

Intro ([00:01](#)):

Welcome to the Workplace Forward Podcast, with your host, executive coach Tegan Trovato, Founder and CEO of Bright Arrow Coaching. Are you a perpetually busy, always overstretched leader or executive who feels there's never time to keep up with leadership trends in an always changing landscape, much less self-care, Workplace Forward will help you overcome both challenges and gain peace of mind. Through Tegan's conversations with executives, experts, authors, and innovators about their leadership journeys. You'll get quick hits of two things you need the most. Essential insights to help navigate the future workplace and best practices on the more human side of leadership. So you're empowered to take care of yourself, while leading others. Enjoy some well deserved time for yourself, to learn and recharge. Let's get started with today's guest Tegan, take it away.

Tegan Trovato ([00:56](#)):

Dane Mathews is Vice President of Precision Marketing at Conagra Brands. He leads Conagra marketing transformation, leveraging enterprise agility, personalization, technological enablement, and advanced analytics. With a focus on the digital consumer experience, Dane is responsible for enterprise consumer marketing efforts, including brand design, media and advertising e-commerce CRM and direct consumer strategies. Dane has 15 years of marketing experience and has led the development and scale of transformative consumer experiences at some of the most well known brands, including Caesars Entertainment, Target, and McDonald's.

Tegan Trovato ([01:36](#)):

Dane received his BS and electrical and computer engineering from Carnegie Mellon University, and his MBA from the University of Michigan - Ross School of Business. Dane resides in Oak Park, Illinois with his wife Marlene, their 3 sons, Dane, Miles, and Jaden, and their Goldendoodle Frida. Dane, welcome to the podcast.

Dane Mathews ([01:56](#)):

Hey, Tegan. So happy to be here.

Tegan Trovato ([01:58](#)):

Yeah. Thanks for joining us. So excited to talk with you today, before we get started and really dive into the leader that you are, let's talk about what you lead. So tell listeners, first of all, what precision marketing is and what it is at Conagra specifically.

Dane Mathews ([02:13](#)):

Yeah, that's a great question. And I get that question often. I think precision marketing, the idea of precision marketing was birth probably about four or five years ago, and the idea was really ground it in marketing, had an opportunity to really ground itself in evidence and consumer behavior. That would be a foundation for how we communicate to our consumers more broadly. And it's super easy to see even at Conagra. So actually we're responsible for the Healthy Choice brand, Birds Eye brand, Slim Jim, Angie's BOOMCHICKAPOP, [inaudible 00:02:49], about 105 brands, I think within CPG.

Dane Mathews ([02:53](#)):

And if you look at our growth, if you listen to Sean Connolly, our CEO talk about the growth of our organization, really centered on the idea around innovating in the grocery, that idea around evidence

and consumer behavior is foundational to the way that we develop products. And so the extension of that was, well, if we're going to develop products based on this deep insight, this deep looking consumer behavior, then we should be communicating those innovations with the same process and the same formulation. So it's kind of born out of that. So that's a little bit of a why, the what under precision marketing super interesting too. I think in order for a marketing to really be successful, it helps to have a lot of built in capabilities to actually help it grow in a super changing environment.

Dane Mathews ([03:44](#)):

So today that includes our e-commerce practice, which is in partnership with, and obviously the rest of the organization, but is really led and driven by the precision marketing team. Certainly all media strategies you would imagine would come from the precision marketing team, along with all content. And when I mean all content, it's not a euphemism, really the center of branded experience design comes from this team, from the packaging on the shelf all the way to, if we decide to do a 15 or 32nd broadcast spot and everything in between all comes from this team and we partner with some other teams, but at the end of the day, brand experience design comes from the precision marketing team.

Dane Mathews ([04:25](#)):

And then lastly all owned channels. And so wherever we have own channel activity, and sometimes that own channel activity is pretty straightforward. We'll have a healthychoice.com brand website, but in other cases that own channel strategy will be more complicated. Meaning we may be launching direct to consumer experiences from those own channels and real commerce experiences for consumers. And so we have a kind of a, I would say at the end of the day, we have a broad view of the consumer journey and all of the forces that help make that consumer journey really drive commerce and drive sales. And so at the end of the day, we're founded on evidence and we're founded on a deep data practice, based on consumer behavior. And that is meant to power the entire consumer journey, centrally for the organization.

