



Beth Comstock, former vice chair at GE, explains how future leaders will be shaped by digitization and why everyone should leave more time for discovery.

Transcript

Mike Kearney:

Welcome back. I want to first pause and thank Beth for the gift of time. She sat down with us in her last week at GE. Beth, when you are listening to this, thank you very much. I am so grateful for your time and all the perspectives that you shared in Episode 1 and all the things that we are going to talk about today, such as her perspectives on the future role of the CMO, her social media prowess, introverts, and confidence. She is going to be talking about this really cool thing that she has been focusing on for the last year, the Changemakers Book Club.

So let's get back to the conversation. Let's pick it up on the law of threes. It's an interesting concept she uses to really help identify trends, and what's interesting is I have started to – already identify for even me to use it in my life, and so we are going to talk to her about how she applies it in her life and how others can use it as well.

Beth Comstock:

To me, I guess if there's one thing I feel like I have learned in my career, if there's one word that I feel passionate about, it's about discovery and that everyone has to make room to discover what's new and what's next before you are – it hits you in the face or disrupts your business. So for me, I have been in roles where I have to do a lot of pattern recognition, where you are looking to spot trends and see things early. It's not for some magical power or skills that I have gone to school for, but it's just putting yourself out there, and so to me, it's sort of – my mind, I see something the first time and I go, "Well, that's interesting. Really fascinating."

Mike Kearney:

Yep. Put that back in the mind, yep, yep.

Beth Comstock:

And then the next time I will see it, maybe it's another industry and, "Huh, isn't that funny? Health care and energy are both being digitized from the consumer.

Wow." Third time, "Okay, this is a trend. This is really – you can draw a line through it." You know, it's pretty simple. It's a simple mind – it's a simple framework for my head.

Mike Kearney: Yeah.

Beth Comstock: And then I go back and I go, "I am seeing this. I think there's something here. There's a hypothesis. This is going to impact us across industries. Let's look into it." For us, Ecomagination a decade ago was that. We were starting to see more and more industries look for cleaner tech solutions. It wasn't just in the energy space. So I think companies need people who do that, but I think everybody needs a little bit of that in their business life. It's our expertise. It's just a simple little device that just reminds you to sort of stop and observe. That's what that one does to me, just stop, really, huh, ask questions.

Mike Kearney: I am going to quote you – I think this is a quote, but you said, "Traditional companies are now coming to their moment of digital reckoning," and obviously, GE has been at this for several years. I think you guys have some really interesting stories where it's almost a mashup of the industrial age with the digital age. Can you give – when you talk about – that may mean absolutely nothing to certain people. Can you give an example or two of what GE has done over the last couple of years?

Beth Comstock: Yeah, well, for us, it's really been since about 2010 that we started looking at these trends of the digitization that – the Internet was having a big impact on consumers. What did it mean in the industrial space? And we saw it in energy, health care, transportation. So, what does that – so we have embraced that in a huge way, invested in our own technology, and it basically means embedding sensors and controls into hardware so that they become intelligent, and the data and artificial intelligence gives you insight.

So to me, the simplest way to think about it is imagine if your jet engine – you are flying home – tweeted. Okay, it's not really, but it's sending out a signal. It's an update.

Mike Kearney: It's a message, yep.

Beth Comstock: And it's – someone in the service shop gets those messages like, "I am great. Everything's good." But what happened if one of them like, "No, it's getting a little hot in here"? "I need to come in early. You were planning to service me in three weeks? You might want to do it in three days." So I think it's that insight, and over time, you start to get all the data and analytics that start to come out of the use cases, and people who run companies can run them better.

You are able to say, "Hey, if you are flying a jet engine over the desert versus over the North Pole, there are different factors and different ways this – based on what we see in other fleets, based on what we know from the material properties," all this is – it's not science fiction anymore; it's really happening.

Mike Kearney: It's really happening. You said something that was in a speech or an interview where you had compared the social connections that have happened over the last 10 or 15 years – and there are hundreds or millions or billions – and then you said, "Think about how many connections there are in machines." I forget the exact number it was that you threw out, but it was like, wow, never thought about it.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, well, basically, if you look at what's happened to us as a society, I mean, we are living it out loud in many ways, but three-plus billion people connected to the Internet, on its way to five. Everybody is trying to get everyone connected. Now imagine when 50 billion – with a "B" – machines get connected, and that's the estimate for 2020, and it's almost 2018. It's not that far away.

Mike Kearney: I know. It's crazy.

Beth Comstock: And that's what it means. I mean, so if you take industry and you start to put these – the digitization, it means your trains move faster. It means it costs a railroad operator less money to operate a train because things get there faster in a hospital.

Mike Kearney: Diagnoses are better. Yeah, it's everything, yep.

Beth Comstock: You can – a radiologist can see more by comparing the chart to every other X-ray that's been done. A nurse, it takes a nurse 20 percent of their time to find things that get lost in a hospital setting.

Mike Kearney: That is fascinating, yeah.

Beth Comstock: So now if you can – if it has a sensor and control and even a robot with it, you can summon it. It's those kind of things that I think are – we're going to see change and make industry more productive. That's what we have been betting on.

Mike Kearney: So, what about organizations that have been dabbling in those but haven't gotten serious or have finally woken up to the trend but really haven't thought about it – what means for them strategically? What advice would you have for them because now they are seven years after GE got into this? What should they be doing?

Beth Comstock: Well, we have not been perfect, and I don't think anyone has been perfect at it.

So we certainly haven't been perfect. The race is still on. You have got the digital first companies. I think realizing it's not just about digitization. Actually, a company that's been in running – helping run airlines for 80-plus years probably knows a lot about running an airline that we, digital team, didn't know. So I think we are each going with our expertise.

