

# PK 133 - Heather Haas

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Matt Hunckler



Matt Hunckler 00:14

This is Episode 133 of the powder keg podcast is the show for entrepreneurs, leaders and innovators building remarkable tech companies in areas decidedly outside of Silicon Valley. I'm your host Matt Hunckler coming at you from my home makeshift studio during the Coronavirus pandemic. And I hope you are safe and well, because in today's episode we're sharing our recent interview and live q&a with our guest Heather Haas, who is the president of advisor. You'll notice that in this episode, we have a special guest host and that is Casey bull Sega our head of partnerships at Powder Keg and he was gracious enough to fill in for me as I got taken out with a terrible fever for 24 hours. Thankfully, it only lasted 24 hours. I've been feeling great now for over a week. So knock on wood, I'm out of the woods there. But Casey is a great interviewer and also knows Heather really well. So I love how this turned out. It just was a really great conversation. And in this episode, we discuss how a crisis like COVID-19 can be complex, can be very fast changing for companies and for individuals working at those companies. So we talk a lot about how leaders can lead more effectively. And how leading more effectively is more important than ever before really in times of crisis like this. It sort of makes or breaks a team and can make or break a leader. So we get into a lot in a very short amount of time and also answered questions from the powder keg community on how to lead through a crisis like the one we're experiencing now. And I'm sure we will face other crises in the future. So I hope you enjoy this conversation. I hope you join us for future ones as well. Well, we're

going to be doing a lot more of these. We've been doing two a week right now of these livestream conversations, picking sort of the very best advisors from the powder keg network and the powder keg community. So make sure you check those out at Powder Keg comm slash events. Today's guest Heather Haas, someone I turned to very frequently for leadership advice. You know, she believes that there is really no higher calling than helping leaders grow and improve. And she has coached and trained thousands of leaders literally thousands of leaders to better understand how to leverage their strengths, as well as build skills for engaging others effectively. Her passion for fueling others really drove her from the very beginning of her career in the classroom as a teacher, eventually as a principal, and now in her role as president of advisor and now advisor is an organization we have worked with that Powder Keg. They provide town optimization software and assessments, as well as leadership development programs and strategic consulting to organizations across the country. And again, Powder Keg is one of these organizations. And we have benefited tremendously from that. So very grateful to Heather and her team. I hope you enjoy this episode. With everything going around us right now. I hope you're staying safe. And well, please enjoy this episode and this conversation with Heather Haas.



03:16

Without further ado, everyone, let's welcome Heather Haas.



03:19

Thank you, Casey. It's great to be with everyone. It's actually nice to be with people, even if we're in a virtual setting here. So thanks for having me.



03:29

Absolutely. And I can only imagine what the last few weeks have been like for for you and for your team. So I'd love to kind of just start there. And just tell me a little bit more about, you know, what you have seen over the last few weeks and how your team has kind of reacted?



03:48

Yeah, it's really an unbelievable time. I think what we experienced first as a team was probably similar to other companies, which was just trying to get a handle on what are the

facts of this situation. How serious is this Coronavirus? Is it really going to impact business? And then once it became clear and the CDC came out with a clear direction, we've been working from home and we've pivoted all of our in person trainings to a virtual format. So my team has been engaged and actually very busy trying to stay in touch with our clients and keep all of our trainings on the rails, even now that everybody's working from home and we're doing things in a virtual format.



04:32

That's awesome. You have to be able to adapt. As I'm sure we've all seen that, you know, a week or two ago, this was not where I was doing my workout. My dogs were sleeping at night, but now it's it's where I spend a good portion of my day. And I know we've all been able to adapt, and you mentioned doing some of the virtual training, which is super important. One question that I have and this is something I've posed to a lot of businesses leaders and HR executives I talked to over the last few weeks. Is there one question or what is one request that you and your team has received? Ever since let's go back to I think it was around Friday the 13th when everything really started to shift. What is like that one thing that you've been requested?



