just sort of this backbeat that allows the song to build and to have this cool vibe.

I feel like it's almost cooler and more badass as a drummer to be egoless about it. It's not about hitting this sick drum fill, it's not about showing off, "Oh, I can do this cool thing with my chops." But serving totally the band context and the song.

HOFFMAN: Chris knows who he is as a drummer. He's not ashamed of his lack of frills or fancy drum solos. The backbone of the music is consistent, simple rhythms that never fail to get a crowd moving. When he is playing his rhythm, the rest of the band follows. They're in sync. They gel as a unit.

TOMSON: A drummer, in my estimation, in a band, is the heartbeat – or at least the driver. They can be sort of a foundation that everything builds on. If they're a little bit more flashy or a little bit more attention-grabbing, they can be a sort of the focal point.

HOFFMAN: And Chris knows that playing the style that lights him up inside is the way to define success.

TOMSON: If a show went by and I was not particularly noticed, that was a successful show for me.

HOFFMAN: For the past 13 years, Chris has been consistent with this no-frills attitude about drumming. And because the sound of the band begins with Chris' simple rhythms, he has helped pave the way to their success. But while Chris is at ease with his lack of chops, he still can't resist stepping out a bit.

TOMSON: I've actually, even just in the last year or so, started taking drum lessons for the first time. I'm usually bookended by 13- or 14-year-olds, learning rudimentary stuff. I've been in the situations where we'll play a gig for thousands of people and then the next day I'm working on something that a high schooler would learn.

HOFFMAN: Chris knows his drum style, and he keeps playing it. As a leader in your company, you should have the same mindset. Knowing how to keep playing the drumbeat of culture, mission, and values is how you get your entire team to start moving to the rhythm.

I believe every leader has to create a drumbeat for their company. The more irresistible that drumbeat is to you, the more naturally your team will follow.

[THEME MUSIC]

HOFFMAN: I'm Reid Hoffman, founder of LinkedIn, partner at Greylock, and your host. And I believe every leader has to create a drumbeat for their company. The more irresistible that cultural drumbeat is to you, the more naturally your team will follow.

There's no one "correct" drumbeat for a leader or an organization. Your drumbeat depends on your temperament. Your experiences. Your company. Your drumbeat might be efficiency, innovation, competition, or work-life balance. Or perhaps a mix of all these.

No two drummers will play the same beat in precisely the same way. And this is actually key. Your cultural drumbeat needs to authentically match both you and your team. Why? Because it needs to inspire those around you. And a drumbeat that doesn't inspire is worse than no drumbeat at all.

I wanted to speak to Jeff Weiner about this because he knows how to instill the drumbeat of culture, mission, and values throughout an organization. It's one of his superpowers. And one of the many reasons I chose him as CEO of LinkedIn, when I stepped aside.

In his over 10 years as CEO, Jeff grew LinkedIn's users from 33 million to more than half a billion. He grew revenue to more than \$6 billion and ultimately stewarded LinkedIn into its acquisition by Microsoft. He's an extraordinary scale leader, and his drumbeat is very much his own. The drumbeat for Jeff is compassionate management.

JEFF WEINER: I couldn't think of anything more important to teach than compassion. In a sense, compassion should be the platform upon which everything else is taught, especially in the modern era, especially with this increasing narrative about "us versus them."

HOFFMAN: Now, if the term "compassionate management" leaves some of you scratching your head – or even rolling your eyes – stay with me. Later in this episode we will explore exactly what Jeff means by compassion, how it translates to a business, and why he's made it his guiding principle as a leader. But we'll start with the drumbeat.

Jeff has always said that to define the drumbeat of your company culture, you need to say the same thing again... and again.. and again. Until you're sick of it. At least, I thought that's what Jeff always said.

WEINER: Yeah, that's not me. It's David Gergen.

HOFFMAN: I stand corrected.

WEINER: It's something I learned from David Gergen, who was a White House communications director for both Republican and Democrat presidents – which gives you an indication of how valuable people thought he was.

HOFFMAN: Both Red and Blue. Both Elephant and Donkey. Those two creatures march to very different beats. But David could effortlessly tango with both. There was something else that struck Jeff as he read David's book, [*Eyewitness to Power*](#).

WEINER: In describing what makes for an effective communicator, especially to a large group, David Gergen would say that you need to repeat yourself so often that you get sick of hearing yourself say it. And only then will people begin to internalize the message.

