The recipe to deal with chaos - Carole Lamarque

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**SPEAKERS**

Carole Lamarque, Murielle Machiels

**Murielle Machiels**

lately, it seems that we go from one crisis to the next one. It started with digitalization, then we had the COVID. Then we had, of course, inflation, war, shortage of a lot of materials, shortage of talent. So how do you deal with all these crisis, and I see a lot of leaders, they'll they're just running like a chicken without a head around and trying to fix things, and to work like a firefighter. But there is a way in dealing with a crisis. And I think we should really learn how to deal with a crisis because it's not going to get easier. I think the world is going faster and faster. There are a lot of reasons for that. The combination of technologies, the complexity, the fact that everything is interconnected with each other. So we're, we'll have to deal with a crisis very often. And so today, I'm talking with Carol Lamarck, Carol is the founder of Duvall Union. But she also wrote a book, so neurotics, and she got really interested in how to deal with a crisis, how to deal with chaos. And that's what we're going to talk about today. She made a couple of analogies that I really loved. And it's really a great conversation, not only for the leaders, but also for the people who, of course, and I think it's everyone today, who regularly deals with a crisis. So be sure to tune in for this episode. I think you're gonna like it. This is rebel leader with a heart. Hi, Carol.

**Carole Lamarque**

Hi. Hi, Murielle.

**Murielle Machiels**

Nice to have you here in the podcast. We've been exchanging a lot for a couple of months, even though and finally we're meeting our life here at a podcast.

**Carole Lamarque**

Yeah, it's a pleasure to meet you people, especially if they're working in foreign with the Soviet business school.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah. And so can you tell us a little bit who you are?

Yes, I can. What defines me, I think is my passion for marketing. I've launched a lot of innovations through my career, especially in technology. And going viral and going exponentially as always been a passion for me through quests, because I was always asked the question, I got the most like, when are we going viral? Carol? Like, if I if I have a real answer to that question, I would be somewhere else in the world, I guess right now. But I'm very happy to be here and to think about exponential growth in trade books about it. But I've been educated in a very competitive world. I've been working in energy in telecom, ICT, where I got the opportunity to launch a lot of innovations, which bring us together right now. Like, I launched the internet in Belgium, and cloud computing, which are two things that are essential for us. Yes. But I also did things a long time ago, I launched voicemail, which you probably don't use anymore, except for your mother and your children. But what I also was very passionate about it was a real roller coaster when we launched TV over the internet, which is called Yellow in our region.

**Murielle Machiels**

Nice, nice. And so you also wrote a book about crisis management and leading in chaos. So Mike, what made you curious to write and to be interested in crisis management and chaos.

I wrote, I wrote three books by now Murielle. So I got the opportunity. They asked me to do it because I wouldn't dare to try to write a book. But then I got really the passion for to write into share. And I all bundled it together in a book called zoonotic, which is actually a type of virus, which, for me, is a good explanation on how to go exponential. And in the book, I got to interview a lot of people. I interviewed several times better to brew humans, who is a real crisis expert as he is the CEO of the fire brigade of zone and where and for people who love Antwerp, they know that it's a large area or not large enough, of course, But then you have a harbour there, you have civilians living, they're all close to one another. So you should be very good at managing crisis and avoid any kind of catastrophe. And so he taught me that you have to see exceptional situations as a normal chaos. So for him, what we call crisis is normal is the crisis became the norm for him and all other firefighters, who just are able to trust the process. And by trusting this process, as soon as it's at is, as it has been built, of course, and if the process goes fast enough, the members of the team just can trust it. And it just becomes business as usual. And that was a real inspiration to me, because I believe we all live in kind of a crisis. If I can compare over the years that I've been doing my job and my passion, I see, speed is of the essence, speed is crucial. Especially if you want to grow if you want to grow exponential, you need to manage these speeds in a manner that you don't burn your people here that you can, that you can work in a constant state of flow, if I may say and not in a constant state of panic. So a firefighter is not in any kind of panic. It just does his job by trusting a certain process by having a certain set. And that's what I really loved about their thinking and their education, how they managed crisises and how I tried to learn from that, to manage other people's business.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah. And what's the secret then? Because yeah, we live in chaos. No, chaos has become just part of business as usual. It's not as, as certain and as slow as it used to be. Now things move very fast and sometimes in disruptive ways with the virus that we've had the corona virus and then the inflation, the war, the fact that we can't find good people talent anymore, or it's hard. So how do you handle what's the secrets to better handle chaos