05:19

Yeah, I think it largely has to do with helping people identify what we call their crisis priorities. So reminding people, you know, go back and consult your core values, and then come back and ask yourself, what are the three most important things right now? And why? Because with this quickly, as things have been changing, a lot of the strategic plans and initiatives that a lot of our clients had in process really had to be set aside, and kind of a whole new mini strategy or crisis plan had to be put in place. So we've been we've tried to be available today. be thinking partners with our CEOs and our HR leaders to really help them figure out what are we focused on and why. And then most importantly, how does that affect the people in the business? Because that that's really communicating in a clear, empathetic and transparent way. And staying connected in meaningful ways to your people is really everything during a time like this.



06:26

Something you mentioned, I guess, maybe caught me off guard. And I didn't necessarily think of this, but you kind of referred to implementing, like the current crisis strategy. So that's something that you work with, with executives and teams on is preparing for a crisis, maybe not this particular crisis, but like what kind of goes into building a strategy from a

leadership perspective when dealing with the crisis, even if it isn't something to the magnitude that we've seen with the Coronavirus?



06:56

Yeah, I think the first thing is very important is you need leadership teams. Who are able to come together? And first confront the brutal facts, you know, what are the facts, the financial fitness of the business? What's happening with our customers? What parts of our business have become obsolete given, you know, the shutdowns and things? So confronting the brutal facts and understanding what are we actually dealing with is really the first piece. And then I think the thinking really shifts to Okay, given that how do we protect the core? What are our core operations? And who are our core people that we may have to redeploy in slightly different ways and how do we start to it's really about identifying, removing from this to these things to from to, and the leaders role is really to clarify that for people so that people understand those things we were doing, we're not doing those right now. But we are focused on these things and here's why. And then that's where start to move into providing optimism and you're able to put a game plan in front of your team so that people have something to focus on and still feel connected to.



08:12

And then just knowing you and knowing the advisor team and the way that you all operate, I'm sure there's a little bit of practicing what you preach internally, right. Has there been any challenges that you've dealt with internally as a leader or any learning opportunities? Let's maybe phrase it that way that you've seen for leading the advisory team over the last few weeks?



08:37

Yeah, I would say the the biggest challenge has been figuring out how much transparency about the financial fitness of the business and what that means in terms of Plan A, Plan B, Plan C. So yeah, we've we've done a lot of modeling of course during times like this cash is king Thankfully, it advised that we have no debt, and we're in a really strong cash position. So I made the decision to just share all of that with the team. And to clarify that are our top priority during this time aside from everyone's health and wellness, but our top business priority is retaining our clients and retaining our team. So we do not intend to cut jobs. We, we if we have to, as we go through those, you know, best case worst case scenarios, we'll be cutting salaries. So I mean, that's that kind of transparency takes a lot of bravery. But I will say I mean, that's what that's what people are worried about.

Everyone sitting out there is thinking, Oh, what does this mean for me and my job and my ability to provide for my family. So I think I've just tried to be really honest about my own emotions going through all this. I mean, I'm Small World small business. You know, we're not at a huge company. And so small businesses everywhere are wrestling with, what are we going to do? With whom? And how do I share that to keep people engaged and still feeling connected in meaningful ways?



10:21

I really appreciate you sharing that Heather. And I just think that level of transparency that you just showed with with our audience, right is is really what it comes comes down to, right. We have to be human, we have to be empathetic, we have to be vulnerable to an extent. And I appreciate you sharing that because I think it's helpful for everyone to know that everyone's dealing with this right now. Right? every leader, there's no one that is exempt from this, this this is not discriminatory. So I appreciate you sharing that Heather and it really shows just the work that you do and how awesome the team is at advise us. so grateful for that and grateful to have you here and to answer some questions. So, as I mentioned, when we first started, we are going to be doing a live q&a. We have had some some previously submitted questions from our community. So I'm going to jump into those here in a second. But just wanted to let everyone know as a reminder, use the the q&a functionality at the bottom of your screen to type in your question. We will all see that on this side, the host, and the panelists will be able to see those and answer those. And then if you would like to answer your ask your question using audio, we can go ahead, go ahead and raise your hand. If you don't want to do that. Don't click the raise your hand because you'll get called on regardless. But I'm going to dive into some of the questions that we had already received from our community. And I think you touched on on this a little bit. But during a crisis like what we're seeing with COVID-19 What are your people wanting to hear what is your team wanting to hear? You mentioned the transparency which I think is is about piece of it. But are they looking for? Or what type of response I should say Are they looking for from you as a leader?