Tegan Trovato ([05:11](#)):

Great. So we're actually, it makes sense. I'm glad we started with this explanation because as we dig into your leadership practices, the things that enable you to do, the work that's industries specific, we're going to talk about things like collaboration, agility, practice. So all those things make a lot of sense if you're innovating in the consumer package goods space. So I can see why you're constantly thinking about that in your leadership space. So little pre-read for our listeners, that's where we're headed.

Tegan Trovato ([05:38](#)):

For our listeners to know I always connect with our guests before we record. And I was leadership nerding out on some of the things Dane was sharing with me, which we've kind of come to the conclusion that a lot of his work has been about making decisions with data, as you could tell with his explanation. What really struck me was the times you are having to make decisions without data. And we're going to get into that here in a minute. Tell us first, Dane, why you don't believe leadership is lonely because I will tell you it's one of the top things I hear from my executives I coach, just feel so lonely. So I love that you opened, when you and I were talking with, "Nope, it does not have to be lonely. It is not lonely." Tell us why, please reposition this for folks that are listening.

Dane Mathews ([06:28](#)):

I've had a chance to reflect since our original conversation Tegan, and I'm going to stand strong. I'm not changing my mind. I'm not going to change my position on this one thing.

Tegan Trovato ([06:35](#)):

Don't blow the episode Dane. Yeah.

Dane Mathews ([06:37](#)):

No, no, can't do that. Can't do that. Leadership can feel lonely. I think the most important thing that you said was it doesn't have to be. And in fact, you are more successful as a leader when you work hard to obscure and remove that loneliness. I think for me, kind of a meta conversation, at least with myself, and I'll say it this way, I have grown up for the most part with the idea that my own success was connected to my own ability to march up a hill with a giant backpack and plant the flag. And that's has served me well maybe in decent parts in my experience, that's not the next leg of, of my own career trajectory. That's not me thinking about being a kind of scalable leader, a leader who can really drive more significant scale.

Dane Mathews ([07:30](#)):

And then the last thing is, it is a truly insular look at leadership. And so I've had to unpack this idea and why I say it's meta is because I thought my own trajectory was responsible. I was personally responsible for it and I am, but I actually had to march my career up the hill. And then anything I did, I had to also march up that hill really on my own. For me, I've grown the most by actually expanding my aperture on well, if I feel lonely, then that's a great reflective moment to say, "I'm in the wrong space of retreating back to my old ways." So if I feel the pressure of, "I need to decide these things, I really need to figure this out." That's a true aspect of all leadership, but if I'm doing that and I feel like I'm need to kind of close my eyes and figure this whole thing out on my own, I've already off the wrong start.

Tegan Trovato ([08:26](#)):

Yes. Wow.

Dane Mathews ([08:28](#)):

That's why I say it's a little meta only because as I'm working through things, I have to back myself up and say, "But how are you going to actually conquer this? How are you going to get around this?" And I've learned that I don't always get direct answers from people, but even people either tangentially to me in spaces and totally different industries and totally different spaces with totally different gigs and jobs, they unlock things from me that help me see things differently and help me notice things differently. And that's been super powerful along the way.

Tegan Trovato ([09:04](#)):

Yeah. I will just validate that that journey that you described in the earlier parts of our careers, is it our autonomous work, our ability to win in our individual roles, our individual contributorship. It's absolutely why we get noticed. It's why we are offered leadership opportunities. I have to tell you though, Dane, a lot of folks will take that next step into leadership. And what I mean by that then is people leadership. And it takes them a long time to get conscious, about the need to change that behavior. And that it becomes about removing obstacles for other people to do that autonomous work on the team. Right? So I just appreciate the level of consciousness and intentionality you're bringing to that part of your

journey and that you're now constantly conscious about it. So share with listeners then some of the tactical aspects of how you build community, how you seek council, because you shared with me, it can still be a struggle sometimes to remember to ask for help. Right? So what are some of the things you put in place to tap into the experience of others and into the knowledge of others?

