

# **Redefining Business: Judy Samuelson on Purpose, Culture, and Sustainable Advantage**

"Employees are your biggest partner. They are your allies in the long game. They are very aligned with the health of the enterprise and play a crucial role in driving sustainability initiatives."

Judy Samuelson  
Vice President, Founder, and Executive Director,  
Business and Society Program, Aspen Institute

This is a lightly edited transcript of a [Building Competitive Advantage in a Sustainable World](#) podcast interview published by the BCG Henderson Institute (BHI) on September 2, 2024. You can listen to this conversation on [BHI's website](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), or wherever you listen to your podcasts.

**Dave Young:**

Judy, welcome to Building Competitive Advantage in a Sustainable World. We're really excited to have you joining the conversation today. For our audience, this will be a real treat. Judy Samuelson has two pretty exciting things right now, and a history, which I'm going to ask her to describe a little bit. Judy leads the program at Aspen Institute Business & Society, which is really about aligning business with the long-term health of society, and all the issues that go with that. We'll talk about some of those today. Recently, Judy released the book, *The Six New Rules of Business*, which I thought had a great subtitle, *Creating Real Value in a Changing World*.

The way that she sees both the context of business having changed, but, sort of, the ingredients—if you're going to get this right, and if you're going to add some real sustainability to the performance of the corporation, you've got to start paying attention, as she describes, to intangibles that drive value, purpose, corporate responsibility beyond the gates of the business, employees, culture, and the ingredient it plays in keeping things together and the right balance between competition, capital, the company, and really then co-creation. How do you go about and co-create in a way that helps us get to a very different model of business?

Judy is a leading thinker in how businesses can get more perspective on their future in ways that benefit society, and in ways that actually make them higher-quality companies, more secure value-creating engines, and are better for their industry as well. Then with the Aspen Institute, teaching that next generation of leaders to do the same. Judy, before I say more, and start asking you some of these things, could you describe, introduce yourself a little bit more to folks? Describe your personal journey. How did you end up doing this business and society thing at Aspen from the time when...if I remember correctly, you were, like, in the State House, and you were at a bank and some of these other things? Maybe give us the story.

**Judy Samuelson:**

Sure. Well, Dave, first of all, thank you so much for having me. I love working with you. I love working with BCG. You're the real thought leaders out there, and I'm just trying to keep up with you. But I would say that I think this is an amazing moment. Do I think we've got this? No, I wouldn't go that far. But I feel like things have shifted significantly. In some ways, I feel like some of this moment that we're in has actually been really clarifying in some ways that will shake up companies and boards, and require them to think differently, and in a useful way.

When I first started getting into the business, one of the most popular phrases was, "Doing well by doing good." I had some instinct from the very beginning that that was just wrong. There are no trade-offs involved here. We have to get these priced correctly. None of this was being really taught or appreciated in the shareholder model that was being propagated for MBAs and beyond. It's been an interesting journey. But yes, I certainly didn't think this was on the radar. I was working.... Grew up in California, graduated from college, went to Sacramento, and worked in the state legislature as a lobbyist and a legislative aide, and those great things you get to do after college.

Great experience, and then Proposition 13, which wiped out the tax base for a lot of the government services, hit. And it made me kind of pause and say, "Wait a minute. What's a bond? How are we going to finance this stuff?" So I ended up in business school. But I had some instinct in business school that I was looking for some better understanding of how the economy really worked. I kind of got government's role in some respects, but I didn't really have any experience in the private sector. My dad worked for the phone company, and that was like working for the government itself at the time.

**Dave Young:**

Judy, this was at Yale, right? You went to Yale?

**Judy Samuelson:**

Yes, the School of Management, I was in the fifth graduating class. It was a really remarkable place—it still is a remarkable place—that naturally drew people that were trying to figure out these boundary-crossing ideas. It really set me up with lifetime friends and people that think about this stuff. But I went into banking because I still didn't get the sense of scale. What are we talking about here? What is a business corporation? When somebody says it's a \$5 million company, I didn't know what that meant. I was a middle market lender, walking almost like a street banker in New York City. I wasn't in big finance. I was in mid-center and the Diamond District, and it really did exactly what I needed it to do. I went on to the Ford Foundation, where I, in short order after arriving, was running what today would be called their impact investing fund.