is accepting this, that crisis is there to stay that it is really a consequence, a sequence better, a sequence of waves of crisis is that change all the time, and, very importantly, is not to prepare for the previous crisis. So you can write up to and and learnings from a previous crisis, but the better thing to do is to understand what you can take from one crisis to another. And that, of course, is most of the time a certain attitude, a certain mindsets. It's important to, to, to understand that there are phases to crisis, and especially the beginning of a crisis is linked to a form of chaos. Because you don't know what all the information is all about, you don't have a full view of the situation. And you can't imagine you can't assess the situation. So in the beginning, it's quite normal to have a short period of chaos. That's something that crisis managers know, another general public, for instance, doesn't understand or immediately accepts. People are quite strict there, they have high standards, and so they don't expect chaos, they want immediate order. So just knowing that a certain period of chaos is a normal part of the process, calms people down, there is no need to be alarmed and to be in panic, at least I understand. It's a natural behaviour, but it's something you need to suppress that leaders need to suppress. Because in we need to stay calm, and certainly not blame anyone during this annoying period of high uncertainty, you will lose a lot of energy and your teams will lose a lot of energy. So the thing the first step in the whole sequence of of crisis is to understand that chaos is part of the process.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah. But and I think as as a leader and as a person, learning to accept this chaos. It also helps to bring this kind of being grounded, just being grounded and breathing. And yeah, with a lower base for yourself. centre of gravity, so that you really grounded to get through this crisis. And as a leader, sometimes you can see a leader that is really grounded with a deep breathing, will reassure people, even if he doesn't have the answers or doesn't know what's happening. It's a kind of being that we need to learn

socially. Yeah, I see, I see that people tend to follow and the majority of people are built in a mindset to follow. Leadership is in different ways, spread to out a community or a country. But so it is a vast group. But then again, most people need to follow, it would be kind of an ironic anarchy, if everybody would want to lead. So luckily, we don't need that much leaders in the world. And I think people that are believers of Thinking Fast and Slow, is is really a true a good inspiration for leadership. Because then as you say, You are grounded. You you, you have an A magnetism for people, to follow you into your direction, hopefully the good one. My inspiration comes from a numerous amount of experts in crisis. Again, I'm not a crisis expert, I just am a fish in the water in environment that go past that, that have a high pressure, highly competitive environments. So that's why I recognise myself in the way crisis managers act. And my inspiration comes from a set of ladies to floor lamps, who is one of the leading ladies that had a coordination role in the COVID-19 commissioner's office. You had also Carolyn pools, who is a professor of strategic communication and persuasive Technology at the University of Antwerp. And then you had Sarah Frederick's was the head of communication of the zone, of Brussels zone. Brussels south, in the police zone over there. So three huge ladies really charismatic and very grounded ladies. And they showed me a lot of a lot of innovation. I understand that crisis, as you said in the introduction is a new normal. So you, it's due to a lot of things that it's what what you teach probably your students, globalisation, that connectivity, the highly networked organisations and so on must be the reason. But you should teach me real, I don't know. But that's the way I think things are. And so I do prepare enterpreneurs to, to use this as a strength, not to undergo the situation, but to wait on it to use this dynamic. Because this just create a lot of energy does create a lot of opportunities, only positive things, but some intrapreneurs I see. And you probably see them too. They're kind of, in a sense, storm. Overwhelmed, they don't see anything, they navigate in almost zero visibility. And so you need to give them a step by step guide. Because of course, if you don't know where you're heading, a step by step guide could get you out of the sandstorm, even if you don't know north from south in the middle of the of the crisis. So I do believe that Thinking Fast and Slow, at the same time, will help a lot of Intrapreneurs get out of their fear.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah, and that's what I see that I miss a lot in entrepreneurs, but also leaders, is they have this feeling that we have to move fast and it's not a feeling we have to move fast. The world is going fast. But then they have the feeling that they have to go fast all the time. And so they're moving very fast without thinking enough without Yeah, being creative enough managing their energy enough. And so they're they're running all the time like chicken without a head and not being efficient at all.

