

Business & Government seminar "Brands on a Mission: How to Achieve Social Impact and Business Growth Through Purpose" with Myriam Sidibe was held on Thursday, September 10, 2020.

Scott Leland:

Hello, and welcome to the first webinar of the new school year, in our Thursday seminar series at the MossavarRahmani Center for Business and Government at Harvard Kennedy School. My name is Scott Leland, I am the executive director of the center. Each Thursday this semester we will be bringing you speakers on social impact, regulatory design, big data, economic efficiency, climate change, and a host of other policy-related topics at the intersection of business and government. A quick on logistics, we will be taking questions via the Q&A feature on Zoom, which most of you should see at the bottom of your screen.

Scott Leland:

The recording of this webinar and many others will be available on our YouTube channel. The link is at the bottom of The Center for Business and Government's homepage, at mrcbg.org. Our speaker today is Myriam Sidibe. To introduce Myriam, I'd like to turn the virtual podium over to Professor Leemore Dafny. Leemore Dafny is a professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, where she teaches courses in healthcare strategy, and directs the PhD program in business economics. She is also on the faculty at the Harvard Kennedy School, and importantly for today's webinar she served for two years as Myriam Sidibe's faculty advisor while Myriam worked as a senior fellow at The Center for Business and Government, researching the topic that she'll be speaking about today.

Scott Leland:

Leemore Dafny, over to you.

Leemore Dafny:

Thank you very much, Scott. It's really a pleasure to be here today to introduce our fantastic speaker, a senior fellow, Dr. Myriam Sidibe. I'm amused at the description of my being faculty advisor, that is like touching base with somebody who has such a clear mission, so motivated to achieve an end goal, and to make change happen. She's really an inspiration rather than an advisee. But it really has been a pleasure



Myriam Sidibe:

They've worked with the LGBTQ community. In 1989, long before it was legally required, they extended health insurance, benefits to partner of the LGBTQ employees. They have credibility across the board. And that work has been rewarded. So, without making a long, ~~case~~ statement on how the profits would be used, they launched a new ice cream flavor in the middle of the George Floyd protest, Justice Remixed. And the customers have welcomed it with open arms. I believe that brands need to get on a mission as the ~~business~~ imperative will be left behind.

Myriam Sidibe:



This transcript was exported on Sep 14, 2020









This transcript was exported on Sep 14, 2020. ~~View~~ latest version [here](#)

together you can really grow your purpose tree from brand say to brand do. And for that, I think we have an amazing framework in the UN SDGs, right? If I think about where we started on Lifebuoy, for

This transcript was exported on Sep 14, 2020. ~~View~~ latest version [here](#)

For me, brands are critical contenders in the fight for social justice, because they have the most

works particularly well, because you can use influencers, you can also be a constant reminders, because you have a ... You can communicate. And the beauty is when the brand alone, and the brand presence alone reminds the consumer that they need to wash hands.

Myriam Sidibe:

So, in itself you are creating, whenever you come out of a toilet, if you see a red bar, which is a Lifebuoy bar, you see, "Well, yeah. That's true. I've just seen that message that I need to wash my hands after the toilet." So, I think there is an element on how do you make sure that ~~tags~~ are being used as constant reminders, that they're using aspirational messages, that they're using messages around role modeling, peer-to-peer interactions, product placements at the right moment? And also, the ability to target media messages at the time where it matters, because a brand can give you the message just before most people know ... About to have dinner.

Myriam Sidibe:

Reminding you that it's time for you to wash your hands. And I think these are the subtleties of branding and marketing which I think this is where the products in itself drives a lot of the behavior change as well.

Leemore Dafny:

It's really interesting because it resonates with what you described of an asset of companies and thinking of people as consumers, and the choice opposed to you should, you must or else, it's here's what you want to do because either it smells great, or it's fun. That sort of just a shift in the message. I'm curious, and I'm sure many others are, we are, right now, around the world, trying to figure out not just how to get people to wash their hands, but how to message things like take the vaccine, take the regular flu vaccine. When we get the vaccine, take the vaccine. Isolate.

Leemore Dafny:

And so, it's interesting, if you could just take ~~argument~~ based on your learnings, and of trying to generate behavior change, what advice would you offer those who are trying to get that to happen in a whole range of ways now?

Myriam Sidibe:

No, I think that that's exactly what ... I mean, we've been ~~think~~ about this, especially with the





But you know, I don't think my lack of ... That's funny. Somebody's saying you should point to it, because it's behind you.

Myriam Sidibe:

Yeah. Well, it's right behind me. Thank you ~~very~~ much.

Leemore Dafny:

And I see, Sustainable Development Goals. All right, so from this great commentator, I'll ask you the question that she posed, which is how do you address NGOs that don't trust the motives in private sector?

Myriam Sidibe:

You get ~~bl~~lied, you get punched, you get called sold-out

Leemore Dafny:

Have you sold out, Myriam?

Myriam Sidibe:

Completely. I've been told all sorts of things. Yeah, if you read my book, and I won't say it right now because I want you to go buy the book, you'll read a bit about the stories of how things have evolved

Leemore Dafny:

I hope somebody will quote you on that. It's a difficult message, but an important one. I'm hoping we might be able to get this participant to ask her question live, Laura Swapp. Scott, can you unmute her? She has a really interesting question about what to do when not all your consumers agree.

Scott Leland:

Let me try to unmute her. I have to find her first. Okay, Laura's unmuted.

Leemore Dafny:

Almost.

Laura Swapp:

Okay, am I unmuted now?

Leemore Dafny:

Yeah.

Scott Leland:

Yes.

Laura Swapp:

Okay, great. I'm enjoying this so much. Oh, we don't want to see my picture, but oh well. I recently just did a work for a well-known Seattle-based company who has a lot of commitments around racial action in the wake of the current unrest in the US, and work which preceded that, in fact. And so, had doubled down on some commitments. And one of the things that we found in going deeper into kind of a landscape analysis of how business is responding to racism, is that this is an area where customers actually are not united, and so I kind of had a tough question.

Laura Swapp:

So, one is isn't this about companies really knowing their purpose and soul, and being willing to stand by their word when the business line is blurry? (The DJ: 10:30 (Over 10 (this) (1) (five) (7) (9) (10) (11) (12) (13) (to) 3t)

This transcript was exported on Sep 14, 2020. ~~View~~ latest version [here](#)

looked quite a bit at what the U.S. businesses are doing at the moment to tackle racism. And from Walmart giving 100 million dollars to fight racial inequality. But then, and this is the part where I also look and say, "Well, it's good for Walmart to do that, but they still sell guns. Which killed some of the





This transcript was exported on Sep 14, 2020. ~~View~~ latest version [here](#)

Leemore Dafny:

Thanks, Scott.

Myriam Sidibe:

Thank you.

Leemore Dafny:

Thank you, Myriam.