It was a \$115 million carve-out from the grant budget to invest in intermediaries and those who were pursuing economic mobility—economic and social goods, but with the ability to repay if you got the business model working right. These were mostly nonprofits we were supporting, of course, working a lot with the business sector. And we started seeing—we saw some extraordinary examples of businesses who were really leading, that were ahead of the curve in their industry. Places like Levi Strauss, that just had a core value. Or Nike, where the CEO had been kicked in the rear by NGOs that got ahold of their brand and started talking about human rights deep in the supply chain. It made me start saying, “Why don't we have more examples of that?” That led to the creation of this program.

**Dave Young:**

Judy, I love that term you were using, sort of cross-boundary, or crossing boundaries between business and capital in society. It's sort of interesting that you've done that between the State House and then in the investing sector. And now in this role, which deals a lot with companies as well as investors. In that trajectory, was there, in addition to the insight you got about why aren't we seeing more of this, was there any other big pivot point for you mentally in raising questions about the quality of our business models, or the paradigms we're using for business, or what we're thinking about the economy? Was there something that you sort of said, “Something's off

here. This isn't going to go the way we want it to go." How did you, kind of, come to terms with what the ambition behind the Business & Society Program at Aspen should be?

**Judy Samuelson:**

Well, I think early on—I mean, I'll just say quickly that I think it's a huge advantage if you're able to work in multiple sectors. I think you see things differently. I think it's helped me have greater empathy for people in business, frankly. That I could see it from different vantage points, and understand more of the pressures and tensions, having been in the nonprofit sector, where, frankly, the Ford Foundation, nobody particularly liked business very much. Or to the time in state government, where we didn't really talk about the business sector. It didn't really show up in our conversations. We were solving problems with government resources and kind of government thinking. But I think it started at the Ford Foundation. We were running this program, and it actually would rely...the investments we were making from Ford, we would be subordinate to business investors.

So we could see it, and we could understand the interplay, because the banks and the insurance companies that we were often supporting, for them to take more risk, were all subject to Federal Regulations, the Community Reinvestment Act. So I started to understand that that was a comparative advantage we had in the United States. It actually drove things that, even with all of the advanced thinking that we continue to expect from Europe, and the conversation... I had to fly to London every year to find people that were talking about the same kind of things that we were trying to talk about in the United States. But they were amazed by what we did in the US that was relatively advanced. They didn't understand how we had managed to move this capital into this kind of blended structures and forms. They wanted to learn from us.

So I started to realize that in every society, you have some things that you may have over-indexed on in some cases. Sometimes I think we over-index on private initiative in the US. We don't necessarily get that balance right, but it's a clear competitive advantage in other domains. I love

the fact that in Europe, people simply trusted the government more. They were more invested in that, or identified with it more. So I just think, again, it's a boundary-crossing thing that helps you kind of see how the system is working and where the lever points are. But clearly, I have come to believe that business is the most important lever point. That's the one that—when I left Ford, I was really betting that this is the institution that I think is so critically important to the kinds of issues and concerns that I think will certainly keep me awake at night, or I think keep a lot of people awake at night.

Climate, to addressing inequality, and everything in between. Business, I think, is an incredibly important agent of change. I think it's got a lot of motivation, but I think there's a lot of structural reasons why we're not seeing the kind of sense of urgency that I think you and I share here, and we can talk more about that. But it's the sector with the extraordinary problem-solving skills, global capacity distribution systems, understanding of conditions in lots of parts of the planet, and trade-offs involved in this. I just think the business sector has incredible gifts, and we simply need to unlock that capacity if we're going to solve our most important problems.

**Dave Young:**

Judy, when you wrote the book *The Six New Rules of Business* and you looked at these different areas, in each of those areas, maybe we spend just a couple minutes and you could share how you have seen that change over time, and why is it now that we need to amplify more than we have in the past on these areas. Because I share that same view. Business can be an extraordinary lever given its scale, technology, ability to move capital, and the imagination it can bring to life in products and services and new models.

