



CORPORATE HOUSING  
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# NAVIGATING THE NOISE PODCAST EPISODE 14: INNOVATING DURING UNCERTAINTY

Brian David Joh...: Hey, everybody. It's Brian David Johnson, and welcome to Navigating the Noise, a broadcast brought to you by CHPA, the Corporate Housing Providers Association. Welcome, everybody, to season three of Navigating the Noise. And certainly this is a time where there's quite a lot of noise. And that's really the goal of the show here is to take on issues of the time, issues of the day, bring in some guests, and have some conversation around how do we navigate these really confusing times with all of this noise and to pull in best practices. So, best practices from other industries, best practices, what people are doing today, and then ultimately give you some things to do. So, give you some things, some very pragmatic things that you can start doing today to get yourself prepared for the future.

Brian David Joh...: So, today's episode is one of the bigger episodes kind of thinking in broad terms. And, for season three, we're taking your suggestions. So, anything that you're interested in, please get in touch with us. I'll give you the information with the website, and our email, and our Twitter address at the end of the show. But, if you've got any questions, you can always ask me, you can always email me. And we're taking on anything. We've taken on very, very specific subjects or big subjects like we have today.

Brian David Joh...: And today, we're going to be talking about how do you innovate during a pandemic? How do you prepare for the future when times feel kind of rather dark? And we've got some great guests on to kind of bring in different perspectives. We've got Steve Brown. Steve is a futurist, and he's an author, and a consultant that works with organizations to get them ready for the future. And we also have Lukas Krause from National Corporate Housing. He's got some really interesting perspectives about crisis management and preparing for the future.

Brian David Joh...: But with that, let's just jump right in. Let's actually start talking about the road ahead. So, for myself as a futurist, as you know, I'm CHPA's futurist. I'm also your host and I'm the engineer as well in this time of the pandemic. So, please bear with me as we go through this. It might be a little bumpy. I'm getting better at it, but it could be a little bumpy. So, but as a futurist, what am I thinking about? And I think, in this time of great uncertainty, right, we're experiencing a global destabilization that is really affecting all of our lives. And what's happening because we're in an uncertain time is we get fearful. We get very, very frightened because we don't know. There's a lot that we don't know.

Brian David Joh...: We know, as we've now all sheltered in place, and you've seen the world kind of closing down, we've seen ourselves kind of in this time of incredible uncertainty. And now, as we start to move to that next step, okay, how do we prepare for turning economies back on? How do we get back out of our houses? What does that look like? How do we maintain sort of the safe distances? And how do we make sure when we're going to open up our different businesses? So, there's a lot of uncertainty right now. And that uncertainty breeds fear. And I've been doing a lot of work in fear. Over the last 20 years, I've been working with not only engineers, and designers, and

executives, and academics thinking about fear, but I've been working with neurologists and people who do brain science.

Brian David Joh...: And what they will tell you about fear is quite honestly, fear makes you stupid. There's really only three decisions you can make when you're fearful. One is fight. Two is flight. And number three is freeze. Fight, flight, or freeze. And we've all seen people, quite honestly, we've all probably made decisions, business decisions or personal decisions, fight, flight, or freeze. But they're never great decisions. Nobody ever innovated in a time of fear. But we're in a very uncertain time where there is a lot of fear. And I do believe a lot of people may not be doing the fight or the flight because we're all sheltering and we're all, hopefully, not fighting too much when we're sheltering in place. So, a lot of us might find ourselves freezing, holding down, not knowing what to do, and stopping. And that's understandable. It's certainly understandable from a personal standpoint. But, from a business stand point, I think that that's dangerous.

Brian David Joh...: And that's really what we wanted to take on in today's show. How do we not freeze? How do we innovate? How do we plan? How do we grow in this time of uncertainty? And so, that's why I wanted to bring on our first guest, Steve Brown. So, Steve, as I mentioned is a futurist. Steve and I worked together at the Intel Corporation for many, many years. And, when I was thinking about who we could bring on, I thought Steve would be perfect, not only because of his work in innovation, because Steve actually just wrote a book on innovation. And again, truth be told, I did love this book so much, I ended up writing the preface to it, but it's a really, really great book. And I'll have him kind of show it to you as, as we get into the end. But Steve and I were having this great conversation around innovating in the time off this crisis and of this pandemic.