So I actually think the race is on and I don't think it's too late for anybody. I don't think – in certain pieces of it, you know, we have got cloud development and you have got artificial intelligence. Some of those things are – the race is way ahead. So

I think every company is going to have this, so the faster you can just create one party or company that's figuring this out and then figure out how do you spread it to the rest of it. I wish we had started slightly differently or at the same time – I think we have come to this – you have to digitize how you work, not just the things you work with, and that was a hard one – lesson.

Mike Kearney: So when you say that, are you saying – and I think this is where you are going is we should have thought internally about how we digitize, which I think that's actually a really pragmatic thing that every leader could say, is if we're going to go down the path of digitization – God, that was not good.

Beth Comstock: I know.

Mike Kearney: Digitization – let's think about our organization at the same time.

Beth Comstock: Exactly. I have been working at a lot with sales and marketing, and you think, "Okay, Salesforce.com, we get all of our sales folks, we start to have a digital pipeline, we are done." "Oh, you are just starting," and you have to digitize every piece of your activity. Every function needs to do that. It's not a matter of just saying, "Oh, now we have got a software system," but you have to work differently.

So in the case of a sales person, you are getting much faster feedback loops. You are able to say, "Hey, artificial intelligence is starting to help me think – you know that person I have is a warm lead? Actually, AI can now tell me that person is not an influencer at all. They have no decision-making power, and so I have spent a year trying to win this person –

Mike Kearney: Building that relationship, yep.

Beth Comstock: – and they are never going to buy anything.

Are you going to – " so that can free me up to get focused and more consultative, more spending time with the customers I know want to buy things, know want to solve problems. So all of us, every function we have got, we have got to get smarter.

Mike Kearney: Yeah, I just want to pause because I think there is a really important learning, and the reason why that resonates with me so much, I actually now lead something called our Brand and Reputation Venture Fund, and the idea was not, "Hey, here's some cool technology and things that we could bring out to clients." Five years ago, we went on a journey where we said, "You know what, we are having reputational issues that are hitting the marketplace. What could we do better to manage this risk?" So we have invested in technology and things like that. It's so much easier to go have a conversation with a client to say, "Hey, this is something that Deloitte did because we needed to from a business perspective."

Beth Comstock: Exactly.

Mike Kearney: So it's almost the same type of thing, like if you have lived and breathed digitization, it's much easier to _____ robotics.

Beth Comstock: Exactly, and okay, I will buy this product, but I don't know the first thing about how I – in a digitized world – take if you are an industry, right? You are an industrial customer right now.

You have got to get your chief information officer, your chief technology officer, your supply chain, your sourcing – a number of people now have to come together. It's not as simple as, "Well, I can buy this machine and put it in the factory." It's not going to work that way anymore.

Mike Kearney: Right, right. So let's talk about talent because I think there is something that's interesting also happening, which is what does the future of work look like for people. So especially in a digital world, you got to hire for them, but you also need to develop, internally, what's your perspectives – not even just necessarily digitization, but just in all the areas that you have worked in, what are you thinking about the worker of the future and that could go in so many different ways. It could go to the value of a college degree is being debated now, you know, the fact that people are going to be probably more subcontracting where you get your talent. Any thoughts on that? I know it's a big –

Beth Comstock: I have a lot of thoughts. We could spend a whole hour just talking about this.

Mike Kearney: [Laughs] We could – we will have our second – can I come back in February?

Beth Comstock: Exactly. Yeah. I have been part of teams that have looked exhaustively at this, and in some ways it's very exciting to think about the future.

The reality is you have to start applying some of that today. Like, how do you make today exciting, too? It's not, you know, "I have a bad job today so I just can't wait till the future comes."

Mike Kearney: Till the future comes, right.

Beth Comstock: Or it's scary. The future can also be very scary to people because a lot with robotics and artificial intelligence – I think that's the area that fascinates me a lot. I have been big in my career on creativity, judgment, strategy, and I am really excited that the future is calling for more of that.

Mike Kearney: So you are not worried about what – the trends that are out there.

Beth Comstock: I am worried in the sense do we have enough people who are going to want to –

Mike Kearney: Embrace it, yeah.

Beth Comstock: – and be willing and have the skill set to do that. It's about judgment. It's not about

– it's about strategy. It's if you want a checklist of – if you want to run everything just by checklist, there probably ultimately will be a robot that tells you how to do that.

Mike Kearney: That will do that, yep.

Beth Comstock: So, what you need are the people who know how to deal with things when things go wrong or deal with the unanticipated issues that always happen.

And so I worry a little bit in business that we think everything is a process, a Gantt chart, a checklist, and we are not training – hiring or training for resilience, for judgment, for critical thinking. So that's where I get really passionate about that.

Mike Kearney: So okay, I am a kid in college. What can they do now to start to develop those skills? Or is it nature versus nature? Like do you think it's stuff that could be taught or is it just who you are?

Beth Comstock: I think it's both. I mean, I think we have been encouraging our kids to take code – be coders. I think there is value in that just to understand the language of the digital world. But don't forget about critical thinking and philosophy. I didn't take philosophy when I was in college. I am trying to read up on it as much as I can now.

Mike Kearney: Now. Right.

Beth Comstock: The critical thinking, the ethics, the unintended consequences. If we are going to start programming our machines to be smart and do things on their own, are you thinking through all the unintended consequences of some of this technology?

You have to think through it. What happens if? How do we do that? So I think those things are going to play a bigger role. Maybe because my daughter majored in philosophy, I am encouraged by what I think that kind of thinking is going to play forth.

I think – it's adaptability. It's the resilience that you are talking about. How do you – I don't know how we hire for it, to be honest. I mean, I think you just need to put people in situations and have them figure it out and see how they do it.

Mike Kearney: And see how they do, right.

Beth Comstock: So I guess my fantasy would be that we don't ever accept a job without some kind of test, a trial.

Mike Kearney: Interesting.

Beth Comstock: I would love to work for somebody for three months before I made a commitment. I would love –

Mike Kearney: It goes both ways.

Beth Comstock: I would love for the people that I hire to work together for three months so that we can figure out if we are able to solve the problems and have the development we needed. That's not realistic, you know, but I think as we talk about gig economy or –

Mike Kearney: Maybe in the future it is. Right.