**Judy Samuelson:**

Right.

**Dave Young:**

But clearly, we're wrestling with something there.

**Judy Samuelson:**

Right.

**Dave Young:**

So I kind of think about the six things you described. Maybe we could go through each and you could say from your perspective, why now? And why do we need either more of it or less of it? Or how do you see it being an ingredient to the change in paradigm we need to be more fit for the future? Maybe that first one, and you mentioned it, was, sort of, the intangibles beyond the balance sheet kind of thing. Which is quite different than maybe a lot of times what's some of the quick things we look to when we have the annual report. Well, let me just flip to the back real quick. And we'll go through each of these. How has this notion of intangibles changed in your mind, and how do you think it needs to change?

**Judy Samuelson:**

I mean, completely changed, from the time I went to business school when it was still kind of a hard asset world. That's clearly how we talk about it. Unfortunately, I think business classrooms are still stuck in some of these old paradigms. So I don't know that they are still doing the work that needs to be done to really prepare students to operate in a world that's changed profoundly. I mean, they say something like 85% of stock market valuation actually depends on intangible values. What are we talking about? We're talking about reputation here—and how that affects the ability to attract and retain talent. We're talking about access. Your license to operate. Is that robust in any environment in which you would choose to try to plant a facility, or access a mineral? Or assume that you are value-creating for the citizens of our country or region, as opposed to value extracting—the whole resource curse conversation?

We've seen industries have to wrestle with these kinds of things. We've seen how they go about doing it. These intangibles are really—that's where these conversations are meeting is around these complex questions. I think that's changed tremendously. When I was writing this book, the great editor that I had at Berrett-Koehler, a guy named Steve Piersanti who was actually leading the enterprise then, he kept on saying to me, he goes, "I hear you saying these rules have already changed." That actually opened me up to thinking about whether that was true, and I came to believe that I was writing about things where the norm had already shifted. I started with a quote in the book, "The future is already here. It's just not very evenly distributed," William Gibson. That was kind of a guiding thought for me as I went through these things. Has it been absorbed into the ways we think and talk and measure and train? No, not necessarily. Although this one is certainly changing pretty rapidly. We're starting to hear more executives say it in profound ways.

**Dave Young:**

The other area that you point out is *purpose*, and that has become a very overused word. Everybody talks about their need to have a purpose, a sharp purpose. What I liked about the way you think about it or have written about it is you talk about—it's really revealed by the business decisions and the way you're running your operations and kind of what you're doing. So I kind of came away sort of saying, in your mind it wasn't about having terrific words, even when those words bring alignment, but was more about, back to your intangibles point, some of the decisions I would be making, some of the ways I would be operating would be reflective of purpose. I mean, I don't think we talked a lot about purpose 20 years ago, 15 ago.

**Judy Samuelson:**

No. Yeah. This is one where I actually feel that our work has opened up a conversation. Our ability, I mean, the Aspen Institute is basically in the dialogue business. We are one of many programs that resides within this remarkable platform of the Aspen Institute that's committed to dialogue and problem-solving, and also supporting leaders to drive the changes within institutions. We engaged in dialogue about the purpose of the corporation for a decade before it



really started showing up. We were bringing together law faculty; we did a whole census about what's taught in law classrooms. We were more familiar with the business classroom, so that added a piece. We were working with some of the most brilliant legal scholars on the corporate governance side—people like Lynn Stout, who I dedicated the book to, who sadly passed away of cancer before the book came out, but was brilliant at teaching me so much about what does a law actually say.

So by the time in 2019 when The Business Roundtable, kind of, it was a little bit of a shot heard around the world, the day that they dropped this statement that essentially said, “We’re restating the purpose of the corporation,” they went to, kind of, the classic stakeholder statement that they found in the J&J credo, I think. But it was met with a lot of cynicism, because, of course, stating it doesn’t mean that it’s felt, or that it’s true. Or that we’ve changed all of the rules, the protocols, and the decision rules, and the way we talk inside enterprises. So that work is still underway, but we shook it up, we opened up the question. It became a question rather than, the purpose of the corporation is to maximize shareholder value, full stop.