HOFFMAN: Note: It's not simply about repeating yourself. You have to repeat yourself so often that you get sick of hearing yourself say it. The key is: never reveal that you're bored.

WEINER: I think all effective leaders understand the importance and power of repetition. And it's counterintuitive, because once you say it just a second time, you start getting bored of it, and you just project that boredom onto the audience. You just assume that people have heard it before. They don't want to hear it again. But they've got their own priorities, they're focused on other things. And so that repetition is actually really important.

HOFFMAN: I have to admit: The need for repetition is something that completely eluded me when I was younger. I'd say things once and assume they were understood by everyone. It took me years to fully understand this need for a cultural drumbeat and how it started with me, as the leader, repeating myself, ad nauseam.

It takes time for every leader to come into their own. And Jeff's journey began just after he graduated from Wharton. He spent two years as a management consultant. And what did he learn? Well...

WEINER: It's probably the subject of many, many Dilbert comic strips.

HOFFMAN: If you're familiar with the Dilbert comics – and the way they poke fun at the farce of corporate ineptitude – you know this is a scathing assessment. Jeff developed his true drumbeat during his seven-year tenure at Yahoo!, where he led a team of thousands.

Midway through his time at Yahoo!, Jeff reached an unexpected turning point. It started when a flyer for a management seminar slid onto the desks of Jeff and his team. Jeff kept on sliding that flyer into his Someday-Maybe-Never pile.

WEINER: I put mine to the side and I didn't read it.

HOFFMAN: Jeff had acquired a healthy skepticism for management consulting. He knew what he was talking about. Remember, he'd been one himself.

WEINER: As a former consultant, I did understand where it could add value, and where it didn't necessarily add value. There's an old adage that sometimes consultants will take your watch and tell you what time it is. And so, like a lot of people, I was just skeptical.

HOFFMAN: But it soon became clear to Jeff that there was something special about this particular seminar.

WEINER: Sure enough, one member after another from my leadership team who was going through the program said to me – without realizing that other members of the team had relayed the same sentiments – that this was different, it was special, and it was really, really valuable.

HOFFMAN: So Jeff kept asking around.

WEINER: They kept saying, “You got to sign up, you got to make sure you take it.”

HOFFMAN: Jeff’s curiosity wrestled his skepticism to the floor and he signed up for the seminar. It was run by a consultant named [Fred Kofman](#). Fred had a way of bringing out the human side of management.

WEINER: I had never heard anyone write or speak like that on the subject of management or leadership or team-building, how important it is to remain mindful and conscious.

HOFFMAN: What Fred said resonated with Jeff deeply. When this happens, it’s a sure sign that you have discovered something that you can incorporate into your drumbeat. Especially if it breaks through your shell of skepticism.

WEINER: I can't recall if he used the word “compassion” specifically, but that was certainly implicit in all of the messaging. How important it was to get out of your own head, to be a spectator to your own thoughts, especially when you become emotional. To put yourself in the shoes of the people that you’re working with, to understand where they’re coming from, their strengths, their weaknesses.

HOFFMAN: Fred’s seminar came at just the right time.

WEINER: And it all resonated very, very deeply with me. I found Fred to be one of the most enlightened people I've ever had the opportunity to work with in business.

HOFFMAN: Jeff and Fred’s drumbeats were in sync and they became friends. Jeff turned to Fred when he was planning to move on from Yahoo!.

WEINER: The two of us got together for dinner and I was talking about what I wanted to do next. And I didn't know specifically, but I had a sense of a personal vision I was interested in pursuing. And that was to help expand the world's collective wisdom.

Fred sat back, and he said, “That's really interesting. I can see why you're excited about that. But wisdom without compassion is ruthlessness, and compassion without wisdom is folly.”

And it just stopped me right in my tracks. And I said, “Wow, Fred, is that the Dalai Lama?”

And he said, “No, that's me after a couple of Belgian beers.”

HOFFMAN: The words hit Jeff with more force than a keg of his favorite Belgian beer, which I happen to know is Chimay Blue.

WEINER: It was one of those moments where your worldview changes in an instant. And it was literally in that moment that I decided I was going to evolve that personal vision statement. And to this day, my personal vision statement is to help expand the world's collective wisdom and compassion.

HOFFMAN: Expanding the world's collective wisdom and compassion. That's a mission that could sit side by side with LinkedIn's.