Brian David Joh...: So, I'm going to move over to Steve. So again, Steve, thank you so much for joining us. Thank you so much for coming today and talking about this. So, as a futurist, as a writer, as a person who has done a lot of work in consulting with people on this, what are you thinking about in this time?

Steve Brown: Yeah. Certainly, there's plenty to think about. I mean, it's a challenging time for sure. And I've started to think about what are the lenses I can apply to it to help tease it apart, because it's overwhelming otherwise. Right? And that's why a lot of us are in this fearful place of freezing. And so, I've been thinking about it a number of ways. So, I'll give you a few different ways of thinking about it.

Steve Brown: The first one is that this is the Great Pause. This is a time where we're all getting to be locked up in our houses and reflect on what is important to us. What are the values that we hold dear? And that is true personally, but also as companies and organizations. And I think one of the things that's been revealed is the fragility of modern life and our society. And that we need to build personal resilience. And we need to build resilience into organizations. So, that's one way I've been thinking about this. And I can talk more about that in a minute.

Steve Brown: A second way of thinking about this time is as the Great Accelerator. Things that were going to happen anyway have been accelerated, so automation efforts and digital transformation efforts. Think about education. For a long time, this has been headed towards having a more online component or tele-health. So, healthcare having more of a digital component. As a result of necessity because of pandemic, those things have been accelerated. So, there's a couple of frames to think about pandemic.

Steve Brown: Another way I've been thinking about this time, I mean, this is a monstrous challenge. And I think about it as a three headed beast. And the first head is a public health challenge. Right? And we have to figure out how to keep people safe. If you're in a business, how do you keep your customers, your employees, your suppliers safe and so on. And then, longer term, what's an intelligent plan to gradually have a phased reopening as that becomes sensible?

Steve Brown: The second head of the beast is an operational challenge. In the short term, how do I make my business operate at all just given the constructions that we all face? And then, longer term, how do you build resilience into your business so that next time something happens, because this is a drill. Right? This is a big drill. But this is not going to be a one off. There'll be other things that come your way. This is a great time to use this as almost like a pressure test on your organization and make sure that you are building a resilient business. And that shows up in lots of different ways, making sure you are financially resilient, making sure you are operationally resilient, you can still operate under these types of circumstances, that you are organizationally resilient, that you have people cross trained, you maybe have them at different locations, you have the ability to flex so they can work from home, and so on.

Steve Brown: And then, the third head of the beast is the economic head. And this is really where innovation comes in. So, in the short term, as we plummet into recession, there's some tactical things that have to be done. How do you deal with cashflow? How do you get credit? What do you need to do basically to triage the business, to make sure that you're preserving cash and that you can live through this?

Steve Brown: In the longer term, how do you get out of recession? What's the best way to power your way through and catapult your way out of recession. It's to drive innovation into every part of your business. So, to innovate your business operations and to invest in developing new products, and new services, and new channels using technology to drive innovation. Because the companies, organizations that fail to invest, they'll come out of recession, hopefully on the other side. But the companies that invest and innovate their way through recession will power out the other side of it on a growth path and come out of it stronger than they went in. So, that's the way I've been thinking about it.

Steve Brown: Now, how do I innovate? So, I just turn a switch and innovate? It doesn't really work that way. We'll create a culture of innovation, people say. Well, it doesn't really work that way either. You have to start to build concrete plans and think about some specific things you can do. One of them is to accelerate things like automation efforts or

creating digital transformation in your operations, building new channels, and most importantly, building new products and services. Why new products and services? If you build innovative new products and services, that is the only way that you will stimulate demand. And that's the only way to power our way out of recession. So, that's the big framework that I've been using to think about this.

Steve Brown: And I think most companies now need to figure out how do I build resilience into my business? And how do I innovate my way out? It's time. I think it's time. Here it comes. It's the shameless plug, everybody. Here it comes. So, I didn't realize when I wrote this book last year, it came out just in February, literally a month before pandemic. And the importance of innovation has just always been there. And, as I looked forward, I could see more innovation in business and more transformation in business coming in the next decade than in the last 40 or 50 years.