Beth Comstock: – these jobs where people are going to be certified by taking on certain tasks or challenges and build up an expertise, that becomes more realistic.

Mike Kearney: Yeah, it's funny, and when I reflect when I was getting my business degree, it was all about, "Take the most pragmatic classes to get that job," and now, almost like you, when I look back I go, "Gosh, I wish I took more liberal arts-type classes" because what I find is when I am sitting down with – _____ somebody young or old, those that can have a breadth of knowledge that could talk about those things are far more conversationalist and interesting than somebody that just has a skill that they have built. I would do it all over again.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, I think of myself and I – because I majored in biology and I had a – I would have majored in anthropology if I could have. I guess I could have, but I love anthropology, but it's so – has given me a framework for certainly the marketing career I have had and the business career. To me, it's – I go forward thinking it's less about how cool the technology is, but how does behavior change?

So I think all of those things – in some ways, biology prepared me incredibly well for business because it's about a system.

Mike Kearney: System. Right.

Beth Comstock: And only now in business are we thinking much more systemically because of the digitization and the platform theories and all these things. It's all about the system.

Mike Kearney: So I have this – I am going to kind of – it's not really changing the subject too much, but it's talking about the analog world. So I live in – I told you before, we started in Walnut Creek, California. We have one of the first Amazon stores, which I just – blows me away because last year, we shut down another big bookseller. My daughter wants a record player, like vinyl records, and I think what we are finding – starting to see is people want physical experiences more and more. But it's, once again, going on during this digitization that's out there. I think you even referenced this earlier, but how do companies then balance? Is it living in that middle that you talked about before –

Beth Comstock: I think it's living in that middle, and it means you are going to have to be having one foot in each. You will have to find your way forward, what's the right combination.

Mike Kearney: Combination.

Beth Comstock: I mean, when you – as you said, when Amazon first announced that they were coming out with bookstores, you are like, "Are they punking us?"

Mike Kearney: "What?" Right.

Beth Comstock: Right. "What?" But they realized they – people wanted to actually look at a book. They wanted an experience, and so I think it is that mash-up. I think the people who can get that mash-up of the physical-digital – and it's also contextual. In our lives, we are multidimensional people. We don't want everything to be exactly the same all the time and we have different moods. I think there's a huge segmentation going forward for marketers, for businesses where it's state of mind. It's contextually relevant at the moment. It's not just, "I am a woman." It's not just, "I am X age. I am an American. I am a east coaster," or, "a southerner." I think those things are maybe more analog, and going forward, it's much less binary; it's much more fluid; we have gotten used to – culturally have much more gender fluidity. I think there is going to be much more interest and experience fluidity. It's going to be challenging and exciting for certainly business and marketing people.

Mike Kearney: You know what's interesting, I just love this because what I liked about the Amazon bookstore, they almost use that technology, "If you like this, then you will like that." They actually – that's the way they have organized all their books, like they will have kind of an iconic book to the left and then, "Here's three other books you may like." So it's really interesting how they have brought that in.

Beth Comstock: Meanwhile, I mean, there's a store here in New York, I am a big fan of the founder and the store is called Story. Rachel Shechtman started it, and every six weeks it's like a magazine and a media experience and an event. Every six weeks, she changes out and curates a new experience in retail every six weeks. So it's hard to – it's a hybrid. It's hard – is it retail? Yeah. Is it media? Yeah. Is it experiential? Yeah. She has three or four different business models. That's just one example. You are seeing more and more of those. So I think it really is this interesting mash-up of things. The winners are going to figure those two, the analog and the digital, out together.

Mike Kearney: How important has all of the diversity of experiences that you have had been in your innovation journey? And we could go through the list, but it's all out there.

Beth Comstock: Essential, essential.

Mike Kearney: Essential.

Beth Comstock: And I feel like it's important to point out that no one gave me a prescription – some of these things happened in spite of the job I had or the company I worked for.

Mike Kearney: What do you mean by that?

Beth Comstock: Meaning I have had crazy experiences, but I put myself out there for them. I had to open up to them. I mean, GE wanted to get into digital more. I had to go and be an early explorer and go and meet people who normally wouldn't meet GE, wouldn't think GE would be interested in them, and you have to show up on just different maker communities where people were hacker, things that seemingly GE would never be interested in, and just understand. So I think you have to put yourself out there to explore and experience different things, and in companies, we, again, think that's a waste of time.

Mike Kearney: Was that at your own volition? Were you like, "I want to engage in this so I am going to do it"? And what I am trying to connect it back to is the early comment that you made about internally taking those risks, not taking no for an answer. Was it something that you said, "This is something I am interested in; I am going to go do it"?

Beth Comstock: Well, it wasn't my natural inclination because I am more reserved. I – and so to kind of put myself out there was a bit of a hard thing for me to do, but my – again, I am curious. I wanted to learn. So it would just – you would start seeing trends and go, "I want to go learn." And so that was what I mean. I mean, I – you have to – you are taking a risk of a certain sort, one, that this is valuable to my job, that I can go meet somebody who's in a hacker space in Brooklyn and that has anything relevant at all to do with GE seems absurd. But you bet it does. After a while, you start to understand that there's a whole community of people who are making things. They don't need to be in a big manufacturing facility.

You see that the new models of manufacturing are happening, technology – so, what you start to realize is that you – there are – the pattern recognition is much richer when you put yourself out there.

Mike Kearney: But what advice – I totally get that, but what advice would you have for people that may say, "That's not part of my job" because it sounds like –

Beth Comstock: Well, it's not part of anyone's job.

Mike Kearney: That's my point, but you would just – you would go do it because you saw –

Beth Comstock: Well, because I think maybe in some ways I have made it part of my job in the sense that –

Mike Kearney: Exactly.

Beth Comstock: – I had the title of Chief Marketing Officer, marketing, but there was – you know, people are like, "Marketing? You do the ads." No, we don't.