It became a question again. Then the question, is there alignment between how the CEO thinks and how the company acts? Or is the CEO not even truly thinking that way, and it’s just a statement in a mission statement? Your point about corporate purpose is revealed. I mean, this is going to take us into the sorrowful example of Boeing. What was their purpose? Their purpose was to beat Airbus at any cost. And the work on this will require another decade to get them back on course. It’s started probably now, but it’s a sad tale of, as far as I’m concerned, just how far off the rails a company can go when it’s trying to maximize to a single objective function as simplistic and over-indexed as shareholder value.

**Dave Young:**

I think you're highlighting two things here. If we say, "Look, it's great to have that purpose statement, but we're really looking for kind of walking the talk." And walking the talk goes well off the balance sheet, because it gets into the how you're doing things. As with your example with Boeing, I mean, part of this *how* seems to show up in two ways, right? In your book, you talk about culture as king, and that culture kind of plays itself out. And the human element, regardless of everything else, is sort of being shaped by that culture within the business. Similarly, the move we've had over these last years to make metrics and measures around the intangibles, the externalities come to life as, sort of, a second way to kind of get a sense of, is the equation bigger for business?

How do we get a big enough equation that we actually understand the quality of the company—the way it's generating that P&L [profit and loss] and that balance sheet, and the things that everybody is kind of trained on? I thought you did a really nice job of leading with that notion that intangibles are here—it takes purpose over profits. But then you have this blending together of, wait, this thing has to be supported by the right culture. We have to begin to embrace these other things. Or do you ever, and can we ever get around shareholder value now alone?

**Judy Samuelson:**

Well, of course, this merely takes us into the question of time frame, because that has been an arc of our work from the failure of Enron. That was the moment. When Enron, when the company was, I think it was the most valuable company on the New York Stock Exchange when it imploded. That was a shocking event. People did not see it coming. We started to see it unravel in the last couple months, but we did not anticipate the failure, and the extent to which it brought down others in its wake. Which we all watched that, not all of us, but many of us watched that really unfold.

That wake-up call really made us start asking more fundamental questions, I think, about these connections. But the other really big shift, and partly it's social media, it's the attenuated supply chains, it's the impact of globalization. Where all of a sudden, you're exposed across a host of different questions that are tough to manage, and that bring you into contact with systems that no one is either speaking to, or an NGO steps into the fray to make sure that it's well represented. You have some NGOs that are out here, kind of the Greenpeace version, that are growing tomatoes. Then you have others that have a different kind of stake in the system, and then step in when a company is vulnerable or an enterprise is vulnerable, and essentially say, "Work with us. We're going to help you amass the pieces of this larger puzzle, this larger system that you are deeply influencing, but you're far from the only player."

There was a guy who was very involved early on in our work. He was the CEO of Shell, and he used to say, "Judy, it's not the big brand you ought to be worried about. The brands are already exposed, and have thought through what's the best practices that are allowed under their business model. What is really needed is to think about how that brand can influence those that are part of its larger supply chain that really have less at risk." That conversation, Dave, as you know better than I, has completely and totally changed in the last ten years. Because at this point in time, when we're dealing with systems as complex as access to water or the availability of water, you simply can't address those, or the sustainability of a fishery. Everybody is going to fall together if the system is not engaged.

These NGOs are critically important players that have kind of brought the outside in, and have to think, who naturally think in longer time frames than corporations, feel like they're set up to be able to exercise against. I think that it's a complex world. There are organizational principles that we see are being repeated in industry after industry, or around specific natural resources. We're seeing the patterns. We're seeing what good practice looks like. We're seeing the exciting role that NGOs play when they become real partners in helping a big brand like a McDonald's or a Pepsi, or somebody else that needs allies in this game and are coming from unusual places, including

their own competitors or somebody deep in the supply chain that they typically wouldn't reach out to. So I think that's a very exciting piece of this whole puzzle. And yet, it's like value is being defined outside the enterprise. It's not within the control of the enterprise anymore.