Steve Brown: So, I wrote this book about innovation and it's how to use... subtitle: How Six Strategic Technologies Will Reshape Every Business in the 2020s. And those technologies, by the way, are artificial intelligence, blockchain technology, augmented reality, the Internet of Things and sensors, 5G and satellite networks, and then autonomous machines. So robots, cobots, self driving cars, and so on. All of those six technologies are ingredients that businesses can use and combine in interesting ways to create innovative breakthroughs in the way they operate, the products and services they deliver, and so on. So, this became a guidebook for that.

Steve Brown: The time horizon that I wrote this for was for a decade. So, this gives you a clue on what should happen, what would be possible in the next decade. And it gives you lots of helpful tips on how to do that. What pandemic has done, I said at the very beginning, was it's the great accelerator. It's not a decade anymore. It's maybe five to seven years. So, if you're looking for tips on what to do to innovate your way out of this mess, there is a book for you. Back to you, Brian.

Brian David Joh...: Thank you so much, Steve. And, again, as I mentioned everybody, the book is great. And I think one of the things we'll make sure to do is put a link to the Navigating the Noise website. Maybe we can talk Steve into giving us a little excerpt from it so you can see it. It's very, very pragmatic, very approachable, very well done. So, thank you for that, Steve. We're going to come back to Steve at the end to get more kind of pragmatic, specific. I think he got really specific, but we've kind of challenged all the guests today to actually kind of think about, to have an idea of what we might want to do during our three things to do segment.

Brian David Joh...: But with that, let's move to segment two, which is our "What Matters." This is where we take the subject and move from the kind of high level to bring it a little more down to operationalization, to the industry, to somebody who is doing some really kind of interesting work in this area. And that's where we wanted to bring on Lukas Krause. And so Lukas, kind of a similar question. I'm going to switch over to you a similar question that I asked Steve. So, in the work that you're doing at National Corporate Housing, what are you thinking about? How are you processing this time? And what

advice could you give people to, not only kind of get through what we're doing today, but then also really prepare for the future?

Lukas Krause: A lot of things ring true to kind of what you covered, Brian, even what Steve mentioned. To go back to your fight analogy, think all of us in our category and other categories are just fighting really this crisis management of survival. And so, you get laser focused on it. It's really easy to fall into that trap because it is mission critical. If you don't get that right, guess what? There is no future to even worry about or theorize on what it's going to end up being. And the key to, obviously, being successful there is obviously, it's important to know who you are, what's important to you, and where you're trying to go. And during that crisis, it's only more important to anchor back to your core values and what's made you successful.

Lukas Krause: I've been a part of quite a bit on the turnarounds. And it's very similar to this. It is that balancing act of not thinking about just this battle that we have here in crisis mode, it is about that future, who do you want to become in this new normal? And you have to be very intentional. Steve said it well of having this plan of how you want to come out of this. But the way you make that happen and what we've done as an organization is dedicate time to that. Dedicate time, mind share on what needs to change for your organization and what you want to become. Because it's very easy to get pulled into that survival trap. And I'm not trying to trivialize the importance of that. But, if you don't dedicate the time, it just doesn't happen.

Lukas Krause: Additionally, just like anything you want as culture in an organization, you need to reward and recognize behaviors that are aimed towards that innovation and evolving as an organization to that future. And so, we've been very thoughtful as an organization having meetings and dedicated time where that's the subject matter and that's what we're focused on. And it's really easy. Right? We have to hold each other accountable to get pulled back into that battle that we're fighting right now. And you don't want to, again, neglect it. But you want to be disciplined about that time.

Lukas Krause: And so, the things you do there is you plan what are our goals? What is our industry going to look like? How's it going to change because of this? Steve brought up a great point of that not only is it accelerating some of the plans, but things that we took as norms and how people would interact are going to change from this. There'll be some scarring element. We may regress back to the mean of kind of normal operations. But, at the same time, there'll be things that will stick with a lot of folks.

