

# THE COMBUSTION CHRONICLES

**EPISODE FIFTY-ONE  
CULTURE, LEADERSHIP,  
AND SOCIAL LEGACY**

**HOST: SHAWN NASON  
GUEST: EMILY CHANG**

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**Shawn:** Welcome to the fifth season of *The Combustion Chronicles* podcast, where bold leaders combine with big ideas to make life better for all of us. I'm your host, Shawn Nason, CEO and founder of MOFI. In these episodes, we'll be exploring the power, influence, and importance of Experience Ecosystems™. To do that, we're bringing together the most unique and influential experience experts in the world for honest conversations about not being okay with the status quo, leading with heart, and getting real about heartsets and mindsets. In case you're wondering, an Experience Ecosystem is the web of people, touchpoints, and interactions that combine to create all of the positive and negative experiences we have in the world. When an organization wants to improve customer experience, they're wasting their time if they're not willing to engage and humanize their entire experience ecosystem. It's time to blow up some silos and ignite an experience revolution by putting people first.

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**Shawn:** On this episode, we have Emily Chang who is a seasoned marketer with 20 years of experience in business strategy, cross-cultural team leadership, change management, customer experience, and brand building. She's currently serving as the CEO of McCann Worldgroup China. Prior to that, she served as the Senior Vice President of marketing at Starbucks U.S., Chief Marketing Officer at Starbucks China, and Chief Commercial Officer at IHG, and head of Asia retail marketing at Apple in Shanghai. Chang also spent 11 years with P&G working across all three of their global business units. Not to mention, she is a celebrated speaker and author, and we're so excited to have Emily joining us today. So welcome to *The Combustion Chronicles*, Emily.

**Emily:** Thanks for having me, Shawn.

**Shawn:** Emily, when I read your bio, you have done some amazing things. How has all of your experience over the years prepared you for your current role that you're in today?

**Emily:** I think it teed me up for this role. Quite a lot of people have grown up and spent their entire careers on the agency side, so I often receive the question, what made you decide to come to an agency? And I'll say, I didn't really choose an agency. I was recruited by McCann, and I chose McCann. I think the company is extraordinary, and it just felt like a very natural next step in a progression. The other thing I'll say is what I didn't do was create a very clear career map. So every opportunity I feel incredibly lucky, incredibly lucky, and privileged to have had each opportunity come along. And

as you look back, you realize, I started at an incredible brand management company that I love and still often go back to, close, close friends that I think are for life. And then I got to go to Apple where I got to work directly with retail. You know, so when you're in CPG, you're always thinking, "How do I get better retail space?" Well, then I got a chance to work directly with retail where I had the opportunity to work with guests who are coming directly into my store to look for my product.

And then I went to hospitality where not only are guests coming to my product and my service, but they're trusting me with their most intimate moments like sleeping, or massage, food, weddings, celebrations. And all of it sort of culminated where I thought it's really about experience. It's not just a product or a service we're offering. And to really bring that experience to life, we have to be able to deeply understand how to merge an online and an offline world, how to create an integrated experience that surrounds our guests. And that's why I ended up moving to Starbucks because nobody, I think, does this digital experience and CRM better than Starbucks. And then I took a year off to write the book after which I really thought to myself, "Okay, this is what I believe. I believe it so much, I took a year off to write it down and publish it. So where do I want to work next?"

And that's when, as I engaged with McCann, I realized, this is the perfect opportunity to think about crafting meaningful brand experiences for people, for brands, for clients across a variety of industries because I've loved all the different industries I've worked in, and I get the chance to do it across a wider spectrum. It's like waking up every day and being a kid in a candy store right now.

**Shawn:** Well, I love it. And at MOFI, we talk about that we make your Experience Ecosystem your biggest competitive advantage, and what's powerful is, in your career, you've worked across that ecosystem in such a powerful way. And I love the fact that you said you didn't have a career map and a career path. That's speaking my love language because I think I'm in my fifth career. And so, something passionate to us in this Experience Ecosystem, Emily, is obviously leadership and culture. And in your talks about creative leadership, you talked about the power of "and." And I wrote a book called *The Power of Yes! in Innovation*, so I'm really intrigued. Can you tell our audience about this concept and how it plays out in your leadership?

