

The Nomadic Mindset Seek Clarity: Be in this Uncertain time Together



TNM_Podcast Episode #013:
Mark Brown
with Kevin Cottam

Transcription



THE
nomadic
MINDSET™

Kevin Cottam 0:04

Welcome to the nomadic mindset season one. My name is Kevin Cottam, a global Nomad and the author of the leadership book. The nomadic mindset never settle for too long. Over the season, we will go on a journey to discover what is the nomadic mindset

Kevin Cottam 0:19

and how you can tap into that. For this I will be interviewing of a diverse group of cross cultural thought leaders from all walks of life.

Kevin Cottam 0:28

So let's get on with it. Let's go nomadic together.

Kevin Cottam 0:38

Welcome to the nomadic mindset podcast. Currently we are in between seasons and I wanted to bring to you a new episode with the astute and clarity seeking Mark Brown. Mark works globally as an leadership facilitator and executive coach with some of the biggest multinational organisations around. I chose to speak to mark because of his wealth of wisdom behind what he sees leaders and organisations are struggling with today is 25 years in the business through multiple uncertain times gives us a superb lens to make better sense of this uncertain time. And along with that, he generously shares his ways of wisdom moving forward. Mark six clarity and that is what I hope you will gain from this wonderful episode. I begin with our conversation by getting curious about what are the reasons he chose the name, time for clarity as the name for his company?

Mark Brown 1:35

Well, I guess the the governing thought is that my wife, Meg and I were partners in the business, we really focus on being clear, cutting to the chase, focusing on on what is most important regardless of of the work we're doing, whether we're working with leaders, whether we're coaching whether it's about strategy, we just seem to agree that being clear is a very important thing to do. And we ended up naming our business after that when we were in Eastern Europe in the mid 90s, that it's time to be clear and time for clarity.

Kevin Cottam 2:15

And we are in a period now of seeking clarity, right? Indeed. And so can you just talk about that and the connection there between clarity and what is happening right now? We all know it but how it you see it in your world?

Mark Brown 2:32

Well, as you know, Kevin, I, I work a lot with corporate leaders and some some government leaders as well. And the the situation right now is very uncertain. I'm telling you something you already know there's there's actually an acronym vuca which is very much in vogue now. WII U ca. And those letters stand for volatile, uncertain complex, ambiguous. And originally that word was or that phrase was created to talk about the battlefield, environment for the military when they were the US military was in Afghanistan or Iraq. It was a very non traditional situation and very uncertain, very complex. Now that really applies very well to the business world because

of this, this virus, the lockdowns that have followed. And so leaders are really being challenged because of the lack of predictability, the incredible uncertainty that is surrounding everyone right now. So that's, I find myself working with a lot of clients around those key issues dealing with the uncertainty, the unpredictability of the world right now and how to move forward.

Kevin Cottam 3:54

Yeah, unpredictability, uncertainty. These are certainly what you hear rampant in all walks of life and especially in organisations. Absolutely. I'm hearing it as well, seems very in the same business and that, but, you know, it's very interesting in that how can people then and these organisations and leaders especially let's talk about that, get more clarity around the bigger picture.

Mark Brown 4:23

Well, granted, it is easier said than done. I mean, the first thing we I think we both do is acknowledge how very difficult this is. One piece of advice that I give to my clients, which are mostly multinationals, is to go back to fundamentals to look very carefully at their core values as a firm as individuals as leaders, and basically say, all right, what is most important, what must we focus on now? What must we conserve going forward, because in such a crazy situation. There's a tendency to put out fires and just to react and try to take care of everything. And to the extent that we can, I think it's important to take a step back and say, Alright, what is truly important? And what am I going to focus on first, and second, and third, and this at least gives you a compass heading for the direction that you need to go.

Kevin Cottam 5:26

Hmm, that compass heading? Absolutely. I mean, as we've talked about with my book, the nomadic mindset never settle for too long. There is a real compass in that and I remember you saying that there needs to be a shift and a change but there needs to be a letting go. And then moving forward of some of the pieces that might be holding these leaders and also organisations back. Can you speak to that around Really? Letting go of Yeah. really letting go?