Mike Kearney: Right. Exactly.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, we do, but that's at the end. You are underestimating what marketing can do when it takes its name seriously, which is live in the market. Go where change

is.

Mike Kearney: Right. I love that.

Beth Comstock: So I choose to define marketing differently. No one gave me a book that said, "Here are the ten – " they did – "Here are the ten steps of marketing," but I saw a different opportunity.

Mike Kearney: But I love that because what you are saying is where there are tried-and-true ways of doing things, like maybe it's the executive of the future has to live outside of that bubble of, "Here's the template," or, "Here's the checklist."

Beth Comstock: I think the executive of the future absolutely has to do that, and I think they ought to challenge themselves just first by saying, looking at your calendar, "How much room am I making for just being out in the world?"

Mike Kearney: Is this your 10 percent rule that I have read about?

Beth Comstock: Yeah, it is. I mean, I just –

Mike Kearney: Yeah. I love this.

Beth Comstock: It's my 10 percent rule, which is, "Make room for discovery." 10 percent of my time – and I do much more personally, but in work, I have to go meet new people, find new themes, understand what's happening. You know, you just have to.

Mike Kearney: How do you – so I totally agree. Probably one of my biggest challenges – I will just relate this to me – is the demands on our time are significant. So you have to – I am guessing part of your answer will be, you have to be extremely thoughtful about where you are spending your time and be proactive. Is that part of your routine?

Beth Comstock: I think that's exactly it. You also can't expect a direct return – an immediate return. So you meet somebody, you go to an event, you go explore something, and it may not immediately pay off, but undoubtedly, it leads to something else that leads to something else.

So again, you have to have a different expectation. "I am going to go here to learn. I am going to go here to experience something new and ask myself, 'What happens if this enters my world?' The digitization – again, if I looked at NBC where we were digitizing media and the ability to say, "This is coming to industry," wasn't apparent. But you started to see, "Hey, people are wearing Fitbits. They are starting to look at their personal health data. Wow, this is actually – the consumerization of health care is actually going to impact how we do health care in our customers in hospitals." So you have to be out there to see that.

Mike Kearney: Is it implicit in that, though also the ability to learn how to say no, which is one of the hardest things – because if you are going to allocate time, that's really an

investment for the future that you don't even know if it's going to pay off. You need to start to learn how to do things that maybe others are asking you to do that, quite frankly –

Beth Comstock: I am not as good at that. So it is – yes, that is what I –

Mike Kearney: *[Laughs]* So I am not going to get any good advice on that one?

Beth Comstock: That is what I aspire to, but less what I do, but I do think you have to be disciplined. I think that you have to have a sort of – part of your time that's open for whatever happens and then a part that's very focused and you know what your priorities are, and I have had to work at that second part.

Mike Kearney: I just was – I am reading this book that I referenced earlier. I won't call it out right now, but there was this guidance where somebody said, "Rate your interest level from one to ten, but you cannot answer it seven." And if you think about it, if you take the seven out – because eight, nine, or ten is like, "I really want to do that." If it gets to six it's like, "Eh. It's not important." So I am going to start – I have always used either –

Beth Comstock: That's a good one.

Mike Kearney: – "Hell yes or hell no," because if you are not, that's a great way of doing it. But it's not an easy thing to do.

Beth Comstock: Yeah. I mean, I feel in business, we think that – "We just surely need to have one more meeting to go through those financials one more time."

Mike Kearney: Oh my goodness, yeah.

Beth Comstock: And there are times when you need to do that, but how often do we go, "Let's go explore"? "I have a hypothesis. Let's go see if it's true. Let's go ask people. Let's go just hang out and watch our customers."

Mike Kearney: Right.

Beth Comstock: Instead of, "Let's go try to sell them something. Let's just – let's show up with a PowerPoint pitch and 15 minutes later, we will say, 'How are you?'" So I think that is a shift that's happening in companies, and again, a company like Deloitte, you guys – that's what you do. I think more of us are starting to come to that more consultative relationship, and that comes through discovery. It's hanging out with your customers.

Mike Kearney: You know, one of the things that I am actually leading to is how do you disrupt that conversation with the client where you are bringing them a new idea, and one of the things I think we have been guilty – I think a lot of people are guilty. It's like, "Hey, customer, I have got a point of view, but damn, I am going to get through this." I think it's more of kind of a journey that you need to go on because you may

have some perspectives or ideas, but they may not necessarily conform to what your client is doing or thinking. So anyways, we are trying to disrupt that meeting that we have.

Beth Comstock: Yeah. Good luck. I think we all need that, so it will be a good thing to pass on.

Mike Kearney: Well, I will let you know how it goes. We are –

Beth Comstock: I think we are all – we have been there. You sit in that meeting and it's like you look at your watch and it's 55 minutes, and –

Mike Kearney: You are like –

Beth Comstock: – I have been with sales teams I am part of and we go, "Okay, but we really came here to hear from you. We have got five minutes left."

Mike Kearney: "We have got five minutes left." [*Laughs*]

Beth Comstock: "What are your pressing needs?" Or a vendor or a potential supplier comes to you and you are like, "You didn't ask me one thing about my problem. You missed this huge opportunity. You had an hour with me. You didn't ask me." And to me, the best partners, the best suppliers are the ones that get to know us better than we know ourselves. It's that trust.

Mike Kearney: I agree. Well, I think it goes back to that people like to be perfect. Like, they want to show that they know everything. So you talked about – I love – one of the things – you have given me a lot of good nuggets today, but the whole, "We need to live in the market," that's what a CMR marketing does. What do you think the role of the CMO is in the future?

Beth Comstock: I think it's much more about the customer experience, the customer journey. I think it's sales and marketing together. That's dog and cats, often, in any company.

