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New Challenge to OLD POWER

	PLATFORMS
	HENRY TIMMS

HENRY TIMMS, AUTHOR AND CEO OF NEW York’s vast Lincoln Center cultural complex, was the guest of Brunswick’s Chairman Sir Alan Parker at a recent webinar for the firm and invited friends. Their conversation took place on Giving Tuesday, a movement co-founded by Mr. Timms, and now the largest philanthropic event in the world.

Giving Tuesday is an example of what Mr. Timms calls “new power.” His book *New Power: How Power Works in our Hyperconnected World—and How to Make it Work for You* was praised by David Brooks of *The New York Times*, who described it as “the best window I’ve seen into this world.” Alicia Garza, co-founder of Black Lives Matter, called it “a must read, a gift to our movements.” It went on to be named “Book of the Year” by the *Financial Times* and McKinsey Business.

Mr. Timms opened the webinar with three stories about how the world is changing—from the medical profession, business and politics. What all those stories illustrate is the idea at the heart of the work of Timms and his co-author, Jeremy Heimans—that the way to think about how the world is shifting is not a shift in technology but a shift in power. It is an emergent and new way to be powerful and those people who are understanding this power are those who are getting out on top.

First, in the medical profession. In 2019, the World Health Organization placed the risk of a pandemic among the top 10 greatest health challenges in the world—and hesitancy to be vaccinated right

up there alongside it on that list. One of the interesting challenges we have ahead, Timms says, is “how can the medical profession—which is used to being much more of a top-down command-and-control world—out-communicate a community of people around the world who are decentralized and distributed, creating power in their own ways? There is no boss, no headquarters.”

Wielded by a few, power in the medical community “tends to download,” he said. Prescriptions written in Latin, that only fellow experts understand, are a symbol of that mindset—a closed language about contained power. “How different that is to the new power world,” Mr. Timms says. “The anti-vaxxers are powerful because their power is made by many. It is about what you have uploaded. It is about what you can share.”

In business, Airbnb only exists because of the properties that we place on it. It is very much about the crowd directing the business in terms of the content. In the face of pending state legislation, the company turned not only to its advisors and lobbyists but to its network of guests and hosts in California to mobilize. And through them, knocking on 250,000 doors, Airbnb successfully fended off the regulatory challenge.

In politics, former President Barack Obama’s campaigns are examples of the power of a collaborative network that viewed itself as a movement. “Obama’s presidency itself, the way he governed, was actually very traditional,” Timms says. “All the energy of the crowd that got him elected, he left

On the same day that **HENRY TIMMS** talked with Brunswick Chairman **SIR ALAN PARKER** about how to harness “new power,” the global, grassroots philanthropic movement he co-founded raised more than \$2.4 billion.

behind when he got into office. And he essentially handed over that energy to Donald Trump.

“In the old power world, power is a currency. It is about what you had that nobody else had, that you could cling on to. Versus power as a current: that power which surges and moves and while you can never quite own it, you can direct that power,” he explains.

#MeToo, Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion, social movements that have defined our times, are all new power phenomena. So is the rise of President Trump and Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro. “You are seeing much more of these spikes of new power,” he says. “New power is very good at surging up and then disappearing.”

By itself, it can bring progress but also breed chaos, as the mob of Trump supporters inspired to storm the US Capitol in January demonstrated. The conversation with Mr. Timms took place before those tragic events unfolded, but his view was clear-eyed about the need for a balanced approach. “My argument to you is not old power is bad, new power is good,” he said. “That is not the argument.” What we need, he emphasized, are agents who have the right dose of both old power and new power to be able to get ahead. And he warns that that will require all of us to become better citizens.

Taking questions from Sir Alan Parker and the audience around the world, Timms elaborated on these ideas and how they figure into his work with Giving Tuesday and Lincoln Center, and the outlook for corporations around the world. Despite negative uses of new power, he remains decidedly optimistic that its rise is a force that can benefit society.