No, I meant at Think if I am an enterpreneur, myself, I teach a lot of people a lot of things. But of course, sometimes I have to look in the mirror. And over the years, even when I was young and sitting on a scooter and the scooter going off the road, what I noticed is I was 17 years, and the driver said, I was so happy, you stayed calm. So and I think that's happened a lot in my life, when things go very bad. I tend to stay very calm, as you say, grounded or something, I think I really do think very fast. And then I act real slow. So it's hard to explain how it feels to but I think people that have experienced the same do recognise this feeling. And if you go all ways at the same time, like you say, a chicken without a head, that's certainly not the person people are going to follow. So yeah, he votes by step guides in order to make them calm down.

**Murielle Machiels**

And for me, it's also developing a sense of presence, it's really being present with what is now and when you're completely present, then you better know what needs to happen. And often people are not present, they're always either in the future, or in the past, or doing three things at the same time, but without being present. And that's when you miss this clarity that you're describing. Where, okay, you're very present. And it's like you're being in slow motion, I love this picture of in the matrix when Neo becomes the one. And you will see that his mind is very calm, very present. And you see in dodging the bullets. In slow motion, well, in reality is it's extremely rapid. And I think that's the state of mind that we should manage to achieve.

Exactly, that's in the in the the state of mind, even if, in certain times, you can be a path thinker or a future thinker, I myself am always in the in the future. Like I love innovation. So I'm reading the metaphors from from Matthew ball at this moment. So I'm always in the future in my head. But truly when it is needed, when you feel these moments of crisis or chaos, it is exactly as you describe it, you are in the moment, you're nowhere else you're like, also for fun stuff. Like if you go to Tomorrowland or something, you're in the moment with your little boots on the ground, you're grounded, and you're really feeling nothing but what you're feeling at that moment. So I think it's for bad things. I think it's for extreme good things. Sometimes you have to be nowhere, how else then here. And now, even if most of the time I really thinking ahead. I'm really making scenarios, what could happen, what could happen when I met How am I going to react on this on scenario, ADT, whereas good crisis managers say, is the habit of creating plans that's important, being having this agility to change scenarios as they occur. And it's not the ability to follow a plan because every plan is, is to be thrown away as soon as the situation occurs, because it's always new. Yeah. But the ability to make plans to be agile in your head to have this habit of being very Yeah, source, creative, flexible. That is that's reason why you make plans. But you don't you will not be able to use a plan. As soon as something unknown, unexpected. Arise. So you manage the unexpected because of habits, but not because you have a plan.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah. Yeah. I love that. And I love making plans. And I never follow the whole plan. But I love making plans. And and also, even when I'm having a conversation with somebody, even if it only takes me one or two minutes, I will think about what's the ideal outcome. And this and this, I'm going to say and it's has always helped me a lot even if then I deviate from the plan at least. I knew I had a plan and then I changed it. Yeah. Yeah. So it's accepting chaos. You said so it's learning to accept chaos. You Then having a process or ways of working as I understood it, and then making plans but not following them being present any other secrets in handling a crisis?