Because it used to be, sales had the customer relationship and maybe marketing sold it – told it – helped them target those customers. Now, it's much more together. It's really – marketing, I think, is much more trying to ongoing listen, help bring the changes that are happening in the marketplace back to the customer so they are not surprised by things. So I think the sales piece of it is much more advisory, is much more consultative, much more – and not every company is set up for that.

Mike Kearney: So if you were advising a CMO today to elevate themselves in the C-suite, do you have one piece of advice you would give to them?

Beth Comstock: Well, I would give them two. I am sorry, you only asked for one but I am going to give you two.

Mike Kearney: No, no, no. You could give three if you would like.

Beth Comstock: I would just say just up your game on the data feedback. Just become the owner of the insights. Really, just parse that, parse that, parse that.

And then own the experience interface. It's digital. It's physical. Somebody's got to own that. That's how you win. Who owns that right now? Who owns it? In every company, there's – so –

Mike Kearney: That's one of our biggest challenges, yeah.

Beth Comstock: So can marketing really help unpack that? At least unpack who should own it. Maybe marketing ultimately doesn't own it, but what are the most essential pieces of the experience and who is best to deliver it?

Mike Kearney: Absolutely. So I always come into these interviews and there is always a topic that I am super – even more interested in learning about, and it's social media. I will say – and this is not just because you are here – I don't think I have seen anybody else in the business world do as much as what you are doing from a social media perspective. You are active on – super active on LinkedIn. You have, like 735,000 followers, which is amazing. Twitter – even Facebook, you use. When did that become important to you and what do you do – because listen, I will tell you, I get active and then I become deactive.

So there's almost a quality and a quantity component to it. But if you could just reflect on that, I –

Beth Comstock: Well, for me, personally, I think because I came out of media and I would spent time immersing in digital media at NBC, you know, I lived that life, and so –

Mike Kearney: Right. But others have, too. You are – yeah.

Beth Comstock: But I think partly it's just what I said earlier: If you are going to digitize the way you work, that's a very easy way to digitize the way you work. Because what does it do for you? It's not just about chest beating and saying, "Here's what I am doing." It's engaging. I find it incredibly effective to engage with employees I work with, future employees I want to work with, and customers, and people in the early days thought, "Well, customers aren't on social media." They sure are.

Mike Kearney: Oh yeah, they are. Yep.

Beth Comstock: They are people, right?

Mike Kearney: Yeah.

Beth Comstock: So for me, that has been really important and I find it a good testing ground. "I want to test an idea. What do you think? Here's a concept." How do people react to it? So it's my own little laboratory.

Mike Kearney: I love it. It's so – it's amazing.

I was looking again today, I am like, "Holy moly, there's so much content," and you were just – I think I just read this morning before – I was just taking one last look. You were in the top 10 influencer –

Beth Comstock: Yeah, LinkedIn had an influencer –

Mike Kearney: You are with, like, the Canadian prime minister. I mean, geez.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, it was a nice list. It was quite an honor. But I also think – you know, look, I have some help because I work in a big company and I have help. As I leave GE and set off to discover what's next for me, I am going to be doing – I think I will even have time to do more if it makes sense. I mean, there comes a point where you can – people are like, "I don't want to hear from you." So it's about a discussion, I think, is really what you are trying to do and learn – can you learn?

Mike Kearney: But what you do really well – once again, I feel like I am pandering to you, but it's true: A lot of content that comes out from leaders feels corporate. Yours is really authentic. So if you have people helping you, they definitely have your voice.

Beth Comstock: Well, what they help me do is just help – you know, I can't post everything exactly the right time every day, but I write what I write.

Mike Kearney: Oh, you do? Oh, wow.

Beth Comstock: And I am very – to me it's very important to have a voice, and I have a certain method that I set up. Usually on weekends, I spend time writing.

So I think those – you have to be – I share things, right? I share failures. "Hey, I tried this and it didn't work." So again, if you are looking for perfection – in too much of social media, we try to be perfect. So I have tried to take a different tact which is, "Here's what didn't work. What about you?"

Mike Kearney: So, what was the one article, post – is there something that you got so much engagement you were like, "I didn't see that coming"?

Beth Comstock: Well, I think it's what got me started. It was really early on with LinkedIn and I wrote a piece – it was a first-person reflection about working with Jack Welch, and Jack hung up on me because he was telling me that I was too abrupt, and – because it was –

Mike Kearney: Jack Welch told you that? *[Laughs]*

Beth Comstock: Yeah. I know. Here's Mr. Edge in energy and he was telling me I was too abrupt. But it was the star of – the power of Jack as much as anything. I think it was just – you know, like I had to overcome something. I had to work on something, and it was also showing Jack _____ sense of humor.

But I think with social, you need to pick a few platforms that you think are right for you.

LinkedIn has really been a great place for me. I like LinkedIn. I like Twitter for a different reason. To me, it's about discovery. I use Facebook more because of the live feature. I haven't quite found my groove yet beyond that. My book club is on Facebook, but – so look, I think you have to – don't –

Mike Kearney: Try –

Beth Comstock: I would say to people: Don't feel bad. If you are on one platform and not on the other, do what works for you. Just be a _____ (voyeur). Maybe you don't express yourself; you just use it for input and insight.

Mike Kearney: Right, but I would go back to – I think especially now, getting to know you, it's very much you. Like, whatever you are putting out there, you believe in, so it gets back to that authenticity piece and vulnerability. If the number one article you wrote was about something that Jack Welch said to you, it's your openness and that's probably why people connected with it, I am guessing.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, another one that resonated with me in the past year was a series I did on vagueness, and it's that living in the in-between, the vagueness, and because I think we're all struggling with it, so it was a common, and the reason I wrote it was because I see with a lot of customers, we're all dealing with this frustration.

So in some ways, there's a nice cycle to – you see your colleagues dealing with it so you can express it, and then, you get more people saying, "Yeah, I am dealing with this, too."

Mike Kearney: So you use a lot of video, too. I know I am getting down into the nuances of social media, but I am guessing you probably have seen even more engagement through video.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, video because no one has time to read things. It's like we're talking to one another, so I think video's just much more urgent and immediate. It's real. You are multidimensional.

