

Masters of Scale Episode Transcript: Hamdi Ulukaya

“Chobani's secret to scale: Tap into community”

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HAMDI ULUKAYA: Growing up, the only way I could go to a city bigger than ours was by train at 6:00 a.m. in the morning. And then the next train would be the next morning, and then you would come back at night. And then the train comes in the train station and then leaves, and it becomes silent. And it was silent. It was always quiet.

HOFFMAN: That's Hamdi Ulukaya, founder of Chobani, recalling the teeny town by the Euphrates River where he spent part of his childhood. He spent the rest of his time roaming the surrounding mountains.

ULUKAYA: We are nomads, a Kurdish nomadic family of hundreds of hundreds of years caring for herds and shepherds and the fires and the stars. It's like the biblical time. The kids go to school in the wintertime. And then in the summertime they're up in the mountains, helping the shepherds and the families making cheese and yogurt.

HOFFMAN: This semi-nomadic upbringing gave Hamdi his deep sense of community.

ULUKAYA: Money meant nothing up there. So even if you had money, you couldn't buy anything with it. So what meant more was the social reputation, the trust. People respect people because of the other qualities, not necessarily what they own. If you had a thousand sheep, you ate the yogurt, cheese, and bread. And if you had 100 sheep, you ate the same thing. There was no difference.

HOFFMAN: When you're focused on growing a business, it's all too easy to get caught up in cash flow, investment, and profit. And that's understandable. Our companies need money to scale.

But Hamdi's semi-nomadic background taught him that there is another currency. The currency of social responsibility. This currency sees a shepherd help their neighbor through a harsh winter or a business help revitalize its hometown. And it brings people together in a sense of shared mission and co-ownership.

For Hamdi, this currency is more fundamental than money. It's why a sense of responsibility to the wider community has been a hallmark of his scale journey — and the defining factor in his success.

That's why I believe you should build a community with a sense of co-ownership. Because smart community investment always maximizes returns.

[THEME MUSIC]

HOFFMAN: I'm Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn, partner at Greylock, and your host.

And I believe you should build a community with a sense of co-ownership. Because smart community investment always maximizes returns.

Picture yourself in an idyllic American town of the 1950s. We're talking the airbrushed, movie-set version ideal — like Hill Valley from *Back to the Future* or Seahaven from *The Truman Show*.

What do you see? Maybe large chrome-finned cars gliding along wide, clean streets. Families window shopping among thriving small businesses: boutique clothes stores, a diner, a drugstore with a soda fountain. Shopkeepers wave cheerily and greet you by name as you pass by. Many of their businesses have been in the same family for generations.

This scene is highly distorted by nostalgia. But one thing that rings true is how business can — and should — be an integral part of the community.

That's because what makes a community thrive is the same thing that makes a business thrive: a sense of shared ownership, pride, and respect that motivates everyone to strive for the greater good.

This is why business has the most profound impact when it's embedded in a community.

I wanted to speak to Hamdi Ulukaya about this because his company Chobani reached massive scale thanks to the deep sense of community and co-ownership that Hamdi has fostered at the company.

Hamdi grew up with strong bonds from his semi-nomadic Kurdish community. When he left for university in Ankara, he saw how Turkish society as a whole was not as closely knit.

ULUKAYA: When I got to university, I became aware of social issues, human rights, especially on Kurdish issues, being Kurdish. And I started publishing a newspaper, and that got me into enough trouble that I had to get out of the country.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi arrived in New York with just a few thousand dollars to his name and basic English skills. He spent the next few years moving between colleges and jobs to support himself. Things changed when Hamdi impressed a teacher with an essay on the cheese-making of his nomadic upbringing.

ULUKAYA: She has a farm in upstate New York with her husband. And she's invited me to go up there for the weekend, so we can make some cheese with the goats that they have. I said, "Of course I would love to come." And when I get there, it was one of the

most beautiful sights. After five years of New York City's weight on my shoulder, Reid, I thought, wow, this feels like home. This is familiar. This is so beautiful. And of course it was another level of beauty.

HOFFMAN: The nomad found his next home, and this time, it felt like the kind of community he could invest in.

ULUKAYA: I fell in love. And I said, "If I'm going to stay in this country, this would be it." And I said I could stay here, and I could take care of the animals, and I stayed on that farm for a year and a half. Built relationships with the other farmers. And then that's how really being with the connection with the farmers and the milk and our connections back home, how we made cheese and yogurts, and things started from there.

