

# Podcast 78\_Anouk Lagae

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people, work, company, fear, rebel leader, energy, create, accent, life, centered, environment, love, ceo, cultivate, friend, perspective, feel, andreessen, flowing, heart

## SPEAKERS

Murielle Machiels

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Murielle Machiels

Hi. I'm Murielle co mom, an educator, I used to work really hard and sacrifice important things to me until I lost my motivation. Fast forward past many failed attempts and lessons learned. And I found a way to reach great results while working less. Today, I'm obsessed with helping other leaders build meaningful lives. So each week, I'll be sharing inspiration to change your life and organization. This is rebel leader with a heart. Hello, nice to meet you. Hello, Maria, thank



you for hosting me today.



Murielle Machiels

You're welcome. I was looking forward to this interview. Because you seem to be a great CEO, you will with your company, you won the greatest place to work awards, you wrote an article about love at work, and you seem to really embrace it and embody the words not only use it, because I've met other leaders who also use work words like love, but it's not really authentic. And with you, I could feel it's authentic. So I really wanted to do this podcast with you.



Well, thank you so much for the the honor and the pleasure.



Murielle Machiels

Yeah. So maybe you can tell us a little bit who you are and what you do for work and a little bit also how you got there.



Okay, so I'm a mum of three beautiful children. I am a wife of a fantastic husband. And indeed, I am also a CEO of actually, the great space to work in Belgium, voted last year, which is accent. So it's a talent placement company, where it's all about people and looking the potential of people. And how did I get there? Well, I started my career as an engineer, a business engineer. So I started at Unilever, then Coca Cola, and then Duvel moortgat. So these were really high passionate companies with a huge amount of love for the products. And subconsciously, I've chosen these I've been attracted to them. And they came onto my path. And now I'm actually at accents. And I am discovering what makes this great display so great. And it's actually the love for people. So which does just tremendous.



Murielle Machiels

Yeah. And when you say the last two people, how do you bring that love to your people?



Well, I don't actually it is there. It's in the DNA of the company. Forever since the start that 26 years ago. It was always with passion and with love for people, you know that Knievel Andreessen and X f, Philip, Krakow have started this mission. And so, it is very much ingrained in everyday things. So I just tried to cultivate it, and try to protect it because it's so precious and so special. But I see myself more as a garden than a CEO. So I actually, yeah, look at it as an environment. And I need to keep it healthy, you know, so that people can thrive. Right? People need Right, right challenges, right opportunities, some need more sense. Some need more vitamins. Some nice shades. So, so yeah, one of my key and key responsibilities is keeping the environment just super healthy. And with a lot of love.



Murielle Machiels

Yeah, I love that you. You look at it this way. Because I believe that's the that's the clue to create an environment that is healthy and where people blossom. Yeah, in exactly that are focusing directly on the symptoms or on things. It's really about creating this environment. Exactly. And so I'm also curious, then, how do you deal because in that environment, not everything goes well, all the time? Of course. We're all human beings. Yes, you'll probably face a lot of challenges as well. And so that's not always easy. So how do you deal with those challenging situations with love? Yeah.



Well, I guess it's always well, trying to remain centered yourself as a person. So Even though the the situation might be very challenging, try to just keep calm and breathe, and keep perspective. So, but more importantly, it's also ask your question why, you know, if you ask, Why is this happening? What? So not the words are not how much and, you know, but But why? If you focus on the why you look through different lenses, and you look with perspective into

the situation, as opposed to being stuck onto the roller coaster, try to, you know, step back and look at the roller coaster, with perspective. And, well, from time to time, I don't have the perspective either, you know, I'm also just human. And what I try to do them is to surround me with some people who can bring different perspectives, you know, so So, typically, it will be my management team, you know, this is happening, I don't have the thought or the only truth, you know, it's, it's, it's very much also, okay, how can I leverage the collective genius to deal with a situation and the more diverse your team is? And I mean, diverse in thinking, you know, yes, it can be diverse, of course, and in color, and age and shape, and, you know, but I, I mean, the most important thing is you have diversity in thinking, so everyone looks from a very different perspective to the same situation. And that helps me, you know, to, if I have lost perspective, or I can't look at it with clarity, because I'm too much into it, as well. Yeah, I really challenge myself, you know, and I love to be challenged by them as well, to look at things in a different way. And if it's not my team, it would be my children potentially, or my husband's very much a mirror there. They're so blunt, you know, uh, brutally honest. And that helps to keep me centered as well. Because sometimes I might start to, to fly or you know, or that, that helps to keep me balanced or look at it from a different perspective.