Mike Kearney: Absolutely. So I want to go back to you talking about yourself being an introvert and – I still can't get over this – lacking confidence, because that's you seem like a very confident person. What did you do to overcome it or – and you could take this either way – what advice do you have for people who may be introverted and may be – I don't think you would – it's maybe trying to find confidence

Beth Comstock: Yeah, well, and they are different things. I think introversion is something that I have come to appreciate. It used to be something I always had to overcome, and I would say you have to overcome it if it holds you back. So when did it hold me back? And then this is where confidence came in, too because I am not the first

person to talk at any meeting ever and –

Mike Kearney: Even now?

Beth Comstock: Even now. I mean, maybe if I am hosting it, but I usually sit back, I observe, and then, I will have an observation. But often, earlier in my career, I didn't say anything, and I would leave that room and I would be so mad at myself, like, "That person said that – we were thinking that. You thought it 10 minutes before they said it. You missed your chance. You missed your opportunity." So it would be those kind of things of saying, "I am holding myself back. I am not going to be successful, and I have something to contribute." So that would be I needed to overcome that, and so the next time I go to a meeting, "Okay," I would write it in advance, I would plan for it, and I am going to ask this question. And, "What's my unique perspective? "How can I ask that?"

So it just – it's simple hacks like that is how I force myself to overcome it because I realized business is an extrovert's arena and my natural style was not set up to succeed. So I had to change that. It's that simple.

Mike Kearney: Absolutely. What about – and so now –

Beth Comstock: But hard.

Mike Kearney: That simple but hard.

Beth Comstock: Because you asked that question, and we all have it – and this was a big awakening for me because once you open up to ask people, "Do you think that way?" People are like, "Oh yeah, I hated asking that question. I was panicked." You are like, "Really?" You think you are the only one, and so you start to realize and sometimes say, like maybe say to a colleague, "I don't like talking in meetings. Can you ask me a question?" That's what I think you can do, to answer the second part of your question, is –

Mike Kearney: That's a fan – okay, absolutely. Yeah.

Beth Comstock: – as a team member or as a manager of people, if there's someone on your team who's introverted, one, call on them in a different way. Maybe you don't call on them at all and ask them after the meeting if you could give you their thoughts or maybe you say to them in advance, "I am going to call on you so I want you to be ready for an answer." I saw people do that for me: "Beth, we haven't heard from you. You usually have a good insight. What do you think?"

Mike Kearney: So it's almost as much the leader's responsibility, to a certain degree, as it is the individual.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, because they want to hear diverse voices, I hope.

Mike Kearney: Totally. I mean, one of the things – I used to lead these – we call them labs at our

firm, workshops, is I would always be super conscious of who has not spoken because they probably have some of the best ideas.

Beth Comstock: See, I think you are a very intuitive leader and thinking about the diversity –

Mike Kearney: Thank you.

Beth Comstock: – of the team, because let's face it, we have all heard Cindy 10 times. Like, enough of Cindy, right? And so be a boss that says, "Now let's hear from Mike," Mike's like, "Thank you."

Mike Kearney: "Thank you."

Beth Comstock: Yeah. "I have – my voice matters."

Mike Kearney: I live on this – I think I am an introvert, but I have had to become an extrovert in a weird way.

Beth Comstock: It's funny, when I have said more – being more open to saying to people I am an introvert, it's amazing how many people say to me, "I am an introvert." And so I think it's our fears sometimes, right? And so to me, it's come down to – like I love the book by Susan Cain, the – *Quiet* –

Mike Kearney: Oh, *Quiet*, yeah.

Beth Comstock: – I think is really a helpful book.

What helped me with that was learning it's about reserving your energy. It's really about sometimes you need to hunker in. You need to sort of recharge your batteries. To me, that's the best definition of an introvert.

Mike Kearney: I completely agree, and that's where – because I do get my energy by being myself, pondering ideas, reading, whatever, and then, I could come out, expend my energy, and then go back into my little shell.

Beth Comstock: But you have to push yourself. I think it can be an excuse if you just go, "Yeah, I am an introvert. That's just the way I am." "Okay. Well, we're going to accept you for how you are, but this is the way we do business, is everybody contributes, and you have to find a way to contribute in a style that suits you, but that delivers what we need."

Mike Kearney: Do you know what I have started to use – and it's actually been – and everybody's talking about it, so I am not coming up with anything new, but it is the whole notion of, "What's the worst that can happen?" so that people in the meet –

Beth Comstock: That's a good one.

Mike Kearney: Like, "What's the worst that can happen?"

Beth Comstock: Yeah, that's a good one.

Mike Kearney: I lose my job? Highly unlikely. Somebody –

Beth Comstock: But that takes the confidence. You have to have done that enough to go, "What's the worst that can happen?" Right? "I did that and I didn't get fired. Okay. What's the worst that can happen?"

Mike Kearney: So this is kind of all in this self-develop realm, but you talked also about recently – I don't remember where I read it, but if there's one thing you would do differently is worry less. Have you figured out how to worry less?

Beth Comstock: No, no.

Mike Kearney: No? No?

Beth Comstock: I am a chronic worrier. I think it's helped me in work because I am a good scenario planner, I think forward, but no. I mean, maybe with age and confidence, it's usually the things that I am afraid to do, the things that are new – the new, uncharted territories. Like I am about to set off now. I am leaving the company I have worked for. I have been about change, but I have always worked for largely the same company, so that's kind of ironic, I guess, and doesn't make sense, and I am about to go off into the unknown – literally – now for myself. It's very scary. I am very fearful of that. I am worried a lot about that.

Mike Kearney: What are you going to – what's beyond the book? What are some things you are planning?

Beth Comstock: I have got a book. I am going to take a few months and just discover, just see – it's a long time I have asked myself, "What do you want to do? What are you good at? How do you want to spend your time?" So that's what I am going to ask myself.