HOFFMAN: After Hamdi took classes at State University of New York-Albany, he left that farm to find full-time work. And he looked back to his nomadic childhood for inspiration.

ULUKAYA: My brothers and my family would make cheese, not necessarily 100% feta cheese, but the form of feta cheese. We call it tulum. As a kid growing up, we would just make it. It was a small business, no vats, and everybody would do the same thing.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi's father shipped over the cheese, and Hamdi sold it to a local distributor. However, importing was expensive and inefficient. So Hamdi quickly developed his idea and moved from importing to creating. He found a small, affordable site in Johnstown in upstate New York and set to work.

ULUKAYA: I really had no business experience. So I'm very foreign to this whole thing, but I'm still driven by it. And we set up this small cheese plant. I had really enormous support from the local community there, the economic center there.

HOFFMAN: Making cheese and yogurt had become a way for Hamdi to invest in the rural community he'd fallen in love with. Euphrates feta cheese was born. But there was one small detail Hamdi had overlooked.

ULUKAYA: And the first cheese came out, and I said, "Oh, what do I do with this now? So I have to sell. And it's like, who buys this cheese?"

HOFFMAN: Well, there was at least one family who bought it.

HOFFMAN: By the way, I've had some of the Euphrates feta cheese.

ULUKAYA: No way?

HOFFMAN: Yes.

ULUKAYA: Really?

HOFFMAN: Yes. I had some of that when I was younger, because my family from California is a little bit foody, so we tend to look for interesting and good international foods.

ULUKAYA: Sure, yeah. There's a lot of ethnic food tradition in California: Armenians and Greeks and Turks and Lebanese. Yeah. It's massive. And feta is the center of all of those dishes.

HOFFMAN: But a few foody families wouldn't be enough to sustain Euphrates.

ULUKAYA: I started looking at the distributors, and I realized most of it is Greek distributors that they use this cheese to make in the Greek salad. And then you go to diners, and that's how we use it. And the volume is so small. They only buy a pallet a month or maybe every two months.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi had been so wrapped up in the romantic image of bringing his family's variation on feta cheese to the U.S., he hadn't stopped to consider that people might be indifferent to his efforts.

ULUKAYA: And I made a calculation, and I realized I didn't make all this planning right. I thought I would just make the cheese and people would come, and, "Oh, you're the saviors of old nations that make the feta cheese here. You're the best." The picture was the complete opposite of that.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi realized he needed to invest even more deeply in the community in order to scale Euphrates, extending ties with local distributors and customers.

Meanwhile, he faced a grueling mix of physical labor making the cheese, and long-distance drives to far-flung suppliers. All while trying to keep the company afloat.

ULUKAYA: I was so close to bankruptcy, to breaking myself, to shut it down, to not being able to pay for the milk, not being able to pay for employees. It really trained me to survive. It trained me to be resilient. It trained me to find the solution and find a way to make it work. And I always said, if I survived through that, I could survive through anything. That was so intense.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi did make it work, and for a time his ambition went no further than keeping it a small-scale operation. Until one day a piece of junk mail caught his eye.

ULUKAYA: And for some reason, I don't know what that is, I called the number, and it happens to be a plant that Kraft was closing after 75, 80 years, and it was a fully equipped yogurt plant. And it was being sold as just junk.

HOFFMAN: Once again, Hamdi didn't have a firm business plan, but he decided to buy the plant.

HOFFMAN: And was it, because it was like, "Okay, I've now figured out the entrepreneurial thing." Was there any thought about the market? Any thoughts about the classic kind of entrepreneurial questions? There's a competitive hole. There's a, "I'm seeing demand. I need to do product expansion." Any of those thoughts or no?

ULUKAYA: No, no, no. None of that. It's a nomadic approach, really. I have no deep knowledge of how I can make this work. The only thing I have knowledge of: I just made one plant work, a small cheese plant, which is dairy, but I think I can make this one work as well.

HOFFMAN: But Hamdi had spotted a gap in the market — one that he believed had huge potential.

ULUKAYA: I was so surprised living up in upstate New York that you could not get a cup of simple yogurt. I was so surprised.

And I just couldn't understand why that wasn't available everywhere and why this yogurt had so much sugar. It was anything but yogurt.