**Dave Young:**

Judy, this is where I think in your book you talk a lot about co-creating to win. These would be examples of that, where you're sort of saying, "Look, the system needs adjusting too. The corporation needs adjusting. It can't control everything. Intangibles bring a new lens on things. Partners like NGOs can bring a new lens on things." But a lot of this, we're sort of trying to figure it out as we are trying to change it. So it's little—this co-creation idea I thought was a really important thing, I mean, the role that you guys play as the Business & Society Program at Aspen, and I've had the privilege of attending a couple of your summer ESG [environmental, social, and governance] summits—it seems that those conversations that you're able to curate and get going are really focused at trying to surface where some of this can happen. And along with things like your "First Movers Fellowship," or your "Leaders Forum," or your "Ideas Worth Teaching," or any of the labs, there's a big theme of co-creation there.

**Judy Samuelson:**

It's co-creation, and it also invites this kind of question about maybe your biggest ally in this game is really your employees today. Because I think, when I first started working in this domain, everybody kind of considered employees a cost of doing business.

**Dave Young:**

War on talent, we got to have them, right? Yeah.

**Judy Samuelson:**

Yeah. The language is starting to morph. Employees are assets, not just a cost and that sort of stuff, but it was still kind of in a monetary frame.

**Dave Young:**

You mean like human capital?

**Judy Samuelson:**

Yes, human capital, exactly. I think the bounds around that have really shifted in just the last few years. COVID obviously was a huge disruption in this, where it felt like you're not sure even where your employees were anymore. So it kind of naturally opened up some boundaries, and the work-home kind of divide started to morph, and all of those things that we've talked about in other domains for years at this point. But your employees are your eyes and ears on the supply chain. They are your connector, particularly these younger generations that use social media as just a communications tool. Their ability, it's taken down these boundaries for them, I believe. So they more naturally think about themselves as, kind of, employees but citizens, almost in the same domain. It's not like boomers like me, where we were at work and then we went home, and these were really divided lives.

I think those walls have been brought down in this period of time. And I believe, and keep coming back to this and testing this, I believe employees are your biggest partner. They are your allies in the long game. They're very, very aligned with the health of the enterprise. They want the same things executives want. They want the company to flourish, because they'll have better opportunities, and they'll make more money, and they'll be prouder of where they work. So there's no distinction between what employees are seeking and what the best executives are seeking. The other thing we know from lots of anecdotes over the last years is CEOs are now speaking to their employees often when they're raising some of these critical issues that they didn't use to want to speak to. They're speaking to their employees, because their employees

believe that their executive ought to be able to be responding to those things that are critically important.

So that's treacherous ground. It's like we're still learning how to do this. But if anything has become crystal clear to me in the last couple of years is that the best enterprises are not stuck in this ESG language. All of us who work close in this domain, we use the language. It's shorthand. We know it's amorphous, we know it's covering a host of different kinds of topics, and we're comfortable with that, because we know about the nuance at the same time. But I think executives that have a real public platform and are being listened to, they have found that what they need to do is get crystal clear on what piece of this puzzle actually matters for the long haul.

**Dave Young:**

Excellent.

**Judy Samuelson:**

What do they need to nail? Where do they need to excel? It's not doing well by doing good across a whole bunch of different things. It's like, what piece of this puzzle is actually most germane to their business model, their way of thinking, the relationships that are going to be instrumental to them for the long haul? What do they really need to secure? I think then we can drop the stakeholder ESG language, and be specific about what we're talking about. To me, that's powerful, and it relieves a lot of the kind of concern about the political pushback, when you can speak powerfully to what is instrumental to the enterprise.

**Dave Young:**

Judy, I want to go in two directions here. One of them is, does this help us in creating more long-termism in our business thinking? I guess, related to that then is, how does that then, or how do you see it, or how should it filter more into the board's role with management, and the board's role in sort of setting horizons and priorities?