The reason I asked Henry to join us in this webinar for the whole firm is that I think the idea of new power is very important for our clients. They live at the nexus of new power and old power; it is the source of many of the challenges they experience around the world, and we aim to help them with. And it also has deep resonance for how we see ourselves as a firm.

And, Henry, what an exciting day to be meeting, on Giving Tuesday. It is all happening literally as we speak, all around the world today. So, first question: Thinking of your example of Obama, can you sustain new power once you’ve achieved a certain status? Have you seen many organizations that really manage to keep that up?

Yes, I think that is the big challenge. People have got very good at the surge of new power and not very good at the sustain. It is hard to embed it inside



an institution, but I think it is definitely possible. Airbnb is one company that has done a good job of mobilizing the new power over time and continuing to build communities and offer new areas of engagement.

I think we are going to see a lot more organizations working out how to operationalize new power. If you look at KKR, the investment group in the US, they are increasingly favoring projects where more of the company’s value is going to its employees. You are going to see more of the workers-on-the-board type of activity, more of how you share value with the people who are creating corporations, just in the way that Airbnb essentially is making its customers its owners.

A lot of corporate leaders are driven by an old power model of leadership. But there is a new crop of CEOs I am seeing around the world who are now fluent in new power, even if their organizations aren’t actually new power organizations. Do you have any sense of that?

One hundred percent right. At all these organizations where the CEOs have a sense of the new power world, there is a group of senior leadership underneath them who are actually holding up change. You have got this sandwich problem: leadership who kind of get it and see that success has to be a more new power outcome, and a broad base of particularly younger staff who are completely expecting this agency. But then you have got the middle upper management who are really holding up change. The CEOs I know who have tried to make new power work and failed have often not taken on their senior staff, the old power guard.

I have a great question here from one of our Partners in Singapore. How do you turn something into a movement if it moves without you? What advice can you give us about the tension between letting it run versus shaping it?

I will give you an example from Singapore. With Giving Tuesday, early on in Singapore they wanted to do SG Gives—rather than a day, they wanted to do a whole week of giving based around volunteering and shopping malls. It was not really what we were trying to do. We were trying to do Giving Tuesday and establish that brand, but they wanted to do something different. On reflection, we decided, sounds great, go for it—and it worked out very well. That decision was us trying to get people to engage in our mission on their terms—this is a phrase we use in the office all the time. That



is a new power idea. Old power, you get people to engage in your mission on your terms. The new power idea is you are creating a mission and people are doing things inside the boundaries of that mission but in their own ways, meaningful to them.

This is not chaos or anarchy. You are providing people a way to engage in your mission on their terms. That was the leadership decision with Giving Tuesday—not about giving up on leadership, but about framing leadership slightly differently. The kind of leadership that has worked in the new power world actually shifts from the kind of superstar model that we were all very used to, the dynamic individual whose force of personality can transform outcomes. Instead, we have this super-conductor model, where the people who are most effective are the ones who are mobilizing people around their mission.

So, how do you shift an established company that has been so good at running the machine for so long, to be much more agile, much more nimble, to release power throughout the organization? I think there are two key parts of that. Part one is the signals you, as an organization, send. A lot of people are getting that right now. Part two is structure. How are you structuring the company differently to allow greater participation? Corporations often fall down because they are very good at the optics when actually the realities aren’t very good. It will need more than a dynamic speech once a year and a nice veneer of purpose. It will need participation throughout the organization. That is the big corporate challenge.

Volunteers in Liberia sport T-shirts adapted for the country’s Giving Tuesday event during the pandemic.

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A lot of new power works because of the new tech platforms. How will technology accelerate the next rise of new power?

I think there is a big reckoning to be had around technology. The great promise of all these platforms was we would be happier, the world would be more democratic. Things would be fairer. None of those things seem likely to be true. The danger of the platform space, in particular, is that the very thing that they train people to do, which is to mobilize and to share their voices, will turn against the platforms themselves. So, I think there is a big challenge coming.