HOFFMAN: Now by yogurt, Hamdi means thick, creamy Greek-style yogurt, a staple for him growing up, but at that time hard to get ahold of outside of specialty stores in the U.S.

So Hamdi took out a small business loan and bought the plant, which was in South Edmeston, upstate New York.

Again, there was something about the community that made Hamdi want to invest in it. But it was also a community in peril. The plant had been there since the 1920s, and was the town's main employer. So its closure shook the community.

ULUKAYA: You have to understand that it was as if you had a dark cloud over your town, everybody feels it. This plant was closed, the steam is off after 70, 80 years, and grandfather worked there, and the father worked there, and I can relate with it.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi had no illusions about being a lone savior, bringing the plant back to life for the good of the town. And the community didn't see him that way either.

ULUKAYA: They would look at me and say "Kraft just left and this guy..." How much planning should I make with my life, looking at this guy — what he's driving, and what's his capability and resources? So there's not much trust there.

HOFFMAN: But Hamdi was also struck by their attitude.

ULUKAYA: They were just heads-up and doing their best to close this factory. And there was no screaming, there was no deep cursing or anything. They were just sad and quiet and supporting each other.

And I'm looking at a perspective and I'm saying, "Well, if they are like this when they're closing the factory, what would they do if you open it?" So I really thought that was strikingly amazing.

HOFFMAN: Initially, Hamdi could only afford to hire five of the 55-strong workforce for this new company, which he named Chobani, from the Turkish for "shepherd."

It took them a year and a half to get the plant running and to perfect the recipe for the yogurt. Hamdi then managed to convince the manager of a local supermarket to stock them.

ULUKAYA: Then two weeks later he called us, and he said, "I don't know what you're putting into these yogurts. But I cannot keep it on the shelf." That is maybe late 2007, early 2008. At that moment, I realized that this is not going to be about selling, this is going to be about: can I make it enough? That is the moment I realized that my life is going to be in this factory for a while. That's what I did. I think from 2007 to 2012, I never left that factory.

HOFFMAN: Soon Hamdi invested more in the community, hiring back the plant's previous employees.

They had seen how Hamdi had worked tirelessly to get that old plant up and running. And they knew how together they could reinvigorate their community by making the plant a success. It gave them a binding sense of co-ownership in the mission.

As the business rapidly scaled, Hamdi looked farther afield for more people to join the team. In the nearby city of Utica, he discovered a community that was in desperate need of investment. It was also a community he related to on a very personal level.

ULUKAYA: I learned that there are people who were settling legally as refugees in this town from all over the world, and they were having a hard time finding jobs. And I went to the settlement agency, and there was this amazing lady. And I said, "What is the problem?" And she said, "Well, there's a language problem. They don't speak the language. Then there is the transportation problem. They just arrived. They don't have cars. And then there is a training problem because they don't know the jobs that are available around here. But above all, there is a stigma. There is this shyness to getting close to them."

HOFFMAN: The refugee population was finding it hard to integrate in the local community — not because they were unwilling to, but because of the many barriers thrown up in their way. They were displaced people who desperately wanted to become part of the community, an experience Hamdi was intimately familiar with.

ULUKAYA: I said, "Okay, let's start. Let's get translators. Let's get buses and cars. Let's get them trained in the plant." And I get my HR person, he's like, "Why bother? We can hire others." And I said, "Well, these are people in our community. Let's give a chance to everyone."

And it was not refugee work at the time. I never called it refugee work. It was community work. People in the community are looking for work, different backgrounds, and we are opening our doors and giving opportunities to everyone.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi was doing more than providing jobs, he was investing in the refugee community.

ULUKAYA: And I look at my experiences. Okay, these are refugees that settled, but they really made them back to life through jobs. And I said, the minute they get a job, that's the minute they stop being a refugee.

HOFFMAN: The central role that business and economic activity plays in building community is often overlooked. But it is something I am a big believer in. And this story is a prime example of how business helps build integration, understanding, and prosperity. It shows that bridging gaps between communities can bring new perspectives and experiences together.

This is something that Abby Falik has immense experience in. Abby is the founder of Global Citizen Year, a non-profit that organizes eight-month immersive experiences overseas for promising future leaders.

ABBY FALIK: Our fellows are not development workers. They are there as apprentices, supporting a local project in education, climate, public health, and economic mobility. And what that means is that they are humbling themselves by being challenged to see themselves and the world through a completely new lens.