Mike Kearney: I am dying to ask this question because I have always thought if I were to – I have been at Deloitte since 1994, so, what, now I am almost in my 24th year. I can't believe that.

Beth Comstock: It goes so fast, doesn't it?

Mike Kearney: It does, and what I have been thinking is if I ever had that time or when I have that time, I don't want to know right away because I also wonder who, really, am I? I don't mean that, but what is it that really would drive me into the next phase of my life? And I think people sometimes look to jump to the next thing where they really don't answer that question.

Beth Comstock: I think that's exactly right, and I have done that. You take the next thing not because it's the right thing, but because you think you are supposed to do it.

Mike Kearney: Exactly.

Beth Comstock: And so now a chance to step back – it's scary. "What do you want?" "I don't know, don't ask me." "Well, who am I going to ask if I don't ask myself?" So that's very scary and uncharted, and there's a challenge.

Mike Kearney: I think you will figure it out. I don't know, that's just my point of view. So you have talked a lot about storytelling – everybody talks – we have something at Deloitte called the art of story and there's so many – Peter Grauer – there's so many people that have written books about it.

I still think it's one of those things that's hard for business leaders, and I know – I think you have got an opinion on this, but what I would love to understand is why do you think it's so important? I think that's table stakes, but is there one or two things that leaders can do in order not necessarily to get better at storytelling, but just start to do it?

Beth Comstock: It's interesting you say that because those words – "storytelling" and "innovation" are two – we say them and we roll our eyes in companies. But why do we keep saying them? Because we haven't figured them out, right? So they might be a cliché, but they haven't – they are not yet working in many places. So to me, story is to be human. I mean, it's to be relatable.

We think business is only logic, yet we're people. We bring our emotion. We respond to stories that are relevant. We want to know what motivates people. We want to understand what motivates us. We want to connect. And so I think business is getting much better about that, but I still think it's ruled by logic.

Mike Kearney: I think a lot of times, though, people think it's got to be some grand – we have all – maybe back up. We have all heard that eloquent story that somebody tells around the fire and you are like, "There's no way in a million years I could do that." But I don't think that's what it's about. I think going back to – it's almost like reflecting on your own personal experiences and sharing them in a story-based way versus this grandiose story. People make more of it than they need to.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, I think they do make more of it. I think you are exactly right: We expect that – people to be – we know that person and we're not – I am not that person.

Mike Kearney: Right. "I am not that person," yeah.

Beth Comstock: But I have a point of view. I have a story. I have an insight to share. And so really, I think it's just sharing a bit of yourself.

Mike Kearney: Right. So I am going to move into the final questions. I call them the dessert. I love that just because hopefully this is the dessert of this conversation. I am going to read a quote that you have, which is as follows: "I love to read and I believe in the power of books to inspire us, spark our imaginations, and – " and I love this word – "nudge us toward meaningful change."

And so I am not going to ask you – I think it's always a cliché to be like, "Oh, so Beth, what's your favorite book?" That's an impossible question to answer.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, I don't have one, one favorite, yeah.

Mike Kearney: But is there one – and the word that you use actually resonated with me, and that is "nudge," meaning – I think of something that just maybe pushed you to do something that you otherwise wouldn't or changed some behavior or belief. Is there a book that you could say nudged you?

Beth Comstock: Well, I mean, if I were to say – back to growing up – Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* is if I picked one book or a book that I think, as a more introverted person, that had a lot of influence – still does. It's one of my favorite books.

Mike Kearney: And isn't it funny to read because it was written in, like, the '50s or some –

Beth Comstock: It was written in the '50s.

Mike Kearney: So you read it and you are like, "These stories – " like the backdrop, but it's timeless advice.

Beth Comstock: It's timeless, and that's what I like – and then I just picked up one this past month that I have been really interested. It's by a Norwegian author named Erling Kagge, and he has a book out. It's called *Silence: In the Age of Noise*.

So that's my new nudge because here, I am very active in social media, I have grown up in communications and promotion, so I mean, it's a lot about content and talking and noise, and we're in business. And so one of my challenges is to appreciate silence more, and this guy writes about going to the South Pole totally on his own and no one knowing that he was there and came to appreciate silence. And so that's a nudge for myself of how can I start to appreciate more silence, and I don't always have to be doing busy.

Mike Kearney: Right. I was listening to this podcast and this was like the trendy thing to do, those 10-day meditation retreats – I am not sure – and I love to listen to people reflect on that because if you want silence, that's like a testament to what it's like _____. [Inaudible due to crosstalk]

Beth Comstock: Exactly. Yeah, I am thinking like an hour. I am not thinking like a week, so –

[Laughter]

Mike Kearney: Exactly, exactly – or 10 days. [Laughs]

Beth Comstock: Yeah.

Mike Kearney: So I am super excited to ask you about this Changemakers program or book club.

Where did you come up with that? It's such a fascinating idea and thing that you are doing.

Beth Comstock: Well, because I do read – like, I have books – if you go to my office, tons of books everywhere, and people would always say, "What book are you reading? What book would you recommend?" And what I found with my colleagues is that they – I thought, "Well, this is a way for me to help open up and help do discovery in my company. Let me do a talk every month with somebody who's got an interesting book, largely about change and innovation." And so I just started doing that, and we did – we do it on Facebook Live because it was a way to share it across GE and with customers, and people seemed to like it.

Mike Kearney: That's awesome, yeah.

Beth Comstock: Because it's a discussion with – it's applying it to work. So many of these are business books. But it's also applying it – early or mid-career people, I think, maybe don't have this kind of discussion at work. I found people are doing book groups now. They are having sort of lunch-and-learns and they use the book and they will maybe tune in, Facebook. We replay it and then they will use it as a jumping-off point for their own book club at work.

So I like that that's happening. I think people want to engage around these ideas.

Mike Kearney: What's been the reaction so far?

Beth Comstock: Largely good from that.

Mike Kearney: Yeah.