[00:05:08]

**Emily:** Yeah. I'm always drawn to the idea of paradox, right, which is the idea of two incompatible ideas, but instead of looking at them as one or the other...I actually learned this really early on, and I probably haven't given credit. There's a guy I worked

for ages ago. I think he was my first brand manager at Procter in 1999. And I remember, I used to kind of roll my eyes at him because I'd say, "Okay, here are my choices." And he'd always look at me and be like, "Can we do both?" And I'm like, "Oh, for goodness' sake." And then I started realizing, "Well, why not?" I love his approach to that. And I still carry it with me. So after this podcast, I have to go back and send him a note and say thank you, because what he taught me is how might we synthesize two incompatible ideas. How might we live with their incompatibility and then consider that possibility? I think it requires us to kinda suspend cognition for a little bit and sit with it, but then you realize there's so much possible. Because here's an example.

You know, I've been wearing an Apple Watch for many years, and even when I was in hospitality and felt sort of compelled to buy really a really nice watch, I still went back to my Apple Watch. But I think my Apple Watch...and I don't mean to create an advertisement for my former company, but it is such a great example of disruptive integration. I'll give an example of the reminder to breathe. I get this little haptic buzz that's like, "You haven't really done deep breathing today." And if it didn't buzz me, I would not stop for a minute to breathe deeply. I just wouldn't. I'm caught up in the excitement of my day. So it's disruptive, but it's also fully integrated into my life. So wherever I am in a meeting, I do take a minute and I breathe. So I think it's just a perfect example of how something can integrate seamlessly into my life, my lifestyle, my habits, the course of my day, and yet inject just the right amount of disruption to capture my attention.

**Shawn:** I obviously love that you used the how might we, you know, because we are deep into human-centered design, what we do at MOFI. So let me ask you this question. What's your advice to leaders who want to create a positive human-first company culture but don't even know where to start? Because I think that's an issue we see across globally with leaders is, "How do I even start this?" What's your advice to them?

**Emily:** I think we always have to start with the end in mind, and I know you've read the book. You know I end with your epitaph, which is truly the end. It's like what do you want people to say about you when you're gone? That's always been my mindset, and that's sort of my answer to a lot of questions. In this case, I'd say, "Who do you want to be? What do you want your company to stand for?" If you can clearly articulate that, the next thing I'd say, Shawn, is, "What people do you need to help bring that vision to life?" Because it's never a one-man thing. And after you define what kind of people you need around you, then what practices will you employ that will foster a culture that

you desire? And I guess those three questions are about envisioning what you want to be true.

The second thing is then shifting into a mindset of engaging, because like I said, I don't think you can do it alone. So who are you in the market? Who do you want to be? What people do you need to help bring that vision to life? And what practices do you need to foster the culture? And then how do you engage the team and co-create a plan to bring that to life?

**Shawn:** Thank you. I want to take it even a step further because in March of this year, you published a book called *The Spare Room*, and it's a guidebook for leaders to find their social purpose. So more than just how do I lead as a company, but what's my social purpose? And there's a quote in there that says, "Now more than ever, social purpose has become an urgent leadership imperative. To be successful, each of us, regardless of industry or functional expertise, must lead with authenticity and purpose. After all, it's tough to lead a socially responsible business if we aren't socially purposeful leaders." And Emily, my partner at MOFI, Michael Harper, and a very dear friend of ours, Robin Glasco, we actually wrote a book and released it in January called *Kiss Your Dragons*. And this just speaks everything that we talk about there. Can you share even what was your reason for writing this book? Because it's so much heart in it, and I love to see it come out in leaders like you.

[00:09:36]

**Emily:** Oh, thank you. Well, I guess one thing I'd pause and say is, "Why did I write the book now?" I always thought, "You know, when I retire, it'd be so great to capture these stories and really hopefully use them as a way to inspire people." And then I really kind of interrogated that question, when I retire. Why when I retire? And so I kind of hashtagged professional halftimes. You know what, the stories are fresh in my mind now, and I think this topic is relevant now. So if I really want to do something that I believe is value accretive for the world, then how willing am I to put my money where my mouth is and really pause for a year and do it? And so that's the imperative behind why I did it last year. And then I just feel incredibly lucky that it all sort of happened within one year, because that's the amount of time that our family all said, you know, "Holding hands, we're just going to do this for a year," because my husband wasn't working either. And you know, I think maybe that's a little bit of the sort of mindset when you kind of say, "I want to do something that is good and useful for the world." I think things tend to flow a little bit more smoothly than when you say, "I'd really like to do something that furthers my selfish ambition."