Dane Mathews ([10:08](#)):

Yeah, I should refine a little bit. So, a lot of my work isn't necessarily in scaling my leadership for my team, my real journey today is influencing the organization. What isn't super clear and I probably should have made this more clear is the precision marketing team at Conagra is often the tip of the spear for digital transformation, which means we are both building new capabilities in the organization. We are piloting those new capabilities and optimizing them, and then we're scaling them, which means at the end of the day, my leadership is about how precision marketing and digital transformation actually touch the rest of the organization. How does digital transformation, that we're delivering actually touch our back office teams, that are in Omaha? How our work touch our brand partners? How does it touch our demand science team? How does it touch our IT teams? And touch, meaning not lean into them, but how do we build practices that help them participate?

Dane Mathews ([11:06](#)):

So for me, when I'm thinking a lot about my work and my own leadership ability, I need to nudge myself to push into peers around the organization. So my peers in brand, my peers in IT, my peers in the demand science team, and really expose the fact that I might have a good sense of what to do next, but I need their help to design what that is. And so the leadership challenge for me is less about how I empower my team. It's actually how I drive participation and ideation and innovation with my peers, where I might have the most experience in this. But that doesn't mean I'm the only one who can run the conversation. And so I need to work very closely with all of the functional areas in the organization, legal, consumer insights, technology, random business partners, RSLT. And while I may be the most knowledgeable in terms of what digital transformation looks and feels like, because it's my kind fourth rodeo, if you will, from a digital transformation perspective, that doesn't mean I have all the answers and I certainly don't have all the contextual answers that I'll need to help it be successful at Conagra. So I need to open myself up to people and allow them to participate and help me co-design what transformation looks like in the future.

Tegan Trovato ([12:29](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. That's art, if I may say, right?

Dane Mathews ([12:33](#)):

Yeah.

Tegan Trovato ([12:33](#)):

It's art and what I know about you and some of the things you've shared is that you've really propped in science with it too though when it comes to three things that are really important to you, that that collaboration, agility, and practice. So when we talk about those three things, because you identified those as being super important so that you, your own leaders aren't operating for from that island, aren't accidentally not asking for that community, like you're talking about, cross-functionally and specifically. So talk with us about those three things that you've implemented, collaboration, agility, practice, and how that serves your mission as a leader.

Dane Mathews ([13:09](#)):

Right. I felt like for the organization, going back to this idea around it is at the end of the day, we are designing an enterprise way of working that leverages evidence, our brands and our communication channels as a way to drive the business. Fundamentally, that's what we're really after, but that's not the marketing team executing on behalf of the organization. It's the marketing, helping the organization execute on behalf of the business and we are constituent [crosstalk 00:13:41].

Tegan Trovato ([13:40](#)):

Oh, good distinction. Ooh, very good distinction. Yeah.

Dane Mathews ([13:43](#)):

So on the collaboration front, we knew really clearly what it meant to really do marketing in this kind of environment. So that was pretty clear to us. The biggest question was, but who can help drive this practice faster and better? And so we had to design places for in this part of our go to market practice, we need the business leaders help here. We need to understand business strategies at a really deep level. So that was great.

Dane Mathews ([14:11](#)):

And then when we got to the next phase, oh, well this would be great to know what are our retail of partners thinking and doing in this space? Because they're an important component. They're the critical channel for success for us. So what's happening in retail. And then the next piece was, how can science, and we'll say automation and machine learning, also help us drive greater efficacy in this space.

Dane Mathews ([14:33](#)):

And we kept finding all collaborative opportunities, in that collaboration, like let's have a 50 person meeting and meet for an hour and I'll get lost around the axle. Let's be intentional about our collaboration, which means this is our practice. This team can help us do these things. And we would start to design with that team. These are the questions we're trying to answer. How can you help us answer those questions, more coherently and more directly so that we don't have to go find those answers. And we actually all get a chance to execute together. And it's this intentional way of, maybe the best is a sports analogy. If we are the kind of point guard in this work, then who is our small forward, I'm going to use basketball because [crosstalk 00:15:15].

Tegan Trovato ([15:15](#)):

Well, I'm kind of glad you are. If you had gone football, I would've just nodded my head because I don't know. I'm with you on the basketball. Okay, go ahead.

Dane Mathews ([15:21](#)):

All right. Let's [crosstalk 00:15:22] the basketball. We're well connected, Tegan beyond even spaces we don't even know now.