Beth Comstock: I think that people want access to these ideas and they want to do it with people they work with.

Mike Kearney: And will you continue it?

Beth Comstock: I plan to, yeah. Absolutely. Yeah.

Mike Kearney: Awesome, awesome.

Beth Comstock: I just did one last week with Adam Grant.

Mike Kearney: Yep, I saw that one.

Beth Comstock: We did it at re:Work, which was a fun setting. So I am going to try different locations and different work settings and try to bring different people into it. It's really about these ideas in the context of work.

Mike Kearney: I have not read any of his books, but I was watching some of the videos. He's a fascinating guy. Some of the idea –

Beth Comstock: He is. Really.

Mike Kearney: Oh my gosh. So yeah, so you got me to probably read his – I think he's got three, right? Three books.

Beth Comstock: He's got three. *Originals* is one of his most recent ones. They are really about creativity and disruption of the people at work.

Mike Kearney: I don't know if this was it or something else, I do so much research, but is also just the patience that you need in geminating these innovative ideas.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, exactly.

Mike Kearney: Which we do not have. I mean, I certainly don't.

So you say you love traveling, but I think I have heard you say – "Well, where's your favorite place to go?" And you will say, "A place I haven't been." But if you could go back to one place that you have been, where would you go?

Beth Comstock: I think India.

Mike Kearney: India? Really?

Beth Comstock: The most fascinating place on earth. It's just such an intersection of people and humanity and culture. To me, India is a culture living out loud, and I think of it as the most colorful place I have ever been.

Mike Kearney: I used to go all the time, yeah.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, it's just – if you haven't been there, you can't appreciate it. So I think that's a place where I feel like I could go back forever and still not fully discover what India has to offer.

Mike Kearney: Well, you need that book about the – what was it again, the calm and the noise or the one that –

Beth Comstock: Yeah, the silence and the noise, yeah.

Mike Kearney: You will need that in India because it's the loudest place I think I have ever been.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, exactly. That would be maybe the ultimate challenge, to see if you could have – find silence in these cultures that – where everybody's living out loud.

Mike Kearney: What about music? You say you love music. So, what are you listening to nowadays?

Beth Comstock: I love all music. I tend to like more alternative rock and indie – you know, alt –

indie, really, in –

Mike Kearney: So Culture Club? *[Laughs]* No, I am kidding.

Beth Comstock: Yeah, back in the day, but more like indie rock, I guess, sort of more – I am always like, "What's next?" kind of like the xx kind of music.

Mike Kearney: You love all genres?

Beth Comstock: I love genres. Led Zeppelin was my absolute favorite growing up, still is. If you had me asked one band, I would have to say Led Zeppelin.

Mike Kearney: So, that's your favorite – that's my favorite band. So here, I will tell you mine while you think of it. "Hey, Hey, What Can You Do," remember that?

Beth Comstock: Yeah.

Mike Kearney: It was a B-side of – I forget what song, but by far my favorite.

Beth Comstock: Well, there's a lot – it's like asking your favorite book. And then I am going to give you my cheesy answer, which is my high school girl answer, which is the "Stairway To Heaven" answer, unfortunately, but that's the cheesy high school girl in me.

Mike Kearney: That's okay. You have talked about this throughout the course, but we purposely talked about – or we purposely named this podcast *Resilience* or *Resilient*, and the reason being is I think that attribute, probably more than anything, is important nowadays in business.

And what I find and what I was seeking was to kind of talk to people who have been resilient throughout their careers. So when you think of that word, what do you think of? And is there one person that really epitomizes that in your mind?

Beth Comstock: Well, I think it means to bounce back. I think it just means to be ready for any possibility.

Mike Kearney: Irrespective of circumstance, yeah.

Beth Comstock: Irrespective of the circumstances. To me, it really means to bounce back, and I am actually hard pressed to think of the best role model because I actually think in business, we haven't given ourselves the permission to say that's what business does. I think these older companies – I guess right now I am really intrigued watching what Wal-Mart's doing in the face of huge disrupt, presumably, they are proving to be really resilient. They have been around a few decades. They are going to be around a few decades more.

So I think it's fun to watch companies – I wouldn't rule out some of the old companies like the GEs of the world, right? we have been around for a reason.

Mike Kearney: You know, I am reading this book I referenced earlier that they ask a question, one of your best learnings, and invariably, it's always that thing that knocks somebody on the ground where they seemingly thought, "My life's over. I didn't get into that school," or, "I didn't get tenure at this – "whatever it may be, and they say, "That was the best thing that ever happened to me."

Beth Comstock: The resiliency soundtrack might be – I think its Chumbawumba, "I get knocked down but I get up again."

Mike Kearney: [Laughs] "I get it – "

Beth Comstock: Remember from the '80s or '90s? But I think that's what – to me, that's what it is. "I get knocked down but I get up again."

Mike Kearney: When we finish this podcast, I need that music in there. So Chumbawumba –

Beth Comstock: I think they were a one- or two-hit wonder, I am not sure.

Mike Kearney: Yeah, I don't know their second, so – well, Beth, thank you very much.

Beth Comstock: Thanks a lot.

Mike Kearney: This was fantastic.

Beth Comstock: It's really been great talking to you. Thanks a lot. Really enjoyed it.

Mike Kearney: Beth, thank you once again so much for joining *Resilient*, and thank you, everybody, for listening to Deloitte's *Resilient* podcast, produced by our friends at Rivet Radio. You can find us by going to <http://www.deloitte.com> or visiting your favorite podcatcher, keyword "resilient." And if you are enjoying our conversation, share it with your friends and family. Also, please give us a rating. It actually helps people find us. And finally, I love social engagement, so reach out to me. Tell me what you thought of the episode, tell me who I should interview in the future, or just connect with me. I love connecting with people on LinkedIn and Twitter. So if you are going to LinkedIn, Kearney's spelled K-E-A-R-N-E-Y, and then also, if you want to find me on Twitter, mkearney33.

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