12:09

Yeah, I think they're looking for consistent communication from me. So a regular cadence of touching base weekly, with the team of via teams. We use Microsoft Teams, we're doing a lot of zoom gatherings. But as a leadership team, we're each getting on there every Monday morning and sharing what we call our top three. These are the three things I'm focused on this week. Last Friday, I did a video for the whole team where I took our strategic plan that I rolled out last December, and I put up that Mike Tyson quote, you

know, everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth. And then I then I proceeded to share with everyone These are our new priorities. We were doing this. Forget that forget that. We're focused. Hear. So I just think my team is really craving that ongoing clarity of priorities so that everybody has confidence that they're working on the right things, and that they play an important role in the new plan. And then the other thing I know my team is craving is connection. So we've done some team happy hours, we've created some lighter channels on Microsoft Teams, where we can still have some fun and bring some light and optimism into a tough situation.



13:33

I appreciate that. I think, as the resident extrovert



13:38

I'm filling out a little bit as well. And you know, one escape for me is just been having virtual coffee and sometimes cocktail meetings with a lot of the same people in the community that I'm usually talking to right. And I've actually found myself being more efficient and being able to have more of those by limiting the time and really keeping to 30 minutes which is a little bit easier. easier to manage when you're remote versus when you're you're in, you know, a heated conversation with someone in a coffee shop. So



14:06

I can I agree, I I



14:08

definitely am feeling that as well. And you talked a lot about kind of the leadership internal or excuse me the transparency from a leadership perspective, internally. You know, this is geared a little bit more towards like that external facing, right, but what are your thoughts of when it's okay to be transparent with your customers, particularly, kind of sharing this similar level of transparency with your customers compared to what you shared internally?



14:38

Yeah, I think what customers first want from us is empathy. Every business out there is

going through the same critical, you know, evaluation of cash and priorities that we are. So I think now is a time externally when your customers want to. They've been Want to feel supported by you and they want flexibility. That's what they're gonna want from us flexibility in some cases in terms of payment terms, flexibility, in some cases with regard to I just can't talk to you right now. You know, we've got to pick this back up in a couple months. But the key thing I think, for us, we're in the relationship business. I mean, we form long term relationships with our clients. We do a lot of training, a lot of coaching. So this is a time to just touch all the sheep, so to speak, and be present, seek to understand their circumstances and just be helpful where you can. That's how we're trying to show up for and meet our customers and clients where they are.



15:46

Absolutely, I think empathy is something to be utilized internally and externally, even in, you know, personally with friends and family and understanding what they're dealing with and how that may be. may not be different than what you're dealing with. So that's something that I think really resonates with a lot of people. Another thing that we've heard a lot about and you mentioned this earlier with kind of team advisor going virtual and remote pretty quickly, a majority of companies have moved to this like remote. It's not it's more like it's not just remote. It's work from home, right? Yeah, remote can mean I'm traveling the country and I have the ability to still to work right now everyone is working from home. So what are some of the best ways to maintain a high level of performance to your team as a leader, when when leading remotely?



16:41

Yeah, I think it's it's really important that communication like I, like I mentioned, I mean, it's hard enough to communicate when you're sharing the same physical space with people, let alone when you're not seeing people when you can't interpret tone and nonverbals. So adding in some one on one touchpoints, I think is very important. Even if you're gathering together to keep a cadence of team meetings going, you still need to make sure that you're giving people a call one on one, so that you can really ask those more genuine questions and how are you doing? How is it working from home is everybody healthy? Those kinds of things, I think are critical, as well as keeping in mind that when people are afraid, you know, some of the sharper edges of their personality tendencies can really come out. So for those of us who are using any kind of behavioral insight tool, like the predictive index, which is what our clients use, that information is like gold right now. Because you know, some of us need control to feel confident some of us need certainty. Some of us need social connection. So I really

encourage people where you have access to that kind of personal and individual information. That's the best thing. Way to stay connected virtually is really customize and tailor your communications to try to meet people's individual needs.