Tegan Trovato ([15:27](#)):

That's right. Sounds like it.

Dane Mathews ([15:28](#)):

Exactly. So I'll do this pretty quickly, but who is our point guard? We are the point guard. Who is our small forward, who is our center? Those are the important questions we started to ask ourselves. Because we could boot up our own center and our own small forwards, but we felt like it would be better designed if it was designed as a team sport versus a, say a hundred yard dash, if you will, leading a track a little bit. So also on collaboration, it is on our team and we're working through stronger collaboration across our team. But the most important collaboration part that we're really focused on today is collaboration from an enterprise lens. And that's proven to be so foundational for the organization, for sure. Should I go into agility?

Tegan Trovato ([16:14](#)):

Yeah, let's.

Dane Mathews ([16:15](#)):

Yeah. So on agility, within this collaboration, we knew, we felt like the marketplace changes too quickly. And if we decide that we're going to go on this journey with the enterprise, we could be doing marketing, planning work for an entire year before we ever go. So we had to be pretty decisive and say, we're going to do this collaboration work, but it lives within time and this is the time you have. So we almost starve the organization, the organization, "Well, I don't have that information yet. I won't be able to get that information." We said, "Well, we're going to have to all move a little bit faster with a little bit more agility and a little bit more connectivity." So we said, "These are the fundamental questions we need from each of these teams. And this is the time that we have to get it done." And in the beginning there was no shortage of stress to you. Well, I don't know. I can't [crosstalk 00:17:00].

Tegan Trovato ([16:59](#)):

Sure. And where does this fit into their work, their day-to-day job, right? Yeah.

Dane Mathews ([17:04](#)):

Right. Right. But over time we started to edge. We started to shave off all of the wasted time around the edges. And we started to get answers faster, harder, stronger. Things that teams said, "Listen, we can't collaborate because we are on a totally different time cycle than you guys." And those teams now help us participate at the end of the day.

Tegan Trovato ([17:25](#)):

And that's something.

Dane Mathews ([17:25](#)):

And they're about a collaboration.

Tegan Trovato ([17:28](#)):

How did you get them there though, Dane? How did you get them there? And what I imagine is some of that may have been top-down, was there a more senior partner who said, "Oh, you have to show up and help." Or some of that. Okay.

Dane Mathews ([17:40](#)):

Well, yeah, in some places we can.

Tegan Trovato ([17:44](#)):

There's mix I imagine, that.

Dane Mathews ([17:45](#)):

Right. It is a mix. That's not my go to though, quite honestly. I think of that as my last resort, if you will. So you got to have great relationships, right? So you just got to [inaudible 00:17:54] great relationships. You need to articulate the value of what you're doing and why. And I think if you can do that well, and you can do that, simply people understand like, "Oh yeah, yeah, that could be good." That's hard, but it could be good. They may not say that to your face, but in the back of their mind, they're like, "Yeah, that might be a more desired outcome." And your question is really interesting because it actually leads into the third thing, which is practice, which means we don't get too stuck around the axle around, was it perfect this time?

Dane Mathews ([18:23](#)):

It's not going to be, we might actually say, all right, these are the questions we need you to answer. And we might only answer 20% of the questions in the first round. Cool. That's 20% of the questions we don't have to answer ourselves that we got better insight from the team. Great. And that cycle is short. So the next time we do this, we do the exact same thing. Do the answers to these questions change. And sometimes they have, great. And then we might have 40% of the questions answered. And it's this idea of using time, little like a savings account, but using time to allow the organization to get better.

Dane Mathews ([19:00](#)):

And I can pinky promise if you start in January and you have small enough time cycles, when you wake up in July, you and your team will be in a dramatically different place than you ever thought possible, because you just kept working at it and you just kept refining it. And that's been for me within my fourth kind of enterprise transformation, one of the biggest learnings is just getting started next week while it may be uncomfortable is the most important part because you have to get past that initial discomfort of growth. And then once you get past that, it becomes easier and easier to do. And you set new growth foundations for the organization and it's super powerful to watch in real time.