Mark Brown 6:02

Well, I'd be glad to and you're right we you and I have talked about this before. One of the concepts that I love about your nomadic book and the concept is this idea of, of moving, staying on the move and knowing when it's time to leave and move to a new pasture or to a new part of the region. I also am struck by the relevance for what I know is the bridges model. And just a quick aside, this is a model by William bridges, which talks about change as a process that takes place over time. And we can think of it in three stages, the first of which is indeed letting go letting go of the old letting go of something, then that is followed by a neutral zone of uncertainty transition. One analogy might be adolescence, you know, we're between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence is a big neutral zone or a learning curve. When you take on a new position, there's that ramping up phase that's also a neutral zone. And then bridges explains that as you come to the end of that you cross the frontier into the new, embracing the new situation, the new challenge, the new job, the new relationship, what have you. So I find some real interesting parallels between this bridges model letting go and then being in a zone of uncertainty, your book, the nomadic concepts, and the current situation we're in right now because long story

short, we have to let go of a lot of the old certainties a lot of the old ways we did business, and right now we're smack in the middle of a very uncertain neutral zone. We don't know how long this is going to last. What the ultimate impact is going to be so I find that those those concepts your your nomadic ideas and also bridges transition model are really quite relevant for this crazy situation we're in today.

Kevin Cottam 8:15

Hmm I like this model very much It sounds very interesting. I have to do some work look on it in online William bridges model fantastic. Yeah, I I don't know about you, but I feel that there will be those that will are questing for the, the old, which is the, what they call the normal and moving into the new normal, which I don't really buy into because I don't think there is a new normal, and I don't believe in the term and this other term pivot and all sorts of things are kind of like words that we have created now, but these lead into that letting go of these old models, but also these old terms, even though it seems new And I'm thinking that because of our mindset, we need to move into a mindset, which is very much letting go. But it's also about understanding the breadth, whether the possibilities and to accept and to just really jump or leap into these in many ways, not without thinking. But at the same time, if you do too much thinking you may not leap, right. So in in what you know, the nomadic people do is they never settle for too long, but they settled long enough to reap the benefits of where they are before the season changes. They understand this historically. Why have we in many ways, do you think not understood that that everything is a season in many ways?

Mark Brown 9:50

Well, that's that's actually a profound question. I think part of that and you address this in your book is the fact that these nomads ads live in nature all the time. I mean, they are in nature constantly. They're constantly aware of it. And they never deceive themselves that they are more powerful or they can can really shape nature of the environment. they realise that they're very small. Most of us who have been away from the natural world and have been educated in more formalistic empiricist ways. We like to think that we can control things that if we analyse it and do the math and do the hard work, we can control the future and nature and our destiny. And I think from time to time, Mother Nature comes around and says, Not so fast. And we're in one of those moments now. It's really very humbling for us as a human race to realise how little we can do. But as you say, it's also an opportunity to turn the page and and perhaps try something new and different ways of doing things. So, like you I'm, I'm optimistic.

Kevin Cottam 11:05

Mm hmm. I am very optimistic. And I see this as a time of, of newness of, of rebirth, a new birth in many ways. And you're probably aware of the woman was her name. I can't remember her name, but she's the woman in Spain that is 113 who recently just survived COVID. And she was talking about this is our moment for humanity and for us to change. And she says we're in the new human age. And I thought that was very profound. I mean, she's lived since the in the First World War, right. So she's seen an enormous amount. Now with that, though, is that we are going into a new age. I want to continue on this about letting go and control what we just talked about, is control the factor of stopping that letting go

Mark Brown 11:58

Maybe it may be part of it. I mean, this is this is a good question. I think also, many of us are just reluctant to change. I mean, I'm 60 years old. And I know you're of a similar age and simply as a function of the years, it gets a little more difficult to change as we get older. Also, if we reach a degree of comfort with our material goods, and with wealth, what have you, we may be reluctant to risk that. And so I think there are a number of things that make us a little resistant to change. It's, it can be exhausting. It can imply a loss of control. We don't want to lose what we've worked so hard for. So I think there's a lot going on here psychologically for all of us, hmm. And some of its going to be pressed upon us. And if the past is any guide, many people will just run into this The future with open arms. Many people would resist it tooth and nail. And then I think there's a middle group that will just kind of be dragged along depending on how things go. We humans have very different approaches to change.