18:09

Yeah, I like the example of talking to the person, right, like checking in on the person because as leaders, we see kind of this this work persona, right? And because so many people are now mixing the home and work like it's literally kind of the same thing for me, I have to shut my office door and say no, that's, that's work. Those are four work hours, right? But but at the same time hearing from someone on my team, even just stay in a couple of minutes extra on like a team call to have a couple more minutes of conversation. Those are really the things that is really kind of helping our team thrive. So I appreciate you sharing that. It looks like we do have a question from the audience. So this is from Victor. I believe it's Angular is how you say that and I I think we're going to go ahead and go to Victor right now. Victor, are you able to hear us? And would you like to ask your question live? Yeah, yeah, sure. So I've been paying attention a lot to CNBC during this whole crisis and something that Mark Cuban mentioned that kind of stuck out to me. You mentioned that companies, the way they treat their employees during this time period could define their brand for decades to come. What do you think leaders should be prioritizing to make sure that they have their their employees best interests in mind? So that you know when this is all over, they can look back and feel confident that they did? What was right.



19:38

Yeah, I think honesty is the most important sometimes honesty is delivering bad news. Sometimes honesty is being really transparent about how the business is thriving and potentially struggling. I think that when people are afraid and many employees out there are afraid or at least somewhat uncertain I think when you when you provide honest information, I mean, we don't need to have all the answers, but we do need to be accessible, and share what we know. I think that really helps people rise to the occasion. You You would be amazed at the stories that I'm hearing. And I think people have put some things out that when you're honest with your employees about the state of the business, and sort of what the options are for keeping the business going during this time, most employees are really willing to step up and say, I'll take a salary cut. What can What can I do, I'll shift my role, I'll step up over here. It's when it's when leaders are not honest, or when leaders are trying to pretend that everything's okay when it's not. So I think that honesty is really important and then not to not to be repetitive, but the genuine empathy.



You have to make sure that Your employees know that you care about them, and you value them. So the more that you can tell them those things in in group settings, as well as one on one and really shine a light on people who are displaying your core values. And there's no better time than right now to really elevate your core values and highlight people who are living those out. And where your team knows that you've done everything you can do to both protect the business and protect their jobs. Yes, I agree with Mark Cuban. The way you treat employees during this time will redefine or underscore the employer brand that you already had going on.



21:44

I love that perspective. Heather and I one thing I've heard a lot, just kind of through social media chatter is you know if you weren't prioritizing culture before all of this, and especially like that massive shift From one week being in the office to the next hire, you know, everyone remote and some people having to make difficult decisions for their business. You're prioritizing it a year ago, it's too late now, right? And how can you prioritize it when you've got a million other things working? So you know, you and I both subscribe to this thought that that culture is important and companies that have built this culture have these cultural values and preferences are that's going to help you know what the talent attraction perspective that's going to help with a leadership perspective. But if you weren't thinking about this, before all this, it's kind of hard to add another thing on top of your plate as a leader. If you weren't thinking about culture, you know, a year ago.



22:44

Yeah, it is hard because culture is really the glue that keeps people together during during times when we when when circumstances are pulling us apart. So I you know, I think I feel that here at advisor and you Another thing I would tell you that this time is really unique in that it's an opportunity for organizations to look for leaders, you're going to you're going to see people step up in unexpected ways. You want to be listening for who's bringing solutions to the table without being asked, who's volunteering to take on something extra? Who are the people that are continually thinking about the greater good, and not self protection? You know, these, these are people who in their regular day jobs and you know, the way things typically go, we might not notice them. So as you as you experience your culture differently now, I really strongly encourage people to look for leadership potential, because this is the best time to see those those stripes come out. And that way when things turn around, you have a real clear picture of who you're best at. And brightest star and how to really start investing in them



24:03

are some of the same things that Emerging Leaders per se. Some of the same traits you mentioned that leaders are exhibiting, are people seeing the same thing from those emerging leaders?



24:14

Yes. I think in particular, your emerging leaders are going to be the ones who are asking you the tough questions. You know, you maybe you share, here's Plan A here, here's the plan, gang, let's all go your emerging leaders are gonna say that sounds great. What's Plan B, and C and D, the people who are thinking like that and pushing you to, to communicate with more clarity, and the people who are pushing you to think outside the box. During this time, maybe you've never done it that way before, but now is different and you could try something different. I think these are the people that really, really rise to the top.