And that's really what this is about. And I called it social legacy for a reason because we talk about personal purpose a lot, but I wanted to kind of double-click into what I really want to say. What are the words that articulate what I'm trying to express? And purpose is such an overarching word. Social legacy comes with two parts. Legacy is what am I leaving behind? How do I leave something better than I found it? So that can be on a very small level, it can be on a very large level. And social defines the space in which I can activate. So for some people, social is their workplace. It could be their home, their neighborhood. They might identify social as country or as the Earth. And so I think if we can identify what is social for each of us and then what is the legacy we want to leave behind, I think it helps us live with much more intention. It helps clarify our priorities, how we spend our time. Nothing tells our social purpose or our priorities like our calendar. It never lies, because that's where we put our time. And if we know how to intentionally put our time on the things that matter, we don't look back with regret, we don't look forward with anxiety, because we know what we want to do, and we have an idea about how to do it. And I think that really translates very directly into who we are as leaders in the workplace.

**Shawn:** Another great nugget that I just love, and I love your passion behind it, you know, and we talk about a heart-focused human-first approach. When we start talking about customer experience, Emily, I want to get your take on this because there's this perception out there that smaller companies can't keep up with the customer experience that the big players offer like you've talked about, an Apple, a Starbucks, the hospitality world, because big companies have a larger workforce. So what would be your advice to a midsize or a smaller company on how to keep experience operating smoothly without simply hiring more people to make them work right?

**Emily:** I think we all have to, wherever we are in the spectrum, play to our strengths. And I think that question...I mean, even as I hear you ask it, I get excited, because I think if you have the opportunity to work at a small or midsize company, you have agility. I've worked at big companies. I've also worked in sort of smaller parts of big companies. And those are very different experiences as well. There's a book I read, I think it was maybe the late '80s or early '90s, called, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*. I love it because even when you're at a large company, you might be orbiting. You might not find yourself in the midst of the hairball. And for me, personally, I think perhaps that's my sweet spot, and I was a little blessed to have discovered that earlier. If I were completely in a small or midsize company, I'd say, "Wow, I'm not weighed down by any of the global imperative. I'm not weighed down by multiple matrix layers. I don't have grandfathered in situations, contracts, partnerships. I get to start from scratch in a lot of ways."

And you know, in my role right now, I get to work with large companies and I get to work with very small ones. And I think it's really exciting when you get to start, and create, and define a CRM experience from scratch because then you start from zero. You know, in Chinese, we say “Líng dào yī.” It's like, “How do you go from zero to one?” That is a very exciting opportunity. And I think when your ambitions exceed your resources, you find yourself in a sweet spot as well because it forces you to be creative and think laterally. And you can come up with things, and you can execute things that people in bigger companies can't.

**Shawn:** I just love your mindset, and we even talked about it in our book, *Kiss Your Dragons*, Emily, about a heartset, and I think it's more than just a mindset for you. I think it's a heartset for you. How do you go from that zero to one and the excitement around it. And we talked a little bit about customer experience, and I want to dive in a little bit around employee experience. You're a CEO, so this has to be top of mind. So many companies talk about wanting to be a great place to work, but their actions and decisions put profits over people. So what advice do you have for CEOs and executives who are serious about putting people first and taking care of their workforces?

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**Emily:** This is such a great question. I would say my first thing is imagine you worked at an agency. I love that, 22 years into my career, I'm here, because you know what, my company is only people. I have no product, right, I have no supply chain, I have no distribution. It's such an interesting place to be. Because if you only had people, what would you do differently? If we really want to put people first, I guess my job makes it very clarifying because my people are how I make profit. It is the only way I make profit by finding the right people, engaging them, helping them feel cared for, supported, and co-creating. So in my job now, I can only do things this way, and it's become incredibly clarifying. But I would also say, you know, check your schedule.

Everybody's talking now about how are we going to go back to work, you know, where do we put the hand disinfectants, how many people should we have on every floor. For me, the question isn't how are we going back to work, it's why are we going back to work. I think it was NPR did a report on the Great Resignation. I think that's such an interesting topic. Whether or not the numbers are truly there, the point is people have had a different state of being now for quite a while, and they're saying, “Well, why am I going back? Is this worthy of me?” And I don't know a lot of people thought about it as this value in and value out equation. It was always “I need a job. I need stability. How

can I make sure I don't get fired?" In a lot of ways, that's sort of a fixed mindset or almost working in somewhat of a fear state.

But now, we're saying, "No, I'm worth something, and I want to work where I feel valued." And I want to look back and say, "That was worthy of my time," because it's taking me away from my kids. And now I found out I really like being home with them, and I found out I'm good at all these other things. So is this the right job for me? And we, as leaders, have to recognize that and lean into it and say, "You are worthy, and it's our privilege to have you. And how can I demonstrate to you that you matter to me?" I'll give you an example live from yesterday.