Secrets? Yeah,

**Murielle Machiels**

the thing is,

you're never alone You are one element in the solution. So having this process and sharing the knowledge about it's makes you very wrong. If you visit centre, a crisis centre, and you see how it is organised, I advise you to do so I visited three times already one. And it is you see that the process is ready to tackle any type of crisis. And you see that the steps are there, the process are there, the roles and responsibilities are there. So everything there is a blueprint that can be used for any kind of unexpected crisis. So I think just go and visits, learn from people that are not doing your job. If you are here for quite a while, let's say you have been management world for 710 20 years or longer, it will be hard for you to learn something new. I think it's good to go to business schools I have on several degrees. I'm a big fan of, of your school morale. That the other way of learning things is to talk to people that are as passionate as you about something totally different. I think it's generally see that passionate people have a lot to share. If I'm passionate about marketing, I can talk about somebody's passionate about his restaurant, I can talk about someone who's passionate about fire fighting, I can talk about two people that are passionate about anything different than I even if I don't agree with them, even if I don't agree. So that's where you will learn the most is to, to me, in modesty, that's how I learn. I read books I study, as much as they can always be the student never feel smart. But then again, I can really enjoy talking to other passionate people, because they have so much to teach you about their passion. And if you then can mobilise can structure the way they think, forget about the food, forget about the fire, just remember the process that they follow. And look if you can remember something that you can apply to your area of expertise.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah, I love this tip as well. And that's what we've been missing a lot in the last year. Is this networking, meeting new people? Because a lot of people, yeah, we had to, first of all shrink our networks. But even now I see, too many leaders are concentrated on delivering the next the profit or the two dues without getting inspiration and of inspiration from other areas that could nourish them. And that's also Yeah,

to do educate, which is reading books going to schools. I tried to get inspired, as you say you need to get inspired. And you do need entertainment as well. You should be fine. It's not all hard work. It's just so nice to do. And board the networking part while I pivoted quite quickly, I did 60 interviews a month during the lockdowns, everybody had signed for chat online, so it was no reason to stop. And my my network increased 5000 people in one year. So it is a bad excuse to say that you couldn't network you had to change your way. You couldn't do productivity and efficiency. So I got 5000 friends more than I had before. So and we met Murielle. So it's best proven we never met in real life. Yeah, no, it was.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah, no, I completely agree. And the other thing I was thinking about is this whole economical system that is based on predictability, predicting the future earnings, the future revenues. And so I am we live in an unpredictable world and still a lot of boards. A lot of shareholders expect a lot of predictability. And I see often. The more chaos there is the more information the more they try to control things and the more data they want, while it should be the opposite.

It's a Dutch version of how is it called in English? Which stupid? I don't know. It's it's called in Dutch. So help me out people in the room that are listening, fat and Kenny's from Hans Rosling, which indeed tries to. Or yeah, they predict it, it's all about graphs and things are a lot more predictable than they were, like, let's say 100 years ago, that I really, truly understand. But predictability is having three totally different scenarios. Like, at best worst case, kind of scenarios. So of course, boards want predictability, because most of the people want to follow, as I said, they don't want to lead. So following means, tell me where we're going. Because otherwise, I can't follow you. Because then I don't know where we are going. Yeah. So because of everybody, I don't want to be disrespectful. But let's take a metaphor, which is quickly understandable, is people want to be sheep, they don't want to lead. So if you don't tell me where we're going, where should I then go, then it's good chaos for me. If I'm a follower, and if majority of people are needy, in order to have order in the world need to be followers, it's logic that people want predictability. So I think that you should educate them and inspire them like Jeff Bezos did four years in a company that didn't earn any money. Like then, like Elon Musk is pretending to, to plan to die on Mars and all while it says it says crazy things and people tend to follow him. So predictability even if it's based on Yeah, it is based on data. And I think we're in a good way, we're in a good place. We're not in, in drama, everything is very much more predictable than it was 10 years ago. Look how quickly we found vaccines for an issue that nobody thought so the unexpected is not drama, the unexpected goes faster.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah, but I agree with no, but a lot of people expect, like detailed plans, and predictability not on the high level, because on the high level, I agree with you. But they want like predictable details. And they're asking for a lot of details.