Tegan Trovato ([19:48](#)):

Yeah. Okay. I have to nerd out on this a little more. I just want to point out for listeners and you may have experienced this too over your years, Dane in different companies, different teams. But I think the piece that's often missing when we try to be more agile is, well, what we usually do immediately is look for waste reduction, reduce waste, go faster. But I don't always hear the stake in the ground on here's the end of the project date. I swear, I don't know why it seems obvious as you and I are talking about it, but as I reflect across teams, I swear that's missing. Right?

Dane Mathews ([20:21](#)):

That's super important. Yeah.

Tegan Trovato ([20:23](#)):

It is.

Dane Mathews ([20:23](#)):

And it's uncomfortable because everyone looks at you and goes like, "There's no way in hell we could do that. There's no way, not even close." And that might be true, but I think in order to really recognize time, you have to really make it clear. You can't be fuzzy about time because it just continues to march and move on. And so you got to be pretty clear. This is the time that we have. And then you use that as, it's actually a tool. It's a great tool, because that tool will help flush out, what do you truly need to be successful in this [crosstalk 00:20:57].

Tegan Trovato ([20:56](#)):

That's right. That pressure does.

Dane Mathews ([20:58](#)):

And what do you not need?

Tegan Trovato ([21:00](#)):

That's right.

Dane Mathews ([21:01](#)):

And it allows you to iterate. And so being declarative around time is a really powerful tool, I started to really understand that probably about three years ago and started to use time, calendars as a way to really fix our transformation so that it became less ethereal and more real.

Tegan Trovato ([21:24](#)):

Yeah. This is a very in the weeds question, how much project management support do you have in order to make that happen? Is there a lot of support in that space or is it owned across the team?

Dane Mathews ([21:35](#)):

Yeah, our organization's been super thoughtful in the role of our PMO function for sure.

Tegan Trovato ([21:42](#)):

Okay, good.

Dane Mathews ([21:43](#)):

And in places where we have strong PMO support, the acceleration is undeniable. It's easier. But when the teams fundamentally are trying to do and schedule the work, it's so much harder.

Tegan Trovato ([21:56](#)):

It is. Because it's a skill, it's a competency to be able to do that. And it doesn't usually live in your functional areas. So yeah.

Dane Mathews ([22:04](#)):

No. And I think you need a third party at some point to call things out, "Hey, we're laid over here with this. Are you going to be ready? This is coming up." We need someone at the center and sometimes that's me, but we're more successful when we have someone formally who understands what we're trying to do, understands the role of time and is helping us all make progress in the right direction.

Tegan Trovato ([22:28](#)):

And it keeps your relationships a little cleaner, right? To have someone else sort of hand smacking, if you will, my phrase. We'll talk a little here about teams for a sec, Dane. So we do a lot of teamwork at Bright Arrow. One of the first things we'll do when we work with teams is help them evaluate what competencies are often missing on the teams, leadership teams spec, 90% of the time, the PMO piece is missing, 90%. In all size organizations, it's really something. So that's why I ask about it. I think it's a key to success and it's often just not there at all.

Tegan Trovato ([23:03](#)):

And then what you've described and how you all run agile is in the team where we call it a team of teams, right. So I'm curious for you all, as you win together and you have these successes, do you have a milestone in place where you're reflecting back to the team of teams? Like, "Here's how we won, collectively here's what we delivered." Because I imagine there's something you're doing to keep them wanting to come back and collaborate. So what do you guys have in place to make sure this feels attractive internally?

Dane Mathews ([23:36](#)):

We do retrospectives for sure, probably within the team we'll do retrospectives. And I think in the early days we would do those retrospectives, they'd feel good. And then we'd just kind of keep marching and we might look backwards at those retrospectives. Like, "Wait, did we really do those things or not? I think we've gotten better kind of tying up." We'll say a lot of the celebration locally, we've done a better job of over time. Where our real opportunity is to making sure that celebration happens, not only with the team, but I would say externally.

Dane Mathews ([24:10](#)):

So for me going back to me and my peers, how do we celebrate the work of the team? And that's something that's I think is a true unlock for us. Because I think that's the, when you have your senior leadership buy in, and the senior leaders are excited about the work teams are doing, it is like napalm on a fire. People just feel like, "Okay, so I'm actually doing the right things, I'm growing and I'm feeling the intrinsic rewards from this cross-functional leadership." I think that view is super important, when we'll say a marketing team, a consumer insights or what we call a demand science team and our IT teams come together and produce something new and novel when me and my peers all say, "That's awesome." And then when our bosses, our CTO, our chief operating officer, co-chief operating officer also say, "That's super awesome."