24:55

That's awesome. I appreciate that perspective. That was taken one of our article Community submitted questions and kind of weaving in an extra layer. So that was one of the questions that was asked. I appreciate that. This next question is anonymous, but it's kind of combining a lot of what we're talking about with like the leadership perspective, and also the business perspective. So it says, as a leader, what steps can I take today to better position my company, and most profitably serve my customers as these shifts are happening and as we get through all of this.



25:32

So I think identifying those crisis or critical priorities to kind of protect the core of your business so you know, the ways that you can conserve cash, the ways that you can maximize collections, you know, cut costs, all of those things, but beyond the financial pieces, I strongly encourage you to really think about the talent piece, because as your business priorities and initiatives change You need to make sure you know how to redeploy talent and get your leaders refocused and re engaged to what we call unfreeze their teams, you know, teams can can feel kind of stuck, especially if there's a lot of change. So I think, really building, building those communication loops, so that people are building trust in new ways, and they can be flexible in how they are working. Some of the change happened, the remote work, and the virtual training, and, you know, cross

functional teams, these things are going to stay some of these things where we're proving out that there are new work arrangements that can be very effective, and even lower cost. So right now is a time I think, in the back of your mind to keep this like continuous learning mindset. Even though we're in the midst of a crisis. What can we learn that equips us to get back to profitability faster than our competition.



27:05

So you mentioned talent. And I know, you know, there's this kind of this focus from advisors perspective on optimizing talent. But I think a lot of you know, I've talked to a lot of talent acquisition leads and in HR people over the last few weeks who are saying, Hey, we're on a hiring freeze right now. But that doesn't mean that that this is going to sustain. So any advice on companies that are kind of balancing, how can I continue to engage talent? How can I continue to create this perspective or awareness of our company from an employer, employer branding perspective, but I'm not currently hiring right now and I can't act on it right now.



27:45

Yeah, I think that's one of the greatest things to contemplate because we went from a talent scarcity situation 3% unemployment. I think now we're at about 10. And estimates say that's going to go up to 20% unemployment. We are experiencing one of the biggest talent, you know, job seeking shifting times ever. You've got more people on the move, they've been displaced. And soon they're all going to be scrambling to find their next position. So for companies who are in a strong cash position, there is no better time than the present and in the coming weeks to find top talent, so even if you're on a hiring freeze, I would encourage all all of you who are in recruiting or talent acquisition, you can still talk to people. You can still reach out have phone calls, and then there's where you use those, the the T the C that I talked about earlier, empathy, transparency and clarity. Be clear with candidates. We're on a hiring freeze right now. This is the situation. However, attracting top talent is the key to our future success. So I wanted to go ahead and connect with you and tell you about who we are tell you about how our culture is pulling us through this really challenging time. Because when things change, I'd love to get you in here for an interview.



29:14

I really I appreciate that perspective. And I think a lot of a lot of people in a variety of roles are feeling that internally, right, because as we've seen, it's not just about the talent

acquisition leaders or the recruiters, right, like this talent piece, because we were in such a need of talent, right, especially in the tech community, we're seeing more and more leaders that are out actively networking and connecting with others to create more awareness for them as a leader to help make them a magnetic destination, if you will, from a culture perspective. So I appreciate that perspective. And I want to make another call out to anyone else that has any questions. We've got a few more here that were submitted anonymously, but would love to hear from you, if you're your check tune tuning in, be sure to use the q&a at the bottom of the screen. And then we'll be sure to take some more of those live if you'd like if you don't want to hop on and use your, your audio or if you're in the middle of a teaching session doing some elearning. That's totally cool as well just just throw your question in the in the q&a box here, but I do have another one here from from our community that was submitted anonymously. And it's definitely more geared towards the opportunistic side and it says, you know, in your perspective, Heather, what are some of the biggest opportunities that can exist for me and my company that are going to turn this this unfortunate negative situation, potentially into a positive sum for my business perspective?