### Murielle Machiels

Yeah, I love that you say, Well, the first thing I do is that I center, I breathe, so that you don't react with your exact conditions, behaviors or from a place of fear. So that's really so important because that that's what I miss often with leaders, is they think in Fast Times, we have to go faster and faster all the time. And they forget to just center breathe, pause, ask themselves why. And then you can accelerate again. But But I was wondering, then how do you cascade this within the organization? Because you you worked on this probably to get to that stage. But I can guess that not everyone is like that you might have a lot of people who react. So how do you help them? Well,



first of all, you just try to lead by example. By doing it yourself and practicing it yourself, you give the example or you give inspiration, or you you show them the tools, you know how they can potentially deal with that as well. So one is delivered by herself. But again, the most important thing is then there is no fear, you know, when there's fear, and actually, the presence of Love is the absence of fear, or, or the or vice versa. So when there is no fear, and it's not about judgment, it's not about one truth, you're open for different perspectives, you're open for failure, you know, so and so that's something very important that, you know, again, was already present in the company, but that I'm continuously cultivating. And so actually, as an example, bottom up instead of top down, bottom up every starter add accent, so every new employee needs to sign a documents, you know, that it's okay, that you will try new things and fail and not feel guilty about it. You know, so it's very much a licence to fail. Yeah. And it just, it's a contract that we we really embrace that people try because you know, it If you don't take risks, you will never gain or gain more, you will never pioneer if you don't do that. So it's very much into the culture that we create an atmosphere of potential. And, and no fear. And actually also, of course, a lot of love. Yeah, one of one of our three values is be a friend. But it's a big promise be a friend, you know, it's be a friend towards our clients. So our clients that are looking for candidates, but we, we truly want to see them as friends, and we help them in the good and the bad times as much as we would do for friends. And the same applies for candidates. So nobody is a number we know them. We, you know, we engage deeply with

them. And we promise to treat them in the best possible way. So they get the best contract, the best environment to work at etc. And, of course, our own colleagues, our own centers. Yeah, we are there for each other and as a friend. And actually, if they don't behave that way, you also need to be strict about that. So it's not just rosy and tell what you are. But it's you don't hang this on a wallpaper, you know, but you need to live through it. Yeah. And if you see that it's not left by, you really need to step in. And so, so that's where you Yeah, you need to reprimand and say, okay, sorry, this is not the behavior we want, or, you know, we've we've signed up for together so. So you're very much aligned on culture, you know, so we, we, you know, we hire for values, and we train for skills. Yeah. It's also wonderful. Yeah, yeah. But that's very much the case. And again, that was already in the DNA. So yeah, that's not my contribution, I keep to cultivate it, and be careful to maintain it and improve it even if I can. But yeah, that's pretty much it.



Murielle Machiels

I would even go a step further and say, be a friend to yourself, and talk to yourself as if it was a friend talking to yourself.



That is so so true. We so underestimate, that so many people have a little devil in the head that is ruining so many things, instead of being kind for yourself, you know, and yes, we can improve. And yes, we make mistakes. And yes, you can be angry with it. But mainly being compassionate. And loving yourself. And taking care of yourself in the first place. Is the best possible way to then also, yeah, reflected to all the others and inspire others to do so. And we so forget this. I mean, yeah, all of us.



Murielle Machiels

Yeah, it's true. Very, I love it. So it's about values, knowing your values, behaving according to those values, and then being an example as a leader and creating that safe environment. And, indeed, that's what comes out from research as well, that's a safe environment creates high performing teams.