Kevin Cottam 13:14

Mm hmm. So if we think of those three areas the run for change and resist and also dragged along, what are you seeing in the organisations and what is from your observation and also listening? How do you see this all sort of playing out? In some ways it's a crystal ball for you but I mean, I'm just curious what how you sense

Mark Brown 13:36

yeah, you know, I I get the sense that I'm dealing with pretty intelligent people they've risen to positions of responsibility, and and relative power in their organisations. So they're, they're not stupid by any means. They're pretty clever. And they realised that changes inevitable. There's no going back completely. So intellectually, They say, Okay, let's figure this out, then it becomes more a question of analysis. All right, what can we bring from the past? What's going to change completely? And then it becomes a rather different discussion. So for most of the executives that I'm working with the general attitude is okay, yes, we're going to change, things are going to be very different. Let's do some careful thinking and analysis so that we change in the right way. So it's kind of a conservative approach. But acknowledging, hey, this has got to happen.

Kevin Cottam 14:35

When you say conservative approach, do you think that it needs to be a little bit less conservative to move us forward? In some organisations?

Mark Brown 14:45

Possibly, I mean, I'm a fairly conservative guy, too. I'm, I started my career in finance, and I believe numbers can tell us a lot. I know there are a lot of companies out there that have to figure out how to invest millions And millions going forward. And they really don't know what the world's going to look like. So that's very chancy situation. And so I can't blame them for going slowly, doing a bit of trial and error, managing the risk. And I'll repeat that phrase because I think it's quite operative right now in business, trying to manage the risk, because there's so much uncertainty out there. You just have to try to control what you can as you make decisions about investing, hiring, firing, what have you. So there's a lot of analysis going on right now trying to figure out what's going on and what's coming next.

Kevin Cottam 15:42

So what type of mindset needs to be into this particular zone of the age then if you're talking about managing risk, it sounds very tight and not so loose.

Mark Brown 15:55

It does. And I think I'm glad you brought that up, because I think there is an answer. Due to that, because if we only focus on numbers and the facts that we're certain about, it really does limit the solution space. So one thing that I'm encouraging my clients to do is to really open their ears, so to speak, and listen to everybody consult with everybody, except, or at least consider crazy ideas. Try to work in a more agile way and less hierarchical because, you know, hierarchy works very well. When you're in a predictable, controlled situation, you know what you're dealing with, but when facts go out the window as they have now, you're dealing with such uncertainty, you need inputs from everybody, regardless of seniority or expertise. So in a way, I think this is the antidote to that conservative risk management approach. It's Yes, we're going to work Going to analyse and study it very carefully. But we're going to open our solution space by listening to everybody by consulting and leveraging the wisdom of crowds. Maybe you've heard that phrase before. Wisdom of Crowds,

Kevin Cottam 17:17

hmm,

Mark Brown 17:18

good. listening to what the public is telling you listening to the feedback, experimenting with a new product or a new service, run it out there, get quick reactions to it and then adjust rather than a three year preparation and launch period. Put a prototype out there every couple of months and see how people react to it. This is very much the the agile way of thinking. And especially now in this Luca, uncertain environment. I think we're going to see more of that. Taking smaller, quicker risks to see what will work. So that meant that mentality Kevin, I think is going to be important. Going forward that willingness to experiment to accept some short term failures in order to get the medium and long term answer, correct?

Kevin Cottam 18:12

Yeah, I like the way you say short term failures. And perhaps it's really embracing the fact that this is a whole new age. And, and that, really, let's embrace failure period. And see what extraordinary things can come out of it.

Mark Brown 18:30

Yeah, I mean, and and I don't think anybody wants to embrace failure permanently. But short term failures as as means to an end as means to, to figuring this out. It's really trial and error on steroids. It's going faster and being willing to take a number of smaller risks in order to figure out the answers. Mm hmm. Is this making sense? I'm ready. Should around.