We have to look at our own participation, particularly a group like this one for example, Brunswick, which has such expert credibility. What is the information you are putting out there into the world? What are the causes you are associating yourselves with? And then, what are the platforms you are spending time on? Who owns them and who do they benefit? That set of questions is coming thick and fast.

I think regulation will become a big deal for tech companies, in particular—both regulation from government and also from users. I think the new power regulation will be quite meaningful.

Do you think any politicians have managed to maintain new power? It might have got them there, but did they maintain it. I don’t know if you consider Mr. Trump as maintaining it.

I do, sadly. I think Trump is a new power phenomenon. Everyone was saying this guy is crazy. He is not

spending enough on TV ads. But he was building this intensity around his campaign which he then managed to keep going through four years. Even the way he thinks about his messaging, he plucks his names from his own crowd and then promotes them up. He literally takes content from this vast army of people and then uses it to engage. It is true now for companies as well as politicians that we have to value intensity more than favorability.

If you think about the way we used to think about products, toothpaste for example: Do enough people like it or not like it? That was essentially how you would think about success. If you are selling sneakers you want as many people as possible to like your sneakers. If you are a politician, you want as many people as possible to think you are a good guy. That was the old power equation.

What Trump realized is that intensity is worth trading off favorability for. So, Hillary’s favorables throughout the campaign were higher than Trump’s, but he had this intensity in his base, they would go harder for him when the time came. Also true of Leave and Remain in the Brexit debate. The Leave campaign didn’t have the favorability but did have the intensity. But it’s also true if you take an example like Nike, with their campaign around Colin Kaepernick: They knew full well they were trading off some favorability. They might have guessed some people would burn their shoes. But they also knew that that exercise would drive their base in a way that brought intensity.

One of the really interesting challenges for the corporate world now is recognizing that intensity is more valuable than favorability. How do you get into that world in a way that is in line with your brand values? Because the kind of vanilla campaign about how great you are to moms is just not going to work anymore.

Our Brunswick Arts team asks, does new power apply to the arts and culture? At Lincoln Center, for instance, are you prepared to trade some favorability for intensity?

I think we as an organization are going to have to stand for things. If our posture is just pure vanilla, then we will not stand out at in any meaningful way. This year, Lincoln Center became a polling place for the first time. We have been thinking a lot more about our role as a civic actor and as a pro-democracy actor. We are an arts organization, of course; our job is to put on arts performances. But we are also a proud democratic organization. And I think it is very important that we think about

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intensity in that kind of issue.

One big campaign that we will be involved with next year will be around vaccinations—will enough people take the vaccine, especially in the US? One thing the arts community is very good at is actually transmitting messages to different communities, especially under-represented communities.

As you said, this isn’t about good power or bad power. But how it is used becomes the issue, because it coincides in places with a move away from what people see as truth. How does one get the positive side of new power?

Certainly, the way I think about the future is that there is a battle for mobilization. Whoever wins is going to shape society. Will it be the climate denier or the environmental activists and scientists? The medical professionals or the anti-vaxxers? Will it be the crazies on the internet or the academics with reason and empiricism on their side?

All of those will come down to who mobilizes best. So, the big question for leadership is, how are you thinking about mobilizing people around the kind of world we want to live in?

Fake news, for instance, is not a new idea. The difference now is that fake news is you and me, in the sense that we all now have broadcast networks that we didn’t used to, so we actually can transform things ourselves. So how do we think about our own roles online in a more civic way? We have all become users very quickly and not become better citizens. We aren’t thinking particularly about how we are using these platforms. How are we contributing to a stronger, more cohesive society? I think we all get sucked up in how many likes we have had. And I count myself in that.