Absolutely. Absolutely. It's so critical as a base. And it's so forgotten. And actually, so many companies are led by fear. You know, and it starts from the very top. You know, when I was younger, I thought, oh, it's the manager, and then is the manager? Oh, no, but it's the it's the directors and management team. And it's not the management team. It's the board. You know, but it acts I mean, it's actually the shareholder know, so we promise X percent of profit to the shareholders, you know, so we are in fear that we might not deliver them. So the board is in fear. So they cascaded down to have command and control to make sure that we deliver the profit, and then it cascades down into layers and layers and more and more hierarchies. And people are afraid to not deliver, people are afraid to make mistakes, people are afraid to speak up, people are afraid to be themselves. So actually, there's a whole new language that has

been developed. It's really business language. And so in companies, people can only bring their heads anymore, you know, the thinking and yeah, and you know, Oh, and the language has been developed Head Head Head, PowerPoints, excels, you know, financial KPIs, but there is no place anymore for the heart, you know, and actually, the heart needs to be closed off. And if you dare to talk about emotions, or you get really cold, you know, you're not serious. You're, I don't know, there is no emotional language anymore. And so actually, people, even their dress code people dress up in gray, they go to with a gray suit, you know, you used to Yeah, so. So you go to work with a very reduced version of yourself, especially



Murielle Machiels

in hybrids, or remote work. It has even worsened people. I



don't know that is that. Yeah, I didn't think about that. Yeah,



Murielle Machiels

yeah. Because they open the virtual meeting and focused on business. Well, through the past, you would walk in the hallway, you would talk a little bit to chat, send you your conversation, and, yeah, yeah, yeah, true.



I didn't think about that. So, but basically, you know, if you can create an environment where the heads and the heart can speak, you know, and the larger the companies, I don't want to, you know, make final conclusions that might be big companies that also are led by the heart. But typically, the higher the structures, the hierarchies, there's, you know, there's much more thinking and no more feeling. And for me, you know, having moved from big corporates, to then a smaller family business, it was like, oh, but this is led by the heart, you know, so, and there's so much emotion, I wouldn't, it's only emotion, so much emotion. And so for me, that was also, yeah, very interesting to see how, how differently can be lens, and actually also successfully LEDs in a different way. So, but the truth is, if there's a balance of both, and the head and the heart, and we don't close it off, we're the same person at work or at home, you know, because the gray suit, closes it off at work, then goes home, and it's the most loving, partner, most loving neighbor who makes pancakes or who helps, you know, the local football players with so that it's still the same person. But unfortunately, on Monday morning, you go back to work,



Murielle Machiels

you shut down your emotion. Exactly.



And so, so if I can help to contribute and create an environment where people can be just you in your flow you and where there's place for head and heart, but also in meetings, you know, also talk about how are you feeling that? How are you really feeling? Yeah.



Murielle Machiels

Ready to accept the answer? And not just good. Exactly.



And if it's not good, be honest about it. I would too, I would get to, you know, so with. So we've lost a bit of that balance and that humanity. But I'm sure, the more we see winning companies, the more we do research, like you do, it will become more and more clear that actually winning companies do exactly that.



Murielle Machiels

Yes. And I like to say, you know, we used to work with our hands. And then we started working with our heads. Yes. And no, it's working with our hearts. Yeah. And the fear in organizations that we see there is a lot of fear in organizations. But it all comes down to the fear that people and especially leaders have in themselves.



Yeah, that's so true. So true. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Will I be able to deliver that result? Or will I, you know, am I a good manager? I don't know what goes into there.



Murielle Machiels

Yeah. Am I respected? Am I good enough? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. If I say no, maybe people will think I can't handle things. Yeah.



Or they might not like me or Yeah, exactly. Yeah,



Murielle Machiels

exactly. And so how did you transform over the years to become that kind of? I guess that's not what we learn in school. That's not what we learn in business school. Not at all. So you probably had some shift somewhere that wasn't always easy.