Now, new fields are the leaves on a tree, lets us say what is the basis of the tree? Let the big branches where what are they? And those are quite fixed. And you can imagine something and then the details are the leaves on the tree. It's not that important. Which lever just stay out of the tree and explain to you it is on which tree does this this leaf is fixed? Is it on that type of tree? Or in this case type of of tree, the bigger picture that's more important. And then yes, actions, of course you need actions is, is doing things going from the strategy from the PowerPoint to the actually doing things. And that's what intrapreneurs wants, they want the word concrete, what are you going to do? So people just want you to put one foot in front of another. And if you're an intrapreneurial or intrapreneurial person, that will happen to and most of the leaders are not interested in too much details. They want the bigger picture. So cluster or your details in three big trunks, and then they will listen. If you start explaining all the leaves on the tree. They get bored. Yes. So they say they say they want detail. But they don't actually do. They just want to see they want to be reassured.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah. They want to be reassured. Yeah, they want to know that you

know what you're doing with their money. So if you are able to reassure them on which tree this leave is hanging, and you give to

**Murielle Machiels**

and that's when we hit a crisis of technology, and we got lost, but we handle this crisis very well. And so let's listen to the rest of the episodes.

Happy to be back sometimes. technology lets you down. Yes, that's okay. It was a little crisis, but I stayed really calm and grounded.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yes. I took a couple of minutes to centre myself. I thought okay, she's coming back.

She'll be back.

**Murielle Machiels**

Welcome back.

Yes. So refer that.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah, no, I agree that, that good leaders want the big picture. But I remember when I was the CEO of a media company, that's my board or my shareholders, they expected a lot of reporting on the details. And, and that's not the way to go today, I believe at least not reporting on the details for longer future periods.

As I said, you need to educate your people, yes, you need to educate them, so they know you that they can trust you, you know, they can ask you any difficult question, you have the answer. So trust is built, avoid this detail, because then your last expected each time, and then inspire them. So in order that they know where you're heading, that they know that you're a leader, and that they can follow you. And they don't know. They don't need to know every little step of the way. They follow You wherever You take them. That's the leadership. So I guess it weighs, you need to earn the trust to do whatever it takes to get it. During the meeting behind the scenes, get your mentors do the work and your influencers, do the work for you. To people in larger organisations, they know that. And of course, if you have some things that profile questions that if they don't trust the girl that's too young, for instance, as I had, I had to go to board meetings, directors that could have all been my father. Yeah, I guess they don't trust me right away, which is stupid, of course. But that's a fact. So if you're young, and that's what I wrote in my book, as well trust your young people much faster, they are the energy, they are the future. That's what a company needs. So apparently, younger people are discriminated because of their age, much more than people are 50. That's something I learned that I didn't know, of course, I've felt it myself, but it's a generality. So in younger people get discriminated, because they are young. Yeah. And that's, that's creating a handicap for the company. Because that's where the power is. That's where the resilience is. That's where the new naive, sometimes ideas come from, they have a bottomless energy that you can use that you need, if you're in this exponential curve. When a company goes exponential, the energy that is needed to cope is huge. Yeah, not only age group has this type of energy.

**Murielle Machiels**

So I agreed, I think

it's a good mix, the companies I like to work for is where the diversity in age is also very nice, where the older people, which I then called all the people, which were 50, which is the age I have today, but they have a certain groundedness, as you say, they are calm, they they have seen crisises before they have this done, this will do it again, attitude, and young people look at them, and they see this calm, and then they are reassured that they can come up with ID, but then they have to get listened to people have to listen and see them and acknowledge them for for their being there and being the future of the company.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah. And so you have to be open to that, you have to be open to that, because a lot of leaders they got where they are being a certain way, and that's great. But that's not the way that will get them to the next level. Because it's changing that much that yeah, they have to be open to doing things very differently and getting out of their comfort zone to get there