I've been wanting now to do it. I just celebrated my first year anniversary. I've been wanting to do this for a year, which is a newcomer welcome. I want to do it across the agencies that all work for me because it's a great way to come into McCann Worldgroup and say, "Okay, what other agencies are there? What floor do they sit on? What do they do?" If we want to partner, we should start from day one so we all know who we are. So we had, finally, our first newcomer welcome yesterday. We just needed to get some things in place and some leaders. And then, as they were setting it up, you know what I heard is, "We're going to have the newcomer welcome. Thanks for giving us the idea, boss." And I was like, "Am I not invited?" And they said, "Oh, well, these are all the junior people. Some of them are interns. We wouldn't want to put this on your schedule." And I was like, "Guys, what could possibly be more important than, A, something I've been asking to do for a year, and B, welcoming our newcomers to our company? Who's going to kick it off if not me?" And I think that was a mindset of being respectful and saying, "No, your schedule is too valuable. You're probably very busy." And like, "I am busy, but there's nothing more important to me than having an opportunity to do this."

And then even to the point of writing a couple of slides, they're like, "Oh, we don't need slides. It's very casual." I said, "Of course, we do. We have to orchestrate not to a point of being overly formal, but we want people to be cared for, and that requires a degree of intention, of thought. They deserve it. If we're going to do it, we're going to do it well." And then it all came together in a wonderful way, and we're going to do it every month. And even afterward, somebody asked me from HR, "You're not going to come every month, are you?" And I'm like, "Well, look, this is the first time for every newcomer coming, so why would I not be there for each of their first times just because I'm saying the same thing? Maybe I'll get more interesting and improve as I go too. But it's everybody's first experience with us, and it's our responsibility and our privilege to make it as great as it can be."



**Shawn:** That is, first off, I'm, like, shouting and dancing over here because I wish every CEO will listen to what you just said because you are truly living out the people-first, human-first approach and that heart-focused approach that we talk about. And thank you for making that a priority, because I can tell you, I wasn't at that event, but every person that was in that room felt important because you were there. And that's where senior leaders need to wrap their heads around that. So let's talk about that intersection of brand management and employee experience. What's the secret sauce for recruiting, training, and retaining associates who will represent your brand the way you want and need it to be represented at the McCann Worldgroup?

[00:19:39]

**Emily:** I'm trying to think about what I have in common across these different companies, because every company has, you know, a profile, every function/department has a job description. But what I'd say is the commonality is a learning mindset. I think there are a lot of things that we can learn when we get into the job. So you know, let's say I have a beauty team now that works with one of our longest-standing and really important partners, which is L'Oréal. And how important is it that this person comes with deep beauty expertise? I think it's actually less important, though that may sound a little sacrilegious. I think we can teach a sense of beauty, but more importantly, does this person come with a learning mindset? Do they care deeply about people? Are they willing to...we call it 3D leadership, exhibit 3D leadership, meaning they're willing to stand in front of the team and block and lead when they need to? Are they willing to come alongside the team and roll up their sleeves and work together when they're needed? And do they have the heart to stand behind the team and push the team into the spotlight, give them credit, and let them be successful? If you're a 3D leader and you come with a learning mindset, you're curious, I will take you in any role, and I think we can teach you the rest.

**Shawn:** Wow. My business mentor actually talks about a concept much like that, that the job for senior leaders is to remove barriers and obstacles and provide a place for people to grow and flourish. And always have said we want to hire people to be that cultural fit that you're building there, right, Emily. We can teach them the other stuff. So I love that. Well, I want to ask you about micro-influencers. And so micro-influencers are everywhere and kind of untamed but have powerfully loyal followers. How should brands be leveraging micro-influencers in their promotional and marketing work?

**Emily:** I think it starts with the end, as always, which is, what is the desired outcome? Who am I trying to reach with what message? If I'm clear about who I'm trying to reach, then I know how relevant micro-influencers are against that target audience. And if I

know what I want to say to them, then I know how much of a role this sort of micro-influencer content will play. And what I mean by that is there's sort of three tiers of content. It starts off with the content that I'm fully in control of, so to speak, which is branded content. It's the stuff that we make. We have complete control over what's said, how it comes to life artistically, and how it goes out into whichever channel, right?

Then you have this in between, which is call it professional-generated content, PGC. So the first one is branded content, BC, the second one is PGC. So this is semi-influenced, if not controlled. I can brief somebody, but I can't exactly control how they express it. I can't make sure that it comes across completely on-brand. I don't know what else it might come bundled with. I don't know if they're going to deliver my brand message with an expletive at the end. That's your PGC.