And when Jeff joined LinkedIn as CEO, I had spent six years drumming the beat at LinkedIn. We had reached 33 million users, but I knew we could scale even faster. I wanted to smoothly transition the beat of the company to Jeff's own drumbeat. We went about it in a very specific way.

Jeff and I shared this next story in an earlier Masters of Scale episode, the one where I was the guest. Our executive producer, June Cohen, tells the story.

JUNE COHEN: And so Reid brought in Jeff Weiner as CEO. They both knew the transition could be perilous. Organizations don't easily swap out their leaders.

HOFFMAN: CEO transitions are super difficult because they are brain transplants, and they have all of the same potential downsides – also upsides – of a brain transplant.

COHEN: As with any kind of transplant, the new CEO runs the risk of being rejected. So Reid followed a very specific playbook to set Jeff up as the new hero of the business. Jeff learned about it on a phone call with Reid.

WEINER: Before I started, I called him and I said, "How would you like this to work? What decisions would you like me to make? What do you want to make?"

And he said "That's easy, it's your ball. You run with it."

HOFFMAN: You get the whole organization to adjust to Jeff being the CEO.

WEINER: And he said, "It's really important when bringing somebody in from the outside to make sure that everyone understands that that person will be responsible for the decisions."

He planned about six to eight weeks of time outside of the office over the course of my first 10 weeks at LinkedIn.

HOFFMAN: I was accepting any speaking engagement. It's the only time in my life where if the Weaver's Society of Canada asked me to speak, I would go speak to the Weaver's Society of Canada. I would get back, I would say, "Is it solved or not?"

WEINER: People had to re-establish connective tissue with the new guy.

HOFFMAN: More than half the time the person would get impatient, go solve it with Jeff and other people and would say, "Oh yeah, we got it solved."

I didn't allow any exceptions. "Jeff's the CEO, you gotta work for Jeff."

WEINER: I don't think I can overstate the importance of how this was set up.

HOFFMAN: It was like, "Oh, right. Actually, Jeff's great, we can work together on this. This really, really works." But it required that rewiring.

WEINER: Without a foundation like that where you have that clarity in terms of leadership and who is responsible for what, it's going to be really challenging to scale.

HOFFMAN: With the clarity of knowing that he would be setting the rhythm, Jeff set out to start his own drumbeat at LinkedIn. Note: For a founder, setting that drumbeat is often instinctive. You get to set the beat right from the outset. You have no legacy to overcome or accommodate. But if you're joining a company at a later stage, it's a lot more complicated. No matter how inspiring your own drumbeat is, it takes time to sync up with the beat that was in place when you arrived.

How did Jeff set the drumbeat at LinkedIn? Person by person.

WEINER: So I took the time to meet with literally every person of the company. At 330 employees, it was still manageable. That would be a lot more time-consuming today. And so before I decided on any plans going forward, I wanted to make sure I understood what was happening, and I wanted to learn as much as possible from the people who had developed the company up until that point.

HOFFMAN: That's right. Jeff met with 330 employees. That might sound excessive. And indeed, I don't know many scale leaders who would attempt it. But Jeff was setting himself up to initiate his own drumbeat – by first tuning his ear to the company's existing cultural rhythms.

WEINER: It's really important when coming into a situation like that, where you take time to recognize the work that had come before you, to not only acknowledge the good work but also double down on it. As opposed to coming in and thinking, "Okay, I'm new, everything that came before me must have been broken, and I'm going to create a narrative where everyone understands that, and now the good stuff starts."

HOFFMAN: Once Jeff got a handle on the rhythm – and how that played for every stakeholder at LinkedIn – he set out to create, sustain, and spread that drumbeat.

WEINER: For me, leadership is the ability to inspire others to achieve shared objectives. I think that's what separates leaders from managers. Managers tell people what to do. Leaders hopefully inspire them to do it.

HOFFMAN: “Managers tell people what to do. Leaders inspire them to do it.” This is Jeff distilling something that’s so simple that it can be easily overlooked. A great leader’s drumbeat doesn’t force people to follow them; it inspires them to move in the same direction of their own volition. Like any good dance rhythm, your drumbeat needs to get people on their feet and grooving together on a dance line towards the company’s goals.

If your drumbeat is out of sync with the people you work with, then it will fall apart, no matter how well constructed it is. If it’s a complicated beat that keeps changing rhythm, it will lead to confusion and chaos. If it is too simplistic, the people you lead will get bored with it. Rather than a synchronized glide, they’ll shuffle aimlessly like a zombie horde.