Lukas Krause: And so, we've really tried to have the discipline of those rainy day projects, accelerated some of those ambitious initiatives that we had, whether it be the technology or trying to move our operations forward, cross training. You name it, that's where we've been spending a lot of time. Because one of the positive byproducts is that volume is down just because individuals aren't traveling and kind of in the mobility sector as a whole. And so, when you have these resources, how can you better utilize them so that you're investing for the future?

Lukas Krause: And, at first there's, it's very easy to feel sorry for ourselves and as a business that we're not where we want to be because of the volumes going down, just because everyone being on lockdown. But you have to see that opportunity in it. And really who do you want to become from is a very important thing. And so, if you can paint that picture clearer, and then lay the tactical roadmap on how you're going to get there, and to have everyone on that shared vision with communicating, that's where it pays dividends. And I think that's where the rubber meets the road in getting to kind of that innovation and being the organization you ultimately want to become coming out of this.

Brian David Joh...: I think, Lukas, you make a really good point there, that now is the time. Like you said, sort of making the time and now is the time, certainly deal with the crisis management deal with what's going on right now. But how incredibly important to take the time to ask the questions that Lukas had mentioned, I think, is really, really helpful. And there were some very, I think, some really, really good points from both of our speakers around how we get started.

Brian David Joh...: So, I'm going to take us all to the gallery view. And I'm going to open it up. I'm going to cancel my spotlight. So, now we can see everybody. So, now this section is called three things to do. This is the portion of the show where we try to give you really specific things you can start doing today. I've got some notes from our speakers, but I'm going to start with Steve Brown. So, Steve, what is one or two things that our audience could do today, very specific to start preparing for the future?

Steve Brown: I think use this time. I mean, yeah, we're all cooped up, many of us in our homes. If you're an essential business, then you're out there. But most of the businesses, you're at home. It's a time for reflection. Think about what... I mean, it's also a time for great stress. You talked about fight, flight, or freeze. A way to get over that is to figure out your tolerance for ambiguity and try and find stability in your life and build on top of that. So, my tip for people is, to reflect and think about what's the mission and purpose of our organization? Has that changed in the last 30 days? No, probably not. The values and the way our company, our culture operates, has that changed in the last 30 days or so? No, probably not. So, a lot hasn't changed.

Steve Brown: And, while there is uncertainty out there, focus on the things that you can control during this time. The only thing that really has changed is how you execute on your mission, vision, and purpose, and how you live the values of your company. And that shows up in your tactics and strategies. So, practice self care. Try and establish your own routine. And focus on the things you can control. And then, figure out, where are the areas I can invest to drive innovation into my business and build resilience into my business. Use this time as like a pressure cooker to figure out where are the areas that I need to make my business better anyway. And to Lukas' great point, this is a time where you have to go and fix those holes and make sure that, when you exit this, you come out much stronger than before.

Brian David Joh...: I like that a lot, Steve. I think that idea of reflect, focus, and invest, right? Because what we always tell people on Navigating the Noise is that we're not the experts, that everybody who has their own business is the experts. They're the ones who are doing this. And you are business people who are going. And so, you will know the future of your business. And to do that, you need to reflect on it. Again, who are you now and who do you want to be, I thought that was a great point, Steve. Focus, spend the time, but then I think that's important is invest. Right? Whether it be your time, or your people's time, or even to be some sort of capital in some way that that investment really does pay off. I liked that term, the Great Accelerator, that the pandemic is really not shutting everything off. It might feel like it's shutting everything off, but it's actually turning everything up. Okay.

Brian David Joh...: So, that's a good one. That was a dense one for number one. All right, Lukas, I'm going to pass it over to you. What do you think? What is something that somebody can start doing today, right now, to start preparing for the future?

Lukas Krause: Yeah. So, it's a dense one and I'm going to cheat, Brian. I'm going to actually play off Steve, because I completely agree with the approach. Mine is actually block and schedule the time to do that. Because it's so easy to get pulled into the trap of whatever distractions are there or just that fight or freeze mentality. And so, have that discipline. Set the time uninterrupted to do those very things, to plan. Okay. What do you want to become? What's going to be different in our industry, so that you can drive forward and get that plan. Because, if you don't set the time aside, it's just not going to happen.