Kevin Cottam 19:01

No, no, I Oh, it's great. It's great. And I think that what, what you're saying is, is giving the audience a flavour for what's out there and what's going on. And I think that's really the most

important thing is yes, everyone's looking for an answer, but there's not one answer. And that's the thing that we have to be very careful with is that at today, now, there are multiple, multiple, multiple possibilities. And technology is even showing us this on many levels. And that creates chaos and the, you know, unpredictable and the uncertainty as well. All right.

Mark Brown 19:36

So I agree with you completely, especially what you say about there not just being one answer. I mean, every individual every business is facing different challenges. And so they're going to be a lot of different answers. And I think experimentation is going to be the way forward because without, without precedent without data, nobody's ever been through this before. It's going to take that mindset. So the people I'm advising I think are making an effort to, to keep open minds and to, to experiment to be willing to take those risks, but also bringing with them the good practices from the past of a business of good decision making, of rigour of consultation of analysis. We can't just say, Oh, it's a new world and throw all of that away. But we need to bring those tools into the future and use them in a slightly different fashion perhaps,

Kevin Cottam 20:43

huh? Well, yeah, it's definitely in a different fashion. I one thing that I wanted to ask you and it popped up in my mind was, Do you find that even some of the organisations that you're working with are actually reaching out to do more partnerships with others so that they can Create a bigger span of wisdom and knowledge so that they, it's not just about, oh, it's my organisation or your organisation, we're going to beat you to, to wherever we need to get to. But this collaboration, co creation partnerships, which are, what is being said in the ether is that's the way forward.

Mark Brown 21:21

Absolutely. Right. Now, it's interesting, I think almost everybody would like to do that to turn outward rather than inward. In some organisations, it's already in their DNA, especially younger, maybe tech oriented. It's just in their DNA and they do it very naturally. Other more conservative organisations that are more hierarchical traditional. It's not as natural but they're working on it, and I give them a lot of credit. I'm working with a big telecoms company, and that is not their nature because they come from a very competitive industry. But in these new circumstances, even that that firm is really making an effort to collaborate, look for partnerships and extend the networks. So it's happening exactly exactly, as you say. But at different speeds depending upon the organization's huh. That's

Kevin Cottam 22:19

good to hear. Excellent to hear. And I guess, statistically, what would you say that people are actually ready to make? And I want to say leap. The reason I say leap is, you know, how they say, in Africa, and some of the countries that were first, you know, poverty impoverished that they never had telephones. And so we have we went through the cycles of telephones of the different types and whichever, and they just leapt straight to the mobile phone. And this is a period I believe, of leaping. It's in many ways, and I want to throw that out to you as to say, do you think that this is a period of leaping and leap to, again, where

Mark Brown 23:03

interesting analogy. I've studied that case about the the telecoms in in Africa and leapfrogging an entire technology. And it's a brilliant, brilliant case. Very interesting. And I think, yes, in certain areas, it will turn out to be a leap story where, hey, let's just skip that and move on to the next. At this point, it's not certainly not clear to me which industries, which sectors are going to be able to do that. And which ones will need to just kind of plod forward step by step. So I kind of agree with you. There's going to be some leaping and we'll look back on it and say, My God, that was brilliant. Look what they did. But it's still a bit early in the day to say which ones are going to leap and which ones are going to crawl? We don't know yet.

Kevin Cottam 23:56

Huh? What stage Do you think we're at now? Though I mean, you started off with this. And, you know, when we talked about the bridges model, and we're now coming out of this lockdown the mental state of the grieving and the situation of where we are, and you opening up tentatively and some people pushing out there as, as individuals and forgetting about social distancing, and how this business, how, Where, where, what are the stages that you think that we're going through? Because I think this is actually quite interesting.