**Judy Samuelson:**

You and I worked together on a piece of work that we ended up calling the "Agenda for the Prepared Board." I'm guessing that the board is having very different conversations today than it even was a matter of months ago. In other words, the complicated questions that are emerging today, the pace of change that is being demanded on climate is a good example. New regulations, regardless of what happens to the SEC's, the rules that they landed earlier this month, they're hitting the courts. They're already being challenged. But a lot of the people we talked to say, "Regardless of the outcome there, we are being caught somewhere in someone's regulation." Whether it's California or Europe or China at this point, we're in this system's way of thinking that this may be a direct cost of our doing business in one company. In somebody else's company it's a so-called Scope 3.

It's like a somewhat derivative effect based on the products and services and how they end up being used. All of this is obviously connecting across complicated systems. So no one has the luxury to simply say, "This doesn't matter for me." I mean, I think smaller companies probably have a longer way to run, but they're going to get a lot of the benefit of some of the efficiencies. And the use frankly of technology that's going to help better understand where the real costs are, but also help us understand how to report these things across different platforms in a more efficient way. So I think there's some enthusiasm that this is one of those domains where technology is actually going to help us out here.

**Dave Young:**

I think where you and I have talked before, and as you referenced this “Agenda for the Prepared Board,” I think we even started it with this notion of preparing for a new reality.

**Judy Samuelson (30:34):**

Yes.

**Dave Young:**

I think the things you’ve just talked about are part of that new reality that we see. To me, one of the challenges, and I love your view on this, is in times where you are going to have discontinuity, in some respects, very big change underway. In my mind, this can be one of the biggest challenges for a board or an executive team, just how far do I go and how quickly do I go, and how confident am I in the direction that I’m going? This discussion on long-termism has been going on for a long time, right? As you said, there’s been a lot more attention to employees. The notion of externalities in businesses there. So some of the ground is set to be able to have more confidence about seeing the future with a bigger lens than maybe just the last run of the numbers. So if you’re sitting here and I’m the chair of a board today, what is your advice? What would you suggest I do?

**Judy Samuelson:**

Well, if I’m a board and I’ve read what the SEC’s intentions were, they clearly are bringing this back to the board. They’re saying the board has real fiduciary duties and responsibilities in this domain, even if the disclosure requirements were less than what you might’ve anticipated if you were living in Europe. They were very clear that the board has responsibilities here, and that they need to be adjudicating what is truly material here. Like, what matters? Well, a board can’t do this if they don’t start to really get into more of the weeds of these questions. So I think there are things that will make it hard for boards to be moving quickly. I think that the design of CEO pay is



one of those things that's holding us back. We've designed CEO pay in an era in which the kind of mantra of pay for performance was ubiquitous.

Somehow, we want them to have skin in the game, so we're going to load them with stock. That was a cheap way for the Silicon Valley to bring on talent. We know the history of why we got to this point. We're going to need to have a reckoning about it. We're a little forward on this. We know that boards are. It's going to take a while, but I think we're seeing some interesting questions. I'll go back to Boeing. Are we really going to pay the next executive who comes in here to pump the stock price? If you load them up with stock, is that the principal thing that they're going to be thinking about all night? I think we've seen some interesting examples of some new questions. We had Boeing's union essentially saying, "Can we put an employee on the board at this point?" Is that a question we're finally going to take up in the United States of America?

Will that not help the board perhaps understand more of the employee experience? To be open to firm specific knowledge and investments that the employees are making to better understand that as a point of reference and something that is an important part of the system that they need to manage? So I think we have design questions of boards, and whether or not the committee structure or, actually, reporting are organized to be able to have these real intake valves on all of the systems that roll up to a successful enterprise. And one that is, in fact, really focused on the long-term return, both to shareholders as well as to everybody else. Employees need their piece of this, and they're not going to sit quietly in this domain or in this era. Employees are not going to sit back and wait to see what happens. They're going to activate on these questions. Frankly, I think we're better off if they do.