Dane Mathews ([25:11](#)):

The teams are like, this's going to be a terrible analogy. They're like, they want to run through a wall. They're so excited to do the next thing, and it's super powerful. We actually had a recent example of that in kind of December and January timeframe. And it was super powerful. People were so excited to keep working on this specific work that it was definitely a transformational moment. It was truly cross-functional, truly, truly, and because of the energy and effort behind it, because of the actual success of the project. And because of the recognition by the leadership team of this work, the team is just so excited to begin to move to the next phases of our planning. So there's been some great wins on the Conagra team for sure.

Tegan Trovato ([25:56](#)):

That's fantastic. Thank you. So everything we've talked about so far is about being able to make really good decisions with data, which we love. What about when you have to make decisions without data? Dane, you told me there was a really pivotal, even transitional moment for you in February of 2020, right at the start of the pandemic, which took you way out of that space of some of the things we've talked about, like having a lot of great counsel of people who've done something similar before, or all the data we could want from internal and external old data points. So tell us about that time in February, 2020, where you were on the way other end of the spectrum and having to make really big decisions.

Dane Mathews ([26:37](#)):

Yeah, it was certainly at a pivotal time for me, up until this time, I was pretty unsatisfied with my ability to take risks. And when I watched my peers or I was reading articles and in the trades or in LinkedIn and people were celebrating some of their wins. I said, "Man, I want to do those kind of things." And those kind of things, just super air quotes folks, can't see me, but I'm doing super air quotes. Those kind of things are not like, all right, the day is all lined up. It's all super clear here. All right, time to go. And that's not truly being innovative. That's kind of hanging with the pack if you will. And it's perfectly fine strategy, but it's not something I wanted to practice again.

Dane Mathews ([27:21](#)):

So I was really unhappy with my, my ability to drive, to move my team in directions that weren't necessarily supported by data really at all. But I feel pretty strongly about. And so in February of '20, we were all sent home. We were all working from home. My entire family was home. My kids were here, kids from college came, my wife was here. She's a principal, we were all working from home, ordering from shout to Instacart. We're ordering from Instacart. I'd gone to the grocery store a little bit, but in the early days we were all masked up. We were lines outside, only five people in [crosstalk 00:27:56].

Tegan Trovato ([27:55](#)):

Wiping our groceries down when they got in your house. Yeah.

Dane Mathews ([27:58](#)):

Yeah, yeah. The whole nine yards. And I was just reflecting on it. I was like, "Oh man. So we sell groceries, and this whole thing has gotten weird and strange-

Tegan Trovato ([28:05](#)):

Yeah. Wow.

Dane Mathews ([28:08](#)):

... and different. And so we were in the middle of planning our next quarter from a media perspective, we were going to step and repeat our media plan, just now the usual stuff, we're going to do some video. We're going to be in social, blah, blah, blah. And I was listening to the team and someone said, "Oh podcast are really trending now. And people start listening to podcasts as [crosstalk 00:28:30].

Tegan Trovato ([28:29](#)):

Hopefully they still are.

Dane Mathews ([28:31](#)):

They definitely still are. Because the podcast game is serious these days. [crosstalk 00:28:36].

Tegan Trovato ([28:35](#)):

Yes, it is.

Dane Mathews ([28:36](#)):

It's good stuff out there. And so I'm listening to the team and I'm thinking a lot about Instacart. I'm thinking a lot about target.com, thinking a lot about in the Target app, thinking a lot about Walmart, Walmart app and all these changes coming in the new consumer. And I kind of jumped in and said, "I want us to actually start to move significant dollars into e-commerce platforms. And we started to move a lot of our dollars into these e-commerce platforms and there wasn't really any data. It was still, we'll call it bleeding edge, but it was so apparent through the way where we were living. So I didn't have real data that said e-commerce adoption is X, Y or Z. I knew where we were sitting and we were sitting about five, five and a half percent. But in that meeting on my front porch in February of 2020, I told the team to move 20% of all of our media spend into e-commerce platform. And the agency lead at the time was like, "Are you sure you want to do that?" "I don't know."