HOFFMAN: This radical exposure to different lived experiences gives the fellows the awareness and insight to make positive change in their own communities.

FALIK: It's about teaching them to understand what community they're a part of and how to be an impactful and appropriate contributor to community work wherever they find themselves.

Many of our students come back with a sense that the most appropriate place to start having an impact is closer to home in their own communities. Whether that's running for

a local school board, whether it's starting an enterprise, making sure that kids in their community have internet access.

So it's that shift from confidence to humility, from knowing the answers to carrying the questions, from managing through brute force to sort of a more organic and community-centered way of leading; and frankly from just managing from our heads to a sort of integrated head and heart, which I think is what the world needs most, and we don't have enough of yet.

HOFFMAN: I love the way Abby lays this out: what every community needs most is a shift from just managing with our heads to an integrated head and heart.

In the case of Chobani, Hamdi's community-centered approach was rapidly driving the company to scale.

ULUKAYA: So you go from \$25 million to \$150 million to \$400 million to \$700 millions to a billion. These are massive scales of equipment and capability, and it comes to a shoulder of this nomad, and everybody else in that town and thinking that, is this real?

We had almost no resources. We had no money. We raised no capital, we didn't raise any penny from anybody.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi relied on the community he'd invested in, rather than outside financial investment, to keep up with demand.

ULUKAYA: I kept this very simple because I really wasn't a sophisticated business person. I joke about this, and I said Chobani was on QuickBooks until it was a \$650 million business because it was simple. I had no board, I had no committee.

I would talk to Kyle, my head of sales. I say, "Kyle, what do you think the next year's sales are going to be like? How much more do you think we will have demand?"

He would make a simple calculation. He'd say, "Hamdi, I think it's going to be this number."

HOFFMAN: This scrappy, just-in-time management style is the classic entrepreneurial approach. It feels precarious because it is. One way to bolster your chances of success is to build a strong community and sense of co-ownership from the outset. Doing this flowed naturally from Hamdi's nomadic instincts.

ULUKAYA: I really did not organize the business at all. It was a nomadic-like business style. I am a plant person. I always love factories. I love the factory floor. I had this very early belief that if this was going to work, it was going to work because of those factory workers and people on the floor. They are the one who's going to come up with the

solutions. They are the one who's going to say, "You know what? Let's go to the next level. Let's go to the next level." They're the one who's going to drive. Not me, not people who asked them to.

So I really made sure that I was on the floor. I was in the line, I was doing everything that they were doing.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi put himself on the frontline with the rest of his workers. It kept the sense of co-ownership very strong. And it emboldened everyone to give their all to the mission.

ULUKAYA: Actually there was my rule: I would never ask anyone to do anything unless I do it first. So people would often see me in the first three, four years on the floor, packing, driving the forklift, fitting the trucks until at some point the people said, "I think you should be well served if you're doing some other work somewhere else, we got this covered. Yeah." That was my very strong belief that it was going to be solutions that were going to be on the floor with the people on the floor, not dictated from the offices.

HOFFMAN: As a leader, your job isn't simply to yell "charge" and then run ahead of your team; it's to inspire your team to run faster than you.

ULUKAYA: And we were elevated for some reasons, we were just in unreal environment, up in that little town in upstate New York, and saying, "We are going to show the world what we are made of, what these plant people are made of, what this town is made of." I look back and some of it's silly, but we were having the best time of our life and the most difficult time of our life in those five, six years up there.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi had put Chobani at the heart of that little town in upstate New York. His investment in that community was propelling the company to scale. His next challenge would be repeating this feat all over again on the other side of the country.

[AD BREAK]

HOFFMAN: We're back with Hamdi Ulukaya, founder of Chobani. You can share this episode using the link mastersofscale.com/ulukaya (that's U-L-U-K-A-Y-A). And to hear the complete, unedited conversation between me and Hamdi, become a Masters of Scale member at mastersofscale.com/membership.

Before the break, Hamdi had founded Chobani in a derelict plant and made it one of the country's fastest-growing food brands — and also popularized Greek-style yogurt in the U.S.

Now Hamdi wanted to expand Chobani's operations so he could keep up with demand and also branch into new products. That old factory had come a long way, but he needed a new, bigger plant for the next leap in scale.