Yeah, that's that's the least I can say. I think in every setback, you have you learned something new. And it's honestly been a life journey, you know, from from when I was young from when I was a child. Up until now and There's different phases where I learned different things. But again, because I try, I want to try to understand, you know, and look at the why. Why are things happening? Why am I reacting this way? Why? Why is this happening with me or with my environment? So it's driven by curiosity and driven by your willingness to improve, you know, to make myself a more complete person, a more complete, you know, a better mom a better wife, a better a better manager, a better friends. So, but yeah, there's definitely been big shifts, yeah, in different moments of my life. And I guess the most recent one would be, when I left my previous job, at Drivemode guts, I really wanted to grow. And I've also realized, I've been so lucky to, you know, to have been born in this country by my parents who had the means to give me education, you know, that I had the possibility to go abroad with the husband I met, etc. So, so I've been so so bloody lucky. That, yeah, I mean, I became 45. And I really decided I want to give back, you know, so I've done 25 years, or 20 years of Western capitalistic learning a lot, you know, doing great business having great results with I really wanted to give back to society. And so I was very clear what my parameters were, you know, for my next job. And actually, I involve my children in that process, because I wanted my children also to know, it's not always rosy for mom, or it's not always successful, you know, mom is sometimes in shifting moments as well. And, and so I asked them, you know, so because I've contributed to more and more and more, you know, so selling more Coca Cola selling more, you know, deodorant selling more, yes. So. But of course, that's not sustainable, you know, because for the planet and for the people. And so instead of going for more, I learned through Google, and thanks to Google, it's about going for better going for quality and not for quantity, or creating value, not volume. And so I asked my children, and I asked them, What if I would sell more of it? It would still make the planet better. So which is you know, and so, they were brainstorming, and they said, Oh, yes, Mom, what about more yoga? We can you know, more yoga? Or what about more veggie burgers? Or what about more cycling holidays? And, and my son at the moment, he said, Yes, Mum, what about more jobs for Syrian refugees? You know, but that was only a seat. I mean, I would never have thought about jobs, you know. And then, and then I met all by coincidence, I met Connie von Andreessen. And, yes, she wanted to offer me this job. And it was like, Okay, so that's not a place where I would have imagined, you know, myself because I have a fast moving consumer goods background. So now I'm in services, and now I'm about Unlocking Potential of people. But yeah, that was very much a very centered process where I very much consciously was looking for, okay, I, you know, I want to grow further, I want to contribute, I want to make an impact in this world, but in a different way. And it's who I am,



**Murielle Machiels**

I went to a same Pro, a similar process, because I worked at Procter and Gamble, and then in pharmaceuticals, but over the counter, and at some point, I felt I don't want to sell more and more and more now, what could I sell more of that seriously, a better planet and and I ended up starting in an educational publishing company, and I felt well, schooled books. Exact rates. If I sell more, it's better for exactly



sharing knowledge in the world. Absolutely. Absolutely. Oh, fantastic. Yeah, I have no idea.



Murielle Machiels

Yeah, so you also told me that you studied Chinese medicine. So what's the link? How did you start studying Chinese medicine and do you use it also as a CEO?