As a leader, your job is to keep the beat going without stifling the rhythm of your team. You need to inspire each one of them to participate.

WEINER: When I think about what makes for an environment or a team that is inspired or inspiring, it comes down to three things. One is the clarity of vision. Two is the courage of one's conviction. And three is the ability to effectively communicate those two things.

And if you don't feel that authentically, if you're just saying the words but you don't believe it deep down, if it's not there and in every fiber of your being, there's no way people are going to sign up for that journey.

HOFFMAN: To say that people signed up for Jeff’s journey would be an understatement. In his 10 years as CEO, LinkedIn grew from those 330 employees to over 15,000. From 33 million users to over half a billion. He led the company through an IPO and to a sale to Microsoft for \$26 billion.

Jeff credits these achievements to the drumbeat that was resounding through the halls of LinkedIn. That drumbeat was so successful because it was authentic. It’s worth rewinding to hear those last words again.

WEINER: And if you don't feel that authentically, if you're just saying the words but you don't believe it deep down, if it's not there and in every fiber of your being, there's no way people are going to sign up for that journey.

HOFFMAN: There are many drumbeats that will inspire a team to take the journey with a leader. In fact, there are as many drumbeats as there are founders. For Jeff, there's a particular drumbeat that pulses through everything he does. And that drum beat is compassion. We'll find out exactly what this means after the break.

[ADBREAK]

HOFFMAN: Before the break, we saw how Jeff established a drumbeat that cemented the culture, mission, and values that drove LinkedIn to phenomenal scale. That drumbeat, which is still going strong, is so effective because it's authentic. It's a drumbeat that Jeff found irresistible. And his passion for it meant he couldn't help but make it irresistible to everyone around him.

The authentic thump-thump-thump that drives Jeff's beat is compassion. Let me quickly acknowledge the eyerolls I can sense from some of you. If "compassion" makes you think of Care Bears skipping arm-in-arm through sun-dappled meadows, you might be left wondering how it applies to the cold harsh reality of business. And you aren't alone.

I asked [Dr. Monica Worline](#) at Stanford about the most common objections she hears from leaders when it comes to compassion. Monica is a research scientist at [Stanford's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education](#). And she hears this a lot:

MONICA WORLINE: "You know, Monica, I understand what you're trying to say and I know that people matter, but we have to focus on the bottom line. We can't be so touchy-feely." That is the primary response that leaders have to a conversation about compassion.

HOFFMAN: Monica and her colleagues have actually studied Jeff's methods of workplace compassion, and exactly why it works.

WORLINE: Organizations become more innovative, they become more adaptable, they become more engaging, and exhibit higher performance when people in the organization are focused on paying attention to each other's well-being and caring for each other.

That's a hard sell to most leaders. They don't really get the link between organizational performance and the quality of human interaction in their work. And so in that sense, Jeff is an outlier in his field.

HOFFMAN: Jeff is an outlier. And it's important to note that compassion is by no means required to scale a company. There are more counter-examples than examples. But Jeff's approach works, and I've learned a lot by watching it in action. I asked him how he responds to objections.

HOFFMAN: I've learned a great deal about the focus on compassionate culture and compassionate management from you, because not just is it kind of a good human thing to do, but it also is a business-effective, a business-competitive thing to do. Elaborate on the ways that you think compassion is an essential quality for a manager.

WEINER: For me, you know, compassion begins with putting yourself in somebody else's shoes, seeing the world through their lens, so you're in a position where you can help them or the classically defined alleviate their suffering. Though in a work environment I think it goes well beyond alleviating suffering.

HOFFMAN: To demonstrate this, Jeff points to the famous commencement speech David Foster Wallace gave in 2005, titled ["This Is Water."](#)

WEINER: And at one point, he talks about being stuck in traffic, as an example. And he talks about not just the traffic part of it, but where he was going, the supermarket he was shopping in, and all the people along the way, who are driving him crazy, who are pissing him off to no end.

And the assumptions that he made about their intentions or their lack of intentionality, and how it was creating so much frustration for him, that was the "before." Then he revisited the entire stream of anecdotes, putting himself in the shoes of these other people. And it's incredibly powerful.

HOFFMAN: So compassion isn't just about understanding other people. It also requires understanding yourself.

WEINER: That's the superpower. It's when you're being triggered, it's when you're triggered, you can get out of your own head, you can recognize when you're being honked at, "Wait a minute," – before you have that knee-jerk anger – it's "Wait a minute, I wonder what they're experiencing that's making them do that."