Mark Brown 24:28

Well, this is, again, a personal view. And I'm not a scientist. I don't really, I don't claim any knowledge on the science. I don't think we're coming out of the lockdown. I think we're making a tentative step to see what we can get away with. And then we'll adapt to that. It's very much trial and error. So I think it's, frankly, it's still pretty early days. I see it as the we're letting go of some things and we're stepping into the neutral zone. Little bit, but it's going to be a bit of a journey. Everything I read is that this is a marathon and not a sprint. So I think it's still pretty early. I don't mean to be a pessimist, but I'm saying, I believe that we're beginning to let go of things. We're in the neutral zone, but it's, it's going to be a long journey.

Kevin Cottam 25:22

Well, yes, I mean, there's so many speculations about the long journey, I find it quite interesting is that so many people have said, Well, I, I don't really know where the time is going, you know, and how I'm spending my time you know, I and I find that very interesting is that maybe we want to just learn to spend that time in different ways now and as we move forward, but again, we don't really sense where the future is because a just in a very practical level, I want to go back to Canada but well, I can't really because there are manufacturers that won't allow me such as an aeroplane and I'm not going to kayak all the way back. And but the thing is, is that so it's it's making us be in the now and be very present. And do you think that organisations are actually existing in the now or they're just propelling forward?

Mark Brown 26:15

Well, two points first, this This reminds me of some of the key ideas from your book. Because the nomads that you lived with and studied with they, they have a very different conception of time. And they don't fool themselves that they can control it or dominated, they just flow with it. And I think there's a lot that we could all learn from them in that regard, in terms of what's going on in the business world, at least the connections that I have, it's still pretty much old school.

Let's have a meeting. Let's talk about this. Let's let's divide the tasks and try to take a few steps forward with the work that we have. It's still pretty conservative. Let's let's take care of our people. Which is very important, I find this, a lot of firms are saying, look, we really need to look after our employees. We need to also look after our client relationships. So there, there's a lot of good prioritisation going on, in my view in that in that sense, but I think we're still pretty constrained by the old way we've done we've done business. I mean, it's only been a few months. It takes a long time to make big changes.

Kevin Cottam 27:28

Yeah, those are habits right and, and patterns and, and systems and things like that. Right. So

Mark Brown 27:35

yeah, I've been in I've been in business for almost 40 years. And those are not habits that one changes in a couple months. You know, you try you keep an open mind. But it is definitely a process. So we have to be patient with ourselves and with each other,

Kevin Cottam 27:53

which was very interesting, because, you know, so many people have talked about the multi generations working together. And this is a period of the youth organisations and youth to really excel and to really move forward into new ideas and thoughts in which they do and, and collaboration and, you know, co creation and all of this. And how do you think the strain will be or I put the word strain sounds negative, but do you sense it will be strain then, between the generations a little bit more, what do you think?

Mark Brown 28:29

Oh, you know, it's it's actually an interesting point. And it reminds me of a story or something that Meg and I lived through. Back in the 90s. We were doing quite a bit of work in Russia. And if you recall, there was a big financial crisis in Russia in 1998, where the bottom basically fell out of the market. So we were there in 97. And everything was Go go go and growth and excitement and the people that were in leadership roles were the ones that were able to lead this growth and expansion. And they were doing very well with it. We went back exactly a year later and the crisis had occurred, the bottom had fallen out. And it was a totally different lineup of leaders, because the people that had done so well under positive circumstances of growth, did not really have the skill set or the mindset to lead during very difficult, challenging times where you're cutting cost and you're trying to retain talent and you're trying to innovate. So we were really struck by how the circumstances changed the the leadership profile that you needed. And I think it's it's pretty much what we're going through. Now. there going to be a lot of new leaders emerging, some young, some not so young, but people who are much better suited to lead in these times. than they were before. So I think that's going to be very interesting to watch as as new leaders emerge from from all the generations because they are suited to lead through these circumstances.

Kevin Cottam 30:16

Fantastic. So now I would like to ask you, what makes those leaders and those are the leaders that are going to take us through this.