Yeah. Oh, that's a funny question. I'm in the so when I was working for Coca Cola, I've lived abroad for 10 years. And, and three of those years I've lived in Sydney. And I was responsible for all new beverages, tea based beverages, you know, waters and teas. And so we had bought Coca Cola. So we had bought a company in Hong Kong, based on traditional Chinese medicine, so to make beverages based on traditional Chinese medicine. And so I remember I was sitting on the ferry, beautiful sun, you know, you go home by the boats in 10 minutes in the sun in Sydney, instead of one hour in the tube in London. Dark and smelly gases. So life can be very beautiful. And and so I discovered while I started to read about traditional Chinese medicine, and it was the very first time I had that fundamental Aha, like, Oh, my God, this is the first time that left brain right brain yin and yang, you know, art and science, seasons, nature, it all came together. And that was an epiphany. That was a, you know, that was such a special moment. Actually, the first time in my life, I had something that so clicked. And I started to discover I developed beverages. And, and I started to practice as a patient, you know, because you go to the doctor before you get sick, not when you're sick. So it's a totally different way of managing and thinking. And actually, that hobby became that passion became very much a hobby. And I started reading and reading. And then when I turned 40, and midlife crisis, I lost two friends of mine. And on one of their funerals, it was like, oh, you know, when he would turn 40, he would have chosen for more X and Y and Z. Yeah. And so I came home to my husband, and I said, you know, I, you need to promise me and I will promise you on both of our funerals, we never want to hear anyone say this. And so it was always my dream. You know, when I stopped my career, you know, to go and learn traditional Chinese medicine. It's it's University, it's seven years plus 14, you know, you can do much more with its university studies. And so I wanted to go to Beijing for seven years to learn it and then spread that wisdom into the world. And then I realized that maybe there is no, tomorrow. And then I decided, okay, I'll start the studies now. And I started to study them. In Belgium, so I was sitting there with doctors and kinnikinnick kinesys, and, you know, physiotherapist and nurses. So it was the only commercial engineer who was the CEO. And, yeah, but it's, it's, it's all about energy. And food is medicine. And so the way I look at the company now, and the way I look at an environment now, the way I look at people and their performance, I still have all my old tools, and you know, I can still use them very well. But I look through a very different lens at the same things, and I see so much more. And, and in the end, it is about unlocking that potential and unlocking energy. And if you think about those unstoppable companies, that one innovation after the other, I mean, the energy is flowing, you know, and they create huge results, and they unlock the genius inside because people are in the flow. People have no fear, there's a lot of love, and they're super results. And so yeah, it's it's a fantastic enrichments in my life and my whole family. We all go you know to Chinese doctor preventatively and I also have herbs at home where I do just for my family because I am not officially allowed to subscribe anything for anyone because I'm not a doctor. But I do have my diploma. But it's it's very much a passion of mine.





Murielle Machiels

Yeah, no, I love that because I also realized at some point that my energy is what makes the whole difference. It was as a CEO and it's now as an entrepreneur. And so every time I can feel okay, my energy is not good now, instead of it's also when you attract to situations that are not great. So instead of continuing in that energy and trying to fix things, I know that I have to stop and manage my energy to make to feel again, exam with a higher vibration. And that's when I have great thoughts again and start attracting great things again,



so true. And the funny thing is, everyone can feel it. Yes, you know, if you enter a reception of a company, the energy and the vibe, same with love, you know, go to any shop or any baker or any, any pub, you know, people can feel or or a family, you can feel where there's love and no love. But it's, yeah, it's not in our language, or it's not that, that everyone can notice it. But actually, we don't realize it because we're not conscious enough of the energy that is flowing.



Murielle Machiels

Yeah, yeah. And again, what we see now in a lot of organizations is that there is a lot of trapped. Energy stuck. And also in people like, yeah, of course, because we don't feel anymore. We only think that energy is there. But it's negative energy. And it's



absolutely, and fear, which lowers the blocks it so yes, yeah, absolutely.



Murielle Machiels

So wonderful. And so your colleagues accept all that. Also,



I don't go into the details. You know, it's for me, just a handy extra perspective that I have, personally, for those who wants, you know, that are intrigued, of course, they ask and they know. And so I was also giving more and more lectures as well. But then COVID came in lockdown. And then of course, with my new job, I wanted to focus first on my job, which was already an overwhelming, you know, challenge in COVID times to you know, to run a new company. From your desktop. Yes, basically. So I've put my other passion a little bit on hold for now, but actually, I use it every day, but not in a in a verbal way. Yeah. So but every time I can, yeah, decompose, what is making that there is a challenging situation or where it's not flowing? Yeah, I get to the root cause. And once you unlock that, yeah, you I mean, and so, for the moment, we have, again, record high numbers. So so it's just phenomenal. To see that. Yeah.