Lukas Krause: So, to me, I think the most important thing is to do exactly what Steve said, have those thoughts. But, if you don't give yourself that privilege of the time, it's just never going to happen. So, that would be my second one that I'd cheat and steal from Steve a little bit, just build on the practical execution of that concept.

Steve Brown: But so important. Brilliant. I love it, Lukas. Because we don't make time. Right? That's the problem.

Brian David Joh...: Right. Yeah. And our time is so important. So, that's a great one, Lukas, number two. And I'm actually going to riff off of you, Lukas. So, something that you said in yours, which I thought really resonated with me and also the different members and the different companies that I've worked with over the years is, you have to reward it. You have to reward this type of behavior. And so, what both Steve and Lukas were saying, and taking those steps, you have to reward it in yourself first. Like actually value it. Your time is valuable, so value your time. And take the time to do it. And know that this is a business investment, an investment for your future. And take that time.

Brian David Joh...: But maybe even more importantly, if you do have a staff, if you do have employees, if you do have a team to give them the permission and the platform to do it as well. I think their perspectives, especially now, because we are so distanced literally, that it will give them time to think. And it'll be really interesting to find out what they come back with. And they might surprise you or they might spark an idea because they've

been working on their own and thinking about things and watching different TV shows and reading different books. And they might come back with an idea that really surprises you that then kicks off an idea in you about something that might be done. That collaboration between people we know is really where a lot of innovation and brilliance happens. But again, making sure that you do that, you give them the platform and the permission and you reward them. It doesn't have to be a monetary reward or even something, it's just valuing it and giving them support.

Brian David Joh...: I think you can put all those together. I think our three things to do worked very, very well together. Right? Just to review, you've got Steve's, number one, which was reflect, and focus, and invest. And then, once you've started doing that, Lukas told us to just block the time, really simple. Just block it off, just like we all do with meetings, just block the time. And then, I would add to that to value it once you're doing it and you're reflecting on it. And don't just do it once. Do it multiple times. Value it in yourself. But then, also, if you have a team, then value it in them. And they may come back and surprise you.

Brian David Joh...: And so, with that, I'm going to wrap us up. First, I'll say thank you, both to Steve Brown and Lukas Krause. Thank you both very much. I really appreciate it. I'm going to go back to the full screen and finish us up.

Brian David Joh...: So, I hope that was helpful for everybody. That's the idea with season three is we're trying to take on topics, no holds barred. Let's just try to get out there as quickly as we can. We're going to try to release these as quickly as we can. If you do have any input or any questions, you can always reach out to me. I am your futurist.

Brian David Joh...: By the way, I think one of the things that could be a really interesting topic for Navigating the Noise, and please tell me if you're interested in it, it's what Lukas, and actually Steve talked about it a little bit, but Lukas brought it up. What will our industry look like when we come out of this? And I think that's going to be really complex. That's a whole show. That might even be a couple of shows in itself because we know the future is local. The future is going to look different in different places. And especially on the other side of this pandemic, as we're transitioning, depending upon where you live, what state, what country, what city, it's going to matter. So, I think thinking about that. And only you know. Again, you are the experts at your business. So, you know about that. I think that's a really interesting one. But tell me if you're interested in that.

Brian David Joh...: If you've got any other questions, you can always reach out to us and let us know. You can email us at [info@chpaonline.org](mailto:info@chpaonline.org). That's [info@chpaonline.org](mailto:info@chpaonline.org). You can follow us on Twitter. We are @CHPAonline. Or you can visit the website, which is [CHPAonline.org](http://CHPAonline.org). What we'll do if you go, once we've posted this, we will put up certainly the bio's and links to both Steve and Lukas. We'll try to see if we can coax to Steve into giving us maybe a little excerpt of the book so you can see the really great work that he's been doing and hopefully kind of use it to kind of innovate your way out of this pandemic.

Brian David Joh...:

But mainly I just want to thank you and say, please be safe. However we can help here at Navigating the Noise, please ask us. That's what we're here to do. And I just want to thank you for listening. Thank you for listening to Navigating the Noise, a podcast and broadcast brought to you by CHPA, the Corporate Housing Providers Association. We'll talk to you soon. Take care.