ULUKAYA: But what I want to really do is create the next-generation food company, and using yogurt as a vehicle to be able to build all the infrastructures or necessary disciplines, necessary supply chain capabilities, hire people from industry and train them and create a web all across the country that we can supply and introduce this food-making in a very wholesome, natural way, but in a large scale that it can reach to everywhere and to keep the cost as accessible, which has been our number one from the beginning.

HOFFMAN: So in 2012, Hamdi took a gamble and built a huge new one-million-square-foot plant in Twin Falls, Idaho costing \$450 million. It was a transformative investment for that community, and again, Hamdi reached out to refugee residents.

Initially, things went to plan. But then Hamdi started to have difficulty making his management style work after the leap in scale.

ULUKAYA: I didn't understand that running one plant, being founder-led, and staying in the factory, and being involved with every single thing. I didn't realize that that plan wasn't going to work. A lot of people really ran out of their capability and capacity because the company was growing a lot faster than all of our capability, including myself.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi was still following the same management model of his first factory.

However, he hadn't built the same sense of community and co-ownership in Twin Falls. Without those key ingredients, getting the new plant working was a struggle.

Problems compounded, costs went up, and Chobani struggled financially.

ULUKAYA: I faced the hard truth in 2013. I said, "Oh yes, I am not going to be able to build the perfect system to run this company, but what I can do, I can move to Idaho and fix the plant."

So I took my two dogs and rented a house in Twin Falls, Idaho, and moved here, and I never left the factory until it was operational, running good. And now, we have something going.

HOFFMAN: Just as he had done in the first plant, Hamdi led by example, building up the sense of community and self-ownership at Twin Falls. Once this began to take shape, he could turn his attention to gearing the company towards its next stage of scale.

ULUKAYA: Then the following three, four years, I tried to work on all the necessary changes in the company, to be able to say, "I built Chobani to be able to comfortably grow, bring other products and supply, and give enormous amount of trust to people who consumes the product, and the trust in the retailers that who are buying our products." And it took us some time, but it was a wake-up call. That experience was probably one

of the biggest wake-up calls for me. And say, "Everything you did good in the last three, four years doesn't mean everything's going to go great next three, four, five years." Every day is evolving, is changing, and you have to not get drunk with it.

HOFFMAN: Yeah. This is one of the fundamental rules of scale, is what gets you here isn't what gets you there? Almost always.

ULUKAYA: That's awesome. Yeah. That's perfect. I lived through it. I totally lived through it. Yeah.

If I go back to one thing is one most difficult thing in this journey, Reid, it would be, building those disciplines is the hardest thing to do. A lot of people will use some other big company's systems, IT systems, distribution systems, and all that stuff, we wanted to build it. I would say in the journey, that was the hardest thing that I have faced.

HOFFMAN: Building out these support systems as you scale is vital, and your success in doing so is a function of the community you build. But if there's no sense of shared ownership, then people won't be fully engaged in the shared mission. And that means making these new systems and processes work will be an uphill struggle.

It's not just the way your business works that needs to change as you scale. You also need to change the way you lead.

ULUKAYA: I have a style that I know is effective, that I know works for me, but I realize that sometimes business needs are a lot deeper and greater than my style. I stayed this "founder" guy. I stayed this "dreamer" guy. And instead of ... I stay in this, "Let's buy this machine and put it in there and then things will work out." Type of guy. I didn't have a huge appetite for all those detailed planning and all that kind of stuff, which is essential, and I think it's needed.

HOFFMAN: Don't get me wrong, being a dreamer is a key trait for founders.

But in Hamdi's case, his dreamer tendencies meant he overlooked some of the nuts and bolts issues of making a business work at scale.

I would also argue that this was compounded by Hamdi's style when it came to building a strong community. He was in the thick of things on the plant floor, day in-day out. This meant he built a strong sense of co-ownership among his team. But it also made it easier for him to miss out on the strategic, wide angle view that a leader must take.

This leadership challenge of balancing the wide-angle view with the zoomed-in perspective is something that Etsy CEO Josh Silverman also grappled with as he told me in his own episode of Masters of Scale.

JOSH SILVERMAN: Yeah, I was really a micro manager. After every inflection point in my career, I can look back and tell you 10 things I would've done differently. But the number one thing is realize that the job of a leader is not to come up with solutions, it's to define success and define constraints and then let the team come up with the solutions.