HOFFMAN: Jeff isn't saying you need perfect Zen poise. Indeed, the most ardent practitioner of Zen Buddhism will tell you that such a state is impossible to achieve. What Jeff is saying is that you need to know how to take a step back when you hit those triggers.

WEINER: There's a whole litany of reasons people may behave the way they do. But by taking the time to recognize that you can reset those conversations that would otherwise become more destructive and turn them into a far more collaborative exchange.

And when you start to compound that and multiply that throughout an organization, not just employee to employee, but you think about all the constituents within a company's

ecosystem – customers, shareholders, the press, analysts – it can really create a lot of value.

HOFFMAN: This modern understanding of a company as an ecosystem helps to make a compelling case for compassion. I wanted to learn a bit more about this. So I reached out to [Keesa Schreane](#), host of [the podcast “You’ve Been Served,”](#) where guests discuss compassion in leadership. Keesa coaches CEOs, and this idea of interconnectivity is at the heart of her work.

KEESA SCHREANE: I love defining compassion in terms of interconnectivity, intersectionality. And we talk about intersectionality as a cultural phenomenon: “I am a person of color, I am a woman.” There’s intersectionality there.

But if we look at businesses, in 1970 or '71, Milton Friedman, an economist, said that, “You know what? The role of a business is simply to make their shareholders happy, to make money for the shareholders.” And that’s one way of looking at it.

But if we combine making money for shareholders also with having compassion for everyone else in the ecosystem – that means the shareholder, that means the employee, that means the supplier and the partner – that’s what compassion really means. How can we leverage everything in the ecosystem to make this enterprise great? There is tremendous interdependence between all of these seemingly disparate aspects of the business ecosystem.

HOFFMAN: This ability to bring stakeholders to the table is at the heart of Jeff’s superpowers as a leader. It’s how he led LinkedIn through the acquisitions of Lynda.com and a host of other startups. It’s also how he led the company through the acquisition by Microsoft. And it’s how he leads today. It begins with his cultural drumbeat – but it lasts because he gets every person in the company to join in the rhythm.

WEINER: Another really important dimension there is ensuring that the organization is committed to manifesting culture and values throughout the lifecycle of the organization, the team. So that begins with recruiting, and recruiting against your culture and values.

Once you’ve found the right person and they have, at least in theory, the ability to fit when they’re onboarded, that first day when they’re there joining the company, to reinforce once again the culture and values that make this company unique and different and what you expect from them as individuals, to develop those people against your culture and values, to train, teach, and coach and mentor in a way that’s consistent.

HOFFMAN: One of the most common mistakes companies make as they scale is to drift from their consistent drumbeat. New employees join by the hundreds – or by the thousands – and they’re so far removed from the leader that they lose the rhythm. But Jeff made sure to reinforce

LinkedIn's cultural drumbeat in each new hire, and to make sure they were rewarded for keeping the beat.

WEINER: One of the most important elements of this is to evaluate performance in a way that's consistent with culture and values. All too often, organizations reward people who achieve results. And those companies don't necessarily pay attention to the "How?" and "Did they do it in a way that's consistent with our culture and values?"

HOFFMAN: As you scale, it's easy to reward people for the "what" instead of the "how." This is one of the ways companies lose their character as they grow. And it's a symptom of operating without a consistent drumbeat. When goals and targets change too often – when the drumbeat keeps shifting – your team will lose the rhythm. To Jeff, it was essential for the drumbeat to remain strong and clear.

You definitely don't want your drums to fall silent during a time of crisis. On a battlefield, drums can be used to rally your troops in the face of danger. The familiar beat fosters camaraderie, and it can be the deciding factor in standing to face overwhelming odds versus turning tail and fleeing.

For LinkedIn, one of the biggest tests of its drumbeat came in February 2016, when reduced forecasts saw the company's stock value crash by more than 40% in a single day.

WEINER: We certainly weren't the first company to experience that; we most definitely won't be the last. And every hyper-growth company has experienced something like that. And some, like Netflix, by way of example, had overcome it on multiple occasions, very significant inflection points where the valuation declines quite precipitously.

HOFFMAN: Jeff knew the crash wasn't the end of the world; but he also knew that a siege mentality could take hold at the company if he didn't start sounding that drumbeat again and get everyone back behind it.

