



Changemakers Podcast episode 6 transcript

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Hosts: Omar Abbosh, will.i.am

Guest: Henrietta Fore, Executive Director Emeritus, UNICEF

Omar Abbosh [MUSIC]

Hello, my name is Omar Abbosh, and I am the Corporate Vice President of Industry Solutions at Microsoft.

will.i.am And I'm will.i.am, entrepreneur, philanthropist, musician and producer, and my mother's son.

And this is Changemakers.

Omar

There are a lot of people around the world driving changes that impact society. In this series, we share stories of transformation directly from the leaders themselves who made the change. We'll talk about their obstacles and triumphs, their learnings, and how technology is accelerating their mission.

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, also known as UNICEF, has been dedicated to helping at-risk children around the world. Henrietta Fore retired recently from her post as executive director, capping an illustrious career in public services. We are so lucky to have her join us here today.

Henrietta, you've been a Changemaker for much of your grown up life and driving change. At the heart of that, it seems that you have incredible skills around bridge building and figuring out how to bring people together, to work together. You're a Republican and a former George W. Bush appointee, and you've been leading one of the world's oldest, largest, and most important multinational charitable organisations. What would you say to leaders today about the importance and art of diplomacy and cooperation in these polarized times?

Henrietta Fore

The last two years, two things stood out. One was that I don't think as adults we particularly listen to children and young people enough. And the example of that is mental health. Young people all over the world want us to talk about mental health, and my generation didn't do it. We were afraid of it; we were afraid that we'd be fired from our jobs, and our families wouldn't speak to us if we admitted that we had any mental health problems. And so we didn't talk about it.

But during the pandemic, everyone experienced mental health and whether you were feeling depressed or anxious or angry, you needed to talk to someone. And where young people went was online; they could not see their friends and teachers at school.

I learned that we have to pay attention to mental health. I hope we have all learned that in our families and that you have to understand that people are going through real traumas and challenges in their lives, and you have to listen to the youngest members in your family. Sometimes we don't do that, Omar, and I wish we did. They will help unify us.

The second thing I learned as a leader of an organization is that you need to trust your people. We were in the middle of the pandemic and people were literally dying on the streets, we were talking to our teams in Ecuador. We just decided to trust our people – give them a little extra time off, let them organize themselves, do hybrid working so that they could come to the office when they could, but that they could be a parent, that they could be a teacher, they could be a provider, and they could be professional at home. And I think sometimes in our organizations and it's a very fractured world, but I think sometimes more organizations we do not trust our people.

Our people come from every walk of life and at UNICEF. They come from all the 190 countries that we work in. They come from every religion, ethnicity, and as a result you get a diversity of experience and knowledge and ability to cope. So, I at least learned that listening to the young and trusting our people made a big difference in how I lead as a leader of an organization.

And what happened in the end is we raised more money, we reached more young people, we helped more people in the world because we listen to each other. We respected each other and we trusted each other, and I hope we could do that in the world, Omar. I hope we could do it politically and economically and socially but it's certainly one that we learned in UNICEF.

Omar

I think that sounds like wonderful counsel for all of us as individuals, as parents, as managers or leaders in companies, whatever our role is in society. Thank you so much, Henrietta.

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Henrietta, thank you so much for your service.