Tegan Trovato ([29:34](#)):

Yeah. We're not talking small dollars here for those of you listening, right? So, yeah.

Dane Mathews ([29:38](#)):

Yeah, yeah. We're going to move for some pretty significant dollars and let's be clear, when you start to market in those spaces, you need very different skill sets. In a lot of ways, our advertising on e-commerce platforms don't necessarily have a lot of creative against them. These are search tactics in Instacart and Walmart in Target on Amazon. So doing search advertising is a very, very different skillset than say, social media advertising. We had the skillset, we had the talent on the team. So that was great. But that team went from executing maybe 10 to 15% of our spend, to executing 40 or 50% of our spend.

Tegan Trovato ([30:18](#)):

Wow.

Dane Mathews ([30:19](#)):

And so I'm sure that team at background was like, "Yeah." And I think the social team and we actually had some broadcast TV [crosstalk 00:30:27] at the time, they were a little like "Boo." It was exactly the right call to make hindsight being 2020, which means at that time in February of '20, we were about five, five and a half percent of total sales, our total sales being e-commerce sales. And today we're sitting at about nine and a half 10. So we basically doubled the presence of our eCommerce business and over that timeframe, partly because of the consumer clearly, but also because we made that shift and we made that substantial shift. And through that shift, the entire organization came along with us.

Dane Mathews ([30:59](#)):

And if you listen to the earnings calls, delivered by our leadership team, you'll see a lot of information around how we're winning in e-commerce. It's actually a fundamental topic and growth plank for the organization now.

Tegan Trovato ([31:12](#)):

That's fantastic.

Dane Mathews ([31:14](#)):

And it's not because of my personal decision, it's all because of the team at the end of the day. But part of my role as a leader is to start to peer around corners. And if I'm only using data to peer around corners, I'm not really peering around corners, I'm kind of looking at the corners. And so it was a big moment for me, a big growth opportunity for me to truly step out there, beyond data. And I'm a data person, but to lean into the word you said to you, which is how are we being creative and innovative when we don't have all the facts in front of us. And do we understand the business well enough that we can see those changes coming and those opportunities?

Tegan Trovato ([31:54](#)):

Yeah. I want to appeal one more layer off of this. And have you get really personal about when you made that decision. What I hear you saying is, it was sort of obvious to me as a leader that we had to do something different, but at the same time you're operating from the, that's not your wiring. Your wiring is, "Let's look at reports, let's pull internal data, let's look at the market." And this had to be made fast. This was a very quick decision. And I imagine when leaders have to make decisions without much any behind it, there has to be some fear because if it doesn't go well, you're going to have to answer way up the food chain. Right? So tell me about the personal experience of, how did it feel, how did you overcome any of the internal barriers to pull the trigger? There's some level of acting from your intuition here, which is part of leadership. It certainly is, but I don't think we talk about it enough. So how did you excavate your own intuition through this and just do it?

Dane Mathews ([32:55](#)):

Yeah, I think the biggest thing is, and this is a broader conversation I was having with myself is the concept of perfection. So am I afraid to be an imperfect leader in a completely vital, ambiguous, uncertain environment? How can I be perfect when the entire ecosystem I actually work within is moving and underrating all around me. It's actually impossible. So for me, moving into this moment, I had been working on am I worried about making a decision because I might be seen as imperfect and what is my choice? Do I want to be a perfect leader which doesn't exist or do I want to be seen as a leader who can respond and adapt? And in this case, I felt like I wanted to be the leader who could respond, who could adapt. And I felt like my leadership team, specifically my boss, would acknowledge my ability to move and make decisions versus waiting for everything the line up and be perfect.

Dane Mathews ([34:02](#)):

And that was the calculus I made. And it's the calculus I stand by, which is, if I think I'm going to show up and be perfect in a marketplace that is as uncertain as it is today, I'm already off to the wrong start. It's just like being a lonely leader. I'm off to the wrong start. It's the wrong frame of reference. So I'm looking for opportunity to stretch myself and say, "I might not get this perfectly right, but I think based on my intuition and my experience, I think I'm going to be more right than wrong. And if I am wrong, I can just change it. And it's all good."