There are countless examples of very positive new power. If you look at a campaign like Black Lives Matter, which is perhaps the most stellar, it has affected change around the world in a very new power way. Very intentionally, its co-founders framed it as a “leader-full” movement, not a “leaderless” movement. The idea with Black Lives Matter is to create a space for other people’s leadership, all around the world.

What is the most surprising response you have had to this idea when it is articulated? People hate it, throw things at you, applaud you ... what is the biggest surprise you have had?

It has changed a lot from when we first started talking about this five or six years ago. People then really just thought it was about Twitter and were

largely dismissive. Now, I don’t think anyone disagrees that this is the right direction.

What surprises me now is how often you get real enthusiasm from people for this kind of work. You will often see very unexpected people being very good at this. It is not going to be the superstars or the old power world who are naturally the superconductors of the new power world. It is a different type of leader. And so, as leaders, if you look in the same places for people to solve these problems, you are probably looking in the wrong place.

You end the book making a case for us all to be better citizens, for everybody to take a better role in our society. It’s not quite a manifesto, but there is a call, isn’t there? Don’t just be bystanders or consumers?

Yes, that is right. There are huge opportunities there. The BBC was a kind of a classic old power

SIR ALAN PARKER is the founder and Chairman of Brunswick Group and former Chair of Save the Children International. He is also Chairman of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh’s Commonwealth Study Conferences. He was knighted in 2014 for his services to business, charitable giving and philanthropy.

organization in every way. They literally controlled the channels—two channels was all there was. They had that kind of power. What is the new power version of the BBC, at a time that the world desperately needs the commitment to fairness and journalism and expertise that it represents? How does the BBC become a mobilizing organization? How would a social media network with the kind of values that the BBC represents look? So, I think the opportunities are going to be huge and definitely positive. The world can be made better and every day you are seeing examples of it.

This is really a great lens to look through. It makes a different kind of picture.

Thank you, Alan. Let me just finish with a call to action to your audience. Do something wonderful. Think about what this group can do today. Help Giving Tuesday out today. It would be great. ♦

THE FORCE BEHIND GIVING TUESDAY — BY HENRY TIMMS

THIS CHART SHOWS THE GRADUATED steps of new power behavior as you move away from an old power model. This was the game plan for Giving Tuesday. Number one, it was driven by sharing. Giving Tuesday ambassadors are not celebrities. They just want to change lives. The most important voices were the people who had small networks that were highly shareable. That is what gave it the buzz that it had.

Affiliation with Giving Tuesday is when people started to kind of join the community and make it about them. All around

the world we saw people who would tie their public profiles to the Giving Tuesday framing.

Adapting is where it gets tricky, especially for organizations who have done well in the old power world. Here you embrace getting people to take your ideas and change them. We had this amazing moment in the first year. New York City Mayor Bloomberg was going to pronounce it Giving Tuesday. We had it all lined up, and a PR campaign. Then, the day before it happened, the mayor of Batesville, Arkansas, a small city,

became the first mayor in America to declare a Giving Tuesday. He scooped Mayor Bloomberg. In the old power world, this is a disaster. You have lost control of the narrative. But in the new power world this is success. It is only a movement if it moves without you, if it is doing something unexpected inside your mission.

The next two are harder. Producing is when people create assets that create value that you don’t own. We saw a bus in Canada, where the driver had decorated it to celebrate the Giving Tuesday message. We didn’t know them. There is no Giving Tuesday centralized team mobilizing this. People simply grab the idea and make it meaningful.

And right at the top of the scale, shaping, is what you are really trying to get to, which is co-ownership. People take your idea and make it better. They did a big campaign in Sierra Leone this year on Giving Tuesday where they did a pro masking campaign tied to the Giving Tuesday we did in May.

The heart logo for Giving Tuesday is something we created right at the beginning. No matter where they were in the world, people ended up designing their own version of the heart. So even without brand guidelines there was a brand community around an ethic-led campaign.