Mark Brown 30:26

Wow. Boy, I wish I had a recipe. I think there are a number of things that are going to be important. And what I've seen emerge thus far is empathy. For one thing, holding people together, looking after relationships, whether it's relationships with your colleagues, with your clients, your stakeholders, the empathic leaders seem to be coming to the fore. This is in contrast to the ones who are purely about production, activity or profit, or market share. There's nothing wrong with those things. But it's a matter of managing the people side. So that seems to be important and Pathak leaders are emerging. Building on that, as I said earlier, people who are willing to listen to everybody to entertain crazy ideas, because they recognise that we're in crazy times. So we need people who are open minded and willing to have a dialogue, even with people that they may not have had dialogues with in the past. And finally, I'll come back to this idea of agility that I mentioned earlier, this idea of leveraging the wisdom of crowds, and then failing quickly, experimenting, trying something, getting the feedback and then putting out another prototype. So taking these small steps forward in the direction that the feedback is leading. I think that agile approach to business and leadership is really going to be very important going forward.

Kevin Cottam 32:08

Which is interesting, which actually leads me into the question the when I've been doing any talks around the nomadic mindset, which has been very interesting and I do some polls with it. And I do a variety of avatars and to share what is the nomadic mindset the builder mindset and this settler mindset and very interesting mark is that the majority of people in the room depending on the industry, it doesn't really shift much is the majority are of the builder mindset. Six it two thirds of the audience usually is that and then we go to settler then we go to Nomad. So interestingly enough, and I asked the question, what is your what is the mindset that your organisation or you need in your company? Now, more than ever and then All say, Oh no, they all but I mean, the majority shifts to over two thirds nomadic mindset which is it's fascinating. And what I haven't asked and what I will ask now is what what are you doing about it? So this is very interesting what you're saying because what you're saying is the idea of what what are the qualities fit exactly into what is the nomadic mindset, empathy, relationships, listening open minded agility of this which I find fascinating what you're saying

Mark Brown 33:36

it kind of closes the circle between our two perspectives because you know you and I take a different look at things. But I think our attitudes and our philosophies meet in this very area that we're talking about.

Kevin Cottam 33:50

Absolutely. And I love it that your book is about empathy. So it has also now come into a real time for itself. Can you just speak a little bit about that?

Mark Brown 34:00

Well, indeed, my book which I wrote I guess four years ago is called the empathic enterprise. And the key idea is remaining human staying human in a digital world. And without going

into great detail my my thesis was that we're losing the human element in business, the digital is overwhelming us. And we may need to make a real effort to dial things back a bit and find better balance between technology and the human touch. Of course, that was written several years before this Coronavirus head. But I think it's I think it's relevant even today that this need for empathy, taking care of the relationships, believing that we're all in this together, that that's what's going to get us through this is being in it together

Kevin Cottam 34:57

and there is a fantastic way to And being in there together. And this is beautiful. So I would like this is brought us around for a full circle mark and being in this together is a beautiful, and it's exactly what is needed. And so I want to thank you very much for that final especially statement, which is the best one of all. And so, if there's anything else you wish to say to our audience into leaders, what would that be?

Mark Brown 35:32

Well, I think building on that it's Take care of yourselves. Every time I speak to a group or an individual. I say this, you've got to take care of yourself so you can take care of other people. I see people working so hard to take care of their teams, their families, their stakeholders, their clients, which is all fine, but they're they're just running themselves into the ground. And in order to look after others, we needed to take care of ourselves. It's not selfishness it's really common sense. So, the basics, you know, eat well get your rest, manage your stress exercise, take care of yourself so you can be there to take care of others.

Kevin Cottam 36:21

Mm hmm. Being there together, take care of yourself. Fantastic. Mark, I want to thank you so much for this beautiful time together and I knew it was going to be great because I love being with you and hearing your conversation because you are incredibly wise and, and so clear, and it is the time for clarity.

Mark Brown 36:42

So thank you, Kevin. It's been a real pleasure. Take good care.

Kevin Cottam 36:44

Thanks a lot. You've been listening to the nomadic mindset season one. My name is Kevin caught him. And I invite you to find out more about the nomadic mindset at the nomadic mindset.com. Until next time, make it a point to Go nomadic and start discovering your nomadic mindset.



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