30:48

Yeah, I think there is a real opportune time for training. Believe it or not, it doesn't mean you have to necessarily spend a lot of money on training. I think most have us have what I call backburner ish things, you know, things that are important but maybe not urgent. And a lot of times, training is one of those things. So if you're running a sales team, what are some of the sales best practices that you could pull out, dust off and get your team on the phone and sharpen the saw? If you run, you know, an operations team? What are some process improvements? What are some Six Sigma Kaizen events that you've done in the past to identify how to make some changes, but you just never got around to making them? Those are the things that I would be focused on is how do we just stay sharp and stay connected? Beyond that, if you can, if there is funds to invest in virtual training, this is a great time for it. New people will have time on their hands. What better thing to do then meet them where they are in their home office? craving, connection and in learning and development. So I think that learning new things in community with other people who are in a similar experience is one of the most helpful and cathartic things that we can do. It helps people feel better to learn something new and be along with other people for the ride.



32:23

That's a great perspective. And, sorry, I thought for a second I lost you and I close, close

the screen, which I did, and it's okay. Another question that we have here that's similar. But more of like if you're in a position right now, where you are managing up and adjusting to a new level of management above you, and then you have a team that reports to you as well. And you're kind of managing down to an extent. Let's say that you're caught in a little bit of the friction, right? You talked about the glue or culture being the glue that holds everything together. But any advice for someone who's dealing with Maybe not quite the transparency when they're reporting up, but they want to be able to provide the level of transparency to their direct reports.



33:08

Yeah, that's a tough situation. And so I'll just answer honestly how I would handle that. If I were in those shoes. I think I would have a one on one with my manager. And I would share from my heart that I don't personally feel like we're providing enough transparency or enough of the facts about our situation, to keep people engaged and to help people feel connected and safe during this time. And then I would ask a question, I would say, you know, I'm sure you're privy to information and decisions that I'm not, but is there anything more that you could share with me? That would just help me give what what I can to myself team. And so potentially by calling that out that you have a need and a desire for more information or transparency, I hope that you're in an organization and you have enough of a trusted relationship with that supervisor, that it would be okay for you to ask that question. If you feel like you don't have that safety or that trust isn't there, then I think all you can do is make the best of the information that you do have. And I would be trying to definitely not lament or complain about what I'm not getting. Instead, I would shift all my attention and all my team's attention to Okay guys, this is really hard. I feel like we're putting together a puzzle without the box top here. Right, but what do we know? And what can we control and I would just keep bringing my team right back to what are the things we can control? And what are the things we can take personal accountability For right now to do and change and make a difference, even though maybe we're not getting the full picture. And even though in the broader organization, we don't feel secure.



**Matt Hunckler** 35:15

That's it for today's show. Thank you so much for listening. And huge thanks to Heather Haas at advisor for sharing some of her wisdom. And thanks to all of you for asking great questions on all of our shows, but particularly this one, you can check out [advisor.usa.com](https://advisor.usa.com). And for links to heavy social profiles and the other people, companies and resources mentioned in this episode, head on over to [powderkeg.com](https://powderkeg.com) and check out the show notes. We've got everything linked up for you there. So make sure you check those

out. And as I mentioned at the top of the show, we're going to be doing a lot more of these. We've got a ton of great guests that we're pulling from all over the world, really pulling from the best experts and best advisors in our network at Powder Keg. So check out some of our upcoming live events live virtual events. At powder keg.com slash events and you can attend from home or wherever you are, and ask your questions, get your questions answered and connect with some other powder keggers in the community as well. And if you're currently in the market for a new role, or you're looking to see what else is out there, and you want to be connected to some of the best companies out there with the best company cultures, you can head on over to powder keg comm slash jobs and apply for our matches program. It is absolutely free. And it is not just a job board. We do have tons of companies that you can check out there and we actually proactively match them to you based on your interests and your priorities for your career. So again, that's Powder Keg comm slash jobs, feel free to apply there or share that with a friend who needs it. If your company is currently looking to get connected with some of those really talented people in our network, we have helped so many people get placed with great companies and we'd love to include your company. So you can join the powder keg matches platform Sign up for a free culture profile at Powder Keg comm slash sign up, sign up all one word, and you can start connecting today with extraordinary talent. Again, that's powder keg.com slash sign up, and to be among the first to hear the stories about entrepreneurs, investors and other tech leaders outside of Silicon Valley. Subscribe to us on iTunes at Powder Keg comm slash iTunes. We'll catch you next time on the powder keg podcast.