Tegan Trovato ([34:36](#)):

Well said, okay. How can listeners find you online Dane so that they can see what you're up to and stay in touch with you?

Dane Mathews ([34:44](#)):

Nah, it's a growth opportunity for me. I'm a fairly insular kind of guy, but I'm on Twitter. I watch Twitter [crosstalk 00:34:51].

Tegan Trovato ([34:51](#)):

You're a lurker, I'm a lurker with you on Twitter.

Dane Mathews ([34:52](#)):

I'm a lurker. I'm a Twitter lurker. And on LinkedIn. Those are the best two places to find me.

Tegan Trovato ([35:01](#)):

Great. We'll be sure to include your contact information for those two in the show notes or links to your profile, rather. So in closing, Dane, I want to ask you the signature question we ask all of our guests. As you know, the podcast was created to discover the behaviors, practices, beliefs, and skills that future leaders need to possess so that they can keep leading these systems, which are apparently going to slow down or be less volatile anytime soon. So to get your read on what's required of future leaders, just finish the sentence for me, leaders of the future will-

Dane Mathews ([35:32](#)):

I'm going to answer the question and provide some good context behind why I answer the question this way.

Tegan Trovato ([35:36](#)):

Perfect.

Dane Mathews ([35:37](#)):

So let's see, leaders of the future will require innovation at every level of the organization. In the future, I don't believe me or people that look like me will be successful if the mantle of innovation and creativity and peering around the corners is only delivered from on high. It has to be distributed. It has to be distributed. And here's why, here's what I'm seeing. Part of my team's work is in automation, which means we use machine learning and automation to actually deliver recommendation to consumers, very similar to what Facebook and Instagram and the other social platforms do. They use algorithms to promote content.

Dane Mathews ([36:25](#)):

And what I'm sensing is with one foot in that world, if the algorithms and the computers are fundamentally executing and making decisions, what is the role of my team? They're not executing in this space. Now it's a burgeoning space for most marketers, for sure. It's a space that we all live in when we go on marketplace and we go do advertising into these platforms, but we don't always natively live in them on our own. And we actually have some automation running and some of our own platforms. If the computers are making these decisions and optimizing this content more broadly, scaly across our consumers, what's our role? What's my team's role? They need to be seeing around the corners too.

They need to be identifying what are the next practices that the computers can't see that we need to start to build around? What are the next experiences? What are the next content types? What are the next ways that we should be communicating with consumers that we start to onboard?

Dane Mathews ([37:18](#)):

The computer will learn how that is effective to consumers, and they'll incorporate that into the algorithms, but my teams need to be way more ahead of the curve and I need to be even further than that. And so if all of the innovation comes from me and my team is really executing, that's kind of the traditional model. And then we have this pressure that the machines now are starting to execute. We need to find a new way forward. And so leaders of the future need to scale creativity and innovation across their entire human teams so that the computers begin to execute and drive the business at the executional level.

Tegan Trovato ([38:00](#)):

That was rich. That is fantastic, Dane. Listen, this has just been such a pleasure to learn from you today and hear about your journey. I know our listeners are going to love every minute of this. So thanks so much for spending the time and all of your thoughtfulness in what you've shared today.

Dane Mathews ([38:15](#)):

Tegan, thank you so much for you and the team. It's been a true pleasure. And for those of you who are leaders and who haven't had a chance to get on a podcast, it is a truly, truly powerful experience, because it will force you, especially if you have a great host like Tegan to refine, better articulate and put down in clear simpler words, your own leadership journey. And it's a powerful experience. So I recommend it for everybody.

Tegan Trovato ([38:41](#)):

Wonderful. Thank you, Dane.

Outro ([38:43](#)):

Thanks for listening to this episode of the Workplace Forward Podcast, where leaders and executives can stay ahead of the curve on emerging leadership ideas and self-care best practices. Guided by executive coach, Tegan Trovato and her expert guests. Please take 60 seconds to help others discover the Workplace Forward Podcast, by going to iTunes to subscribe, give five stars and leave a comment. Want to learn more about Bright Arrow coaching and leadership development, visit the website at www.brightarrowcoaching.com. See you next time. And while you're filling your team's cups, remember to take care of yourself too.