WEINER: I just thought it was so important on that day to reinforce to the team and the company that while the stock price was lower, that was the only thing that had changed. We still have the same mission, we still have the same vision, we still have the same culture and values, we still have the same leadership. And that none of that would change as a result of the decline, that the work we were doing was more important than ever, and that we shouldn't get defocused by virtue of a stock price decline. So that was the thinking behind that day's all-hands.

HOFFMAN: Rather than trying to shift focus from the news, Jeff acknowledged it. And then made it clear why it didn't matter to the core of LinkedIn's mission. A video of Jeff making that speech went viral.

It's a clear example about how your team's shared beat can be a bulwark against despair, something everyone can rally around in times of war and times of peace. The challenge is to construct a beat that stands the test of time.

WEINER: For us, the narrative begins with a framework that we use, called "From Vision to Values." It starts at the top. The vision is the dream, it's true north. We delineate between the vision and the mission, insofar as the mission is a singular overarching objective that is measurable, realizable, and then hopefully inspirational. So that delineates the mission from the vision. That's the "what". The vision or the mission are our "what." And the culture and the values are the "how", they're how we go about doing what we do.

HOFFMAN: You need a clear vision of what you want to achieve and how to achieve it. You need to make sure that, when it comes to focusing on the mission and the values, everyone in your team has 20/20 vision. You do this with consistent repetition.

WEINER: There's a lot of value to consistency as well. Especially when you are cascading key messages to a company that's achieved scale: 5,000, 10,000, 15,000-plus employees.

The more messages that you're cascading and the more those messages change, the more complexity you introduce, the harder it is for people to internalize and understand what it is that you're trying to get across to them. And more importantly, once they understand those key messages, to act upon them, to execute what it is that the company is trying to accomplish.

HOFFMAN: Does that mean you never change? No, because static cultures are dying cultures. But when you do change the underlying drumbeat, it has to be carefully considered.

WEINER: I think it's important to remain open and flexible. We just changed one of our values for the first time in over a decade.

HOFFMAN: The change Jeff made? It was to one of LinkedIn's long-standing values, to "demand excellence."

WEINER: One of the things that as an executive team we had commented on over the years is that this idea of "demanding excellence" didn't seem entirely consistent with how we operate. Not the excellence part – we all set a very high bar, but the demand part. And it didn't feel authentic.

HOFFMAN: It may sound small. But everyone who was keyed in to the LinkedIn rhythm could feel something was off. Like a disturbance in the Force.

WEINER: We kind of all agreed that when it comes to “demand excellence,” the words kind of get stuck in our throat, because we’re not a demanding culture. That’s not what it’s about. And our head of internal communications, Blythe Yee, had the idea to tweak “demand excellence” to “inspire excellence.”

And as soon as she said it, you would think there’d be a lot of debate and back and forth given that it had been 10 years since we’ve changed any of the values. And it was just instantaneous. And everyone was like, “That’s it. It’s perfect.”

HOFFMAN: The agreement was instantaneous because LinkedIn had been moving for so long to a shared drumbeat. The team was in such alignment over their values, they instinctively knew the words were right. Jeff’s drumbeat of compassionate management was one that inspired excellence, rather than demanding it.

And Jeff continues to spread that value of compassionate management, even outside of LinkedIn. He recently launched [the Compassion Project](#), a national initiative to bring lesson plans on compassion to elementary school students across the U.S.

WEINER: The mission is to ensure that every primary school student, every elementary school student in the United States, can not only understand the meaning of compassion, but practice it.

And so we’re active in nearly 4,000 schools already, and the goal over time is to be active in every elementary school in the country. And there’s nearly somewhere between 70,000 and 80,000, primary schools in the United States, so that’s the goal.

HOFFMAN: Jeff believes compassion is crucial to navigating the new challenges technology is creating. And that’s as true in the boardroom as it is in the classroom.

WEINER: It’s increasingly important in the modern era, that companies focus beyond the what. That it can’t just be about meeting your business objectives and maximizing shareholder value. It also needs to be about how you go about doing that.

And without the how, what we’re finding increasingly in the world of technology, is that there are unintended consequences. And despite the best of intentions for these massively scaling innovations and platforms, it’s really important that people think about how they want to go about doing business. And that they’re in a position to not only do well, but to do good as well.

HOFFMAN: For Jeff, being compassionate is about striving to increase joy and decrease pain in your team, your customers, and the world. By doing so, you amplify potential – inside your company and out. And that’s a drum beat we can all get behind.

I'm Reid Hoffman. Thank you for listening.