quite hard because of course, I I tend to believe that rather stay naive, that I tend to believe that I am open and innovative and, and, and so on but I do understand as as the more generations come between me and my people. Yeah, I have to invest to understand them. It doesn't come naturally anymore. If you're very invested with your children, for instance, then you understand your some of your employees have the age of your children by by now. So you still have this connection to youngsters. But then three years lead later your employees are three years younger than your own children. So in a in a certain period of your leadership, everything comes natural to you. It's the same for young People when they just graduate, something's come natural to them. Three years later, they have to invest in their own knowledge. They're not, they don't have the finger to the pulse all the time, because they are in working life. And they're not in the middle of the school where everything is trendy by default. Everybody has the latest sneakers and the latest hairstyle and in the right kind of jeans, they, but when you get out of a certain community, your children's are older, you're no longer close to school environment. So everything polarises. You don't understand, happening by nature anymore. You have to invest. And that's when teaching learning getting inspired is so important. Because you because you feel that you don't have it anymore. Except if you invest your time in this.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yep, completely agree. And now let's move maybe to the last question. And this podcast is called rebel leader with a heart. So we interview leaders that don't do things like others. That's why we call them rebels, but with a heart which is very important. So what makes you a rebel leader with a heart?

Yeah, okay, the hard part I can imagine. I can agree. Let's say the rebel part is something else. I think you're a rebel because other people see you as a rebel. I don't know if rebels feel that they are a rebel. What I do believe is that I can call myself sometimes be a pioneer, sometimes most of the time and innovator. And so people tend to think you're revelling against something. No, you're just following an adoption curve, which is pure economics, you know. So I think pioneers and innovators are first in line often with in the acceptance of innovations of new habits. And so the people are tend to look at them as strange creatures. And if in my heart, I'm truly an innovator and want to stay open, I want to understand beyond yours. And of course, if you go against a certain flow if you go against majority, early and late. Yeah, if you go against the flow, people call you a rebel. So if they have to, then they have to, but me myself, I don't call ourselves and rebel. Yeah. We just love innovation. We do our greatest best to stay open to everything that's coming to, you know, our way.

**Murielle Machiels**

Yeah. And the hearts part you say that's, that's okay. What is your heart or love parts?

Yeah, I, I do listen much more in my new life. Since I'm an intrapreneur. Versus when I was working in corporate life, I tend to follow my heart much more than I did, then. Because I think it's now it's me who has to make choices for myself. There's nobody else gonna make the choices for me. You're your own leader now. So I follow my heart if it's, I tried to educate and get inspired. So I have the ground for making any decision. But most of the time in intrapreneurship, there is no ground. It's totally new. It's your decision alone. So you have to follow your heart. That's, of course, you need ration and I do I love in my profile been analysed many many times in corporate life, what kind of person I am. And know that data is driving me. But a lot of times in it now and in the future, we will have no basis no ground. We have vision, we have vision from others, and we read books to get inspired by them. And then there is only one thing left is the part between your heart and your brains and you go for it. You jump Yeah, nice. Being a rebel Allenby ones

**Murielle Machiels**

Okay, nice. Thank you, Carol. And where can people find you

on LinkedIn? I've got a lot of friends over there. Yeah, and I'm very proud that 20,000 people are following me and reading my my posts almost all the time. I know it's now it's really calm on the internet, which is a good thing. People are not on online a lot. But yeah, I tried to inspire my followers several times a week so if you want to find me, I would just suggest to find me there because I but as I say to everybody, I'm on every type of social medium. So if you want to follow me on tick tock, feel free.

**Murielle Machiels**

You then I was, yeah,

I do have a video where I almost dance. I do I do. But if you want to follow me on your medium of choice, feel free if I can choose, go to LinkedIn, that's safer.

**Murielle Machiels**

Okay, well, thank you very much Carole. It was a nice conversation, I think. Yeah, I liked some of the metaphors and the tips you gave I liked the tree with the branches and the leaves. Yeah, thank you very much.

Thank you very much hope to to meet you in real life when the yeah you

**Murielle Machiels**

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