HOFFMAN: Yep. And also make sure that the team, in doing that, they say, "This is a solution," you're like, "Well, may not be a solution yet."

SILVERMAN: My job is to make sure they're super clear about what success looks like, they're super clear about the constraints, and then removing roadblocks for them. The main thing is keeping the main thing the main thing.

HOFFMAN: Like Josh and many other leaders, Hamdi also struggled to make the transition from micro-manager to roadblock remover.

ULUKAYA: I was a little protective of Chobani. I always thought it's like a baby, and you need to be around, and you need to be nourishing, you need to be protecting and until the quality of it. I had very strong opinions about what this company should be doing and what this company should solve.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi did of course make that transition, and I would argue that the sense of community and ownership that he instilled in Chobani made the process easier for him. He knew that everyone else was just as invested in the shared mission as he was — and that they would work on innovating and solving problems just as hard as he would. To enhance this sense of community and shared ownership even further, in 2016, Hamdi gave equity to his 2,000 employees.

ULUKAYA: I said, "You know what? This is not a gift. This is just recognition of what belongs to you. I think this should be a practice in all manufacturing, service industries, and globally. I think this is the only way that this injustice between income inequality can somehow start to be meaningfully adjusted. Because the world is going in a very wrong place where the rich are getting extremely rich and the poor are getting extremely poor.

HOFFMAN: Hamdi also founded the Chobani incubator to scale his mission and community beyond the company.

ULUKAYA: I truly believe that this food system in this country needs to be transformed, and needs to be disrupted, and we don't have time to waste, and we got to do it. People are suffering because of it.

You have obesity, child healthcare, all that kind of stuff you can think of. This needs to be disrupted, but it's work. It's a lot of work.

HOFFMAN: The incubator has been building a community of innovative founders throughout the food industry.

ULUKAYA: I thought about what are the things that I wish I had known when I started this whole thing. So I said, "I think one of the biggest gifts I can give is to share my experiences with the others."

HOFFMAN: One of the incubator's aims is to help other food entrepreneurs avoid the mistakes Hamdi made by building strong roots from which they can explore disruptive new ideas.

ULUKAYA: We need a community. We need these founders. We need these disruptive ideas, the products, and we need to create a community of the new food makers, where we can be impactful in changing this food system.

What they do to each other is pretty amazing. It is a community. A lot of learnings, a lot of collaborations. It's a lot of good relationships being built through this.

HOFFMAN: In 2016, Hamdi founded the Tent Partnership for Refugees. Over 200 companies signed up to the partnership with the aim of boosting hiring of people whose own lives have been uprooted.

ULUKAYA: When companies like Airbnb and Pfizer and Amazon and Starbucks and Chobani say, "We are opening our doors. Our people are making connections. We are training. We are helping refugee entrepreneurs. We are helping refugees' small businesses by using our supply chain," it really breaks that stigma. It helps the branding. It helps the general understanding that this is a humanitarian issue. It's not a political issue really.

And we still have a lot of work to do.

HOFFMAN: For a clear example of the upsides, Hamdi points to the city of Utica.

ULUKAYA: In 2008-9-10, there was a town everybody was leaving. You go back now. This is one of the most exciting towns. It's because of this new blood coming in and bringing the excitement. Houses are being built and painted. Businesses are open. Factories are operating.

This is not really a Hamdi story. This is a South Edmeston, Twin Falls, Idaho story. This is the people in these communities and what they're made of and what kind of values and what kind of capability they have. They might not know what's needed in the business, but God, they will get it, and they'll get it fast. And you'll build very strong, strong businesses.

HOFFMAN: This is the long-term return on community investment in terms of business. But there is an even larger, more vital, return that has a far wider impact.

ULUKAYA: We have so much work to do when it comes to social issues. But businesses can solve, especially the right-minded businesses can solve a lot of issues in these small towns and communities. I think that is one of the things that sometimes is forgotten through our story, but I just wanted to make sure that credit really belongs to the people in those towns.

Close your eyes, put your hands and fingers in a map in some town, and go there. And hopefully it's a town that a lot of people left before. And make connections, and start your business. And you will see a miracle happen."

HOFFMAN: Taking connections and turning them into miracles that transform relationships, communities, and society for the better — that's a mission we should all take ownership of.

I'm Reid Hoffman. Thank you for listening.