**Dave Young:**

Yeah. In my mind, this is a very exciting time. So many questions on the table and, in some ways, the challenge of the political environment we're in. They have to think pretty deeply about a lot of the fundamentals here, and hopefully innovate as a result of those—not just to embrace the

opportunity for the future, but [to] recognize the quality of the corporation. And, ultimately, the quality of those underlying earnings depends on it. Judy, I'd like to come back as we close here to the Business & Society Program at Aspen. Given the way you're sort of synthesizing the view of where we are and what needs to change and what you see, what does that mean for your program? Where do you aspire for Aspen to play a role here in what is a very complicated time?

**Judy Samuelson:**

Well, we toggle back and forth between, kind of, two domains. One is the domain of those who work inside enterprises with enterprise-level responsibilities for exactly these questions. So these are your chief sustainability officers. Sometimes they bridge into having responsibilities more in the, kind of, human domain of management and systems and protocols around the workforce. They have a zillion different titles. They focus on different things, depending on the nature of the enterprise. If it's an industrial firm, they're going to be more focused on climate and sustainability. If they're a retailer, they're going to naturally think more about labor conditions, et cetera. In the Business & Society Program, we both learn from and help equip these change agents inside business to move further, farther, faster.

To kind of translate and play this internal role between the executive, the employees, and, of course, the myriad external forces who have a belief that the corporation needs to head in a certain direction, so, that's that whole stakeholder management piece of their jobs. Their jobs are complex, and we focus a lot on equipping them to drive change from within. Then we bump up against the rules of the road that exist in the boardroom. And that takes us back into the governance space—the *E*, the *S* and the *G*. The one that we actually spend the most time [on] is the *G* piece of this. It's essentially, what are the decision rules? How is this actually playing out? What is the purpose of the enterprise? What direction is being set? Is the direction on the purpose, and then the execution, are these things really aligned? And what would have to change to make sure that we are equipped to follow through on the things that we've committed to?

So that's going to open up lots of different questions then, that take us back inside about the management of this and what are the changes that have to come within. And you keep on morphing and keep on iterating back and forth between these kind of existential questions about corporate purpose, fiduciary duty of the enterprise, how much that's changed. What are the systems you need to be paying attention to as a board designed for that purpose? But then, back inside to work with those change agents on the inside—by the way, who also sit on boards of directors who are trying to do things differently. And that we hope with this “Agenda for the Prepared Board” to better equip them to [be] asking relevant questions. So that's kind of the fun we get to engage in.

**Dave Young:**

Yeah, no, I think it's a wonderful engine for system change. By my observation, I think you folks do a spectacular job of that. One of the things that I would agree with you on, and I think that's part of the wisdom in the way you've laid out the “Agenda for the Prepared Board,” is that these are all conversations. That there are these six areas of discussion, seven areas of discussion, and each of them has a few questions that boards should be wrestling with at each board meeting, if you will, to move through this agenda to sharpen up what they're doing, to sharpen up this balance between today and the future. And to make sure that the lens is wide enough to have a business that literally is—and a board that is—prepared for the reality that we may be already in, but certainly a reality that we can predict is coming aboard.

Judy, it's been wonderful to have the chance to hear and to talk with you, and the work that the Aspen Institute is doing through the Business & Society Program, and the thought leadership that you continue to press and learn. We need lots of it, and we need it as quickly as possible. Because I think we all aspire for something more, but we need some help in figuring out just how we do it and where we do it. So I appreciate your time so much, and we do encourage everyone listening to explore more the Aspen Institute's Business & Society Program. You can download the

“Agenda for the Prepared Board,” and begin putting it to work at the next board meeting. Judy, thank you very much.

**Judy Samuelson:**

Thank you, Dave. I appreciate very much the time we had today.

**About the BCG Henderson Institute**

The [BCG Henderson Institute](#) is the Boston Consulting Group’s think tank, dedicated to exploring and developing valuable new insights from business, technology, economics, and science by embracing the powerful technology of ideas. The Institute engages leaders in provocative discussion and experimentation to expand the boundaries of business theory and practice and to translate innovative ideas from within and beyond business. For more ideas and inspiration, sign up to receive [BHI INSIGHTS](#), our monthly newsletter, and follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).