And in the works doing great. And yeah, and so, but it's just an extra, extra toolbox. But yeah, it's one that I'm, you know, I'm for those who are interested, I will explain, but otherwise, I just give snapshots of wisdom whenever I can, you know, whenever I noticed something that



Murielle Machiels

Yeah, and what I like is like, you see, it's not opposable, it's not you do one or the other. I love to just embrace Exactly. The traditional things. We've used the research. Exactly. And a little bit of spirituality, because that makes the mix. Also beautiful and



Exactly, exactly. Yeah, that's,



Murielle Machiels

that's great. So in this podcast is called rebel leader with a heart. So what would you see we we've talked a lot about the hearts, what would you say is your webull sides?



Oh, well, well, first of all, I'm with accent, we are all happy rebels. So the house of HR, it's literally, yeah, we are happy rebels. So if you're not a rebel, you don't enter the house. I've passed that, that test. And one of the other values at accents. So one was already be a friend. The other one is Go Pro. So we really want to improve constantly and make things better and be professional. And the last one is stay gutsy. So taking risks, and doing crazy things and pioneer and do things that nobody has ever done before. And so we partied a lot. We dress the dress up for it with that. So there's a lot of fun. And there's a yeah, there's a lot of craziness actually, again in the DNA of the company. So it's not a coincidence. I got attracted by it or they got attracted by me so so yeah, so the, the rebellious side is I mean, I never want to follow you know, if you follow you're not you're not discovering new things. So, yeah, I just, I just love to discover new things, try new things, curiosity, ask questions. And, and be creative with it as well, if you see patterns and then okay, but flip it on the other side. And so, so come with a totally different solution to the same problem or look at the same problem in a very different way. So, so yeah, I mean more, two more to come for sure. When you see what we're going to do with accent, but one of the, it's not, I mean, it's not crazy. So I might not now disappoint you. But a total new thing that we've just decided to do is actually invest in education. So because talent is everywhere, there is an abundance of talent, and there is no shortage, there is an abundance of talent, but we need to train them, and unlock they might not have the right skills to match, you know. So, so we've decided instead of being hopeless, and you know, complaining about what we can't find, or what is not available, well, we want to try to come up with a solution ourselves, you know, and so we've just bought two companies actually in education, where if we see the talent, you know, and we train for the skill, we might, so education is the new recruitment. So we so it's a long learning life. Yeah, absolutely. So it's,

again, a different way to look at a problem and come with a new solution. So I don't know yet how successful we will be that time will tell. But for sure, we want to pioneer constantly and try new things. So



Murielle Machiels

wonderful. So it was a really nice conversation at some points. I felt, maybe you could teach my course. Because you said a lot of things that I teach seriously, your you apply them. So that's wonderful. Oh, well, congratulations. And I'm sure you really deserve the greatest place to work awards.



Oh, well, thank you for doing the academics and for, you know, taking the time to share this knowledge in a broader way. So because you do this out of passion as well, so. So thank you for giving us the platform. Thank you.



Murielle Machiels

Yeah, we really believe that. If we manage to change leadership, it has an impact on a lot of people. And at the end on our planet, so true, especially if you manage to connect people to their hearts again, instead of their fears. That's when great things happen.



Yeah, I couldn't agree more. And actually, before, I was always thinking, I want to change the world, I want to change the world, you know, and, and I would take all my energy to try and change the world. And what I've come to realize is I don't need to change the world. If you change yourself, yes. If you change yourself, as a consequence, all the other things will follow. Yes. And so that's the same now with my leadership team, because we want to go through a transformation and it's like, instead of saying, oh, and how are we going to design? No, no, no, we are going, you know, into the woods, we transform ourselves, and the rest will follow. You know, so so that's when through through change happen



Murielle Machiels

is actually because you change Yes. And it's going into the being it's not about doing having no more it's about being again. Absolutely, yeah. So great. Thank



you for your wise words.



Murielle Machiels

Thank you. It was really great having you here.



Thank you so much real.



Murielle Machiels

Yeah, you finished another episode of rebel leader with a heart if you want more, go to rebel leader with a heart.com For show notes and past episodes. If you love the show, subscribe, leave a review and share it with a friends The more the merrier. Thanks for tuning in and have a great week you rebel leader with a hearts