And then you've got your UGC, which is your user-generated content, which is completely not briefed by you, completely not controlled by you. So knowing who you want to reach and what message you want to deliver to them, you can then think about these three tiers, BC, PGC, and UGC. And what percentage of investment and priority do you put across those three tiers? Then once you know what percentage of influence you want to put in the sort of PGC space, then you can think about how you want to leverage them. How do you want to engage them? Are you looking for those who are already passionate about your product? And you're finding them and engaging them. Or are you buying a group who says something in a way that you like and then you want to introduce them to your product? Those would require two different strategies of engagement as well.

**Shawn:** You also said that companies that exploit their core competencies tend to burn out, and companies that explore their core competencies create new ways to thrive, but the best companies, like Google, bring the two together. So from a business case perspective, can you elaborate on that and tell us what impact that has on the experience and psychology of working at those types of companies?

[00:24:03]

**Emily:** Yeah. I think this is so interesting. It goes back to the first question you asked, which is about paradox, because if we want to build a capability and an organization that exploits a strength and if we want to explore new opportunities, it's challenging, fundamentally, because these two strategies require different skills, mindsets, structures, and processes, probably different KPIs too. So how do you manage, again, you know, from a paradox standpoint, two seemingly incompatible ideas or two strategies that may look like they're headed in opposite directions? And I did think

Google has done a good job with that because they do have a very mature business, right? Look at Maps, for instance. They can absolutely exploit, grow, optimize what they have as a mature business. They also created a new holding company called Alphabet. And with Alphabet, I believe they have a separate moonshots division, right, with Google Ventures, Google X, and I believe those teams, I don't work there, but this is something that I've just been observing, they have different criteria, they're managed very differently. And I think that allows us to scale, find efficiency, and create sort of rapid incremental improvements on one side of the business, and then really explore unshackled on the other side of the business. So we're not all Google. We don't all have the ability to create separate businesses. But how might we adopt that mindset and how might we think about our people what they're great at and which side of the business we might want to put them on?

**Shawn:** I love that. Emily, I could go on and on with you. The knowledge, the expertise, and the passion, and purpose that you bring is so powerful. But it has come to that point where we do something called The Combustion Questions, and they are three randomly selected questions that we ask that you just answer with short answers and the first thing that comes to mind. So, Emily, are you ready for your combustion question?

**Emily:** Yes.

**Shawn:** All right, Emily, so combustion question number one. If you could design a new theme park, what rides and activities would it include?

**Emily:** My first reaction is my brain just exploded. I don't mean to pause. My answer is, like, visual. It would be something virtual, engaging, integrative, where multiple people could experience something together. I love the power of shared experience, and I think it's something that cements something emotionally as well as intellectually. I immediately imagined a lot of people together, experiencing something where there are just gasps, where they are in a physical space, obviously, but also in a virtual space. That's as far as I can go, and there are a lot of colors and lights.

**Shawn:** I've got my eyes closed imagining this with you. All right, combustion question number two. Do you prefer paper books or eBooks?

**Emily:** It depends on the book. I have a library, actually behind me, where I still love the paper books of my favorites. And there are some books, like mine, where you want to write in the margins, and you want to answer questions, and you want to highlight and go back to them later. But then there are some books, I always have at least six to seven books on my...I have a Kindle and I have Libby at all times.

**Shawn:** Wow. And I'm an "and" person too. I have certain books that I just have to write in and then those that I read that I love. Well, thank you. Combustion question number three. What do you think about alarm clocks?

**Emily:** I think they're necessary, but my greatest joy is when I wake up and there hasn't been an alarm yet, because it means I'm well-rested. And you know that moment when you wake, and there's been no alarm, and you, like, gently ease into consciousness? That's one of life's greatest joys.

**Shawn:** Ah, yes. Well, Emily, can you tell our listeners where they can follow you at and learn more about you and McCann Group, and all?

**Emily:** Oh, thank you. You can find my website at [social-legacy.com](http://social-legacy.com). You can put your email down, and I can add you to my distribution. I rarely send out messages though. If you want to connect directly, find me on LinkedIn. That's probably where I'm most active and I'm very responsive. It's [emilychang8621](https://www.linkedin.com/in/emilychang8621).

**Shawn:** Thank you for being a part of *The Combustion Chronicles*.

**Emily:** Thanks, Shawn. It's my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

**Shawn:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of *The Combustion Chronicles*. Let's keep the conversation going by connecting on LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

To learn more about the world of experience ecosystems, go to [MOFI.co](http://MOFI.co) where you'll discover ideas and resources to help you ignite your own experience revolution.

Be sure to check out my book, *Kiss Your Dragons: Radical Relationships, Bold Heartsets, and Changing the World*, available now at Amazon. Then head over to [ShawnNason.com](http://ShawnNason.com) to engage resources, a discussion guide, and information about everything from self-paced training to personal coaching.

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