



**IRI
Growth
Insights**

C-SUITE
CONVERSATIONS



Unilever

Unilever's Social Missions Bolster Dynamic Growth in Its Culture and Brands

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IRI's Growth Insights [C-Suite Conversations](#) feature insights and best practices from CPG and retail industry leaders. The experiences of these executives and their companies demonstrate the agility and foresight that keeps our industry dynamic. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and economic struggles, CPG and retail companies have reengineered supply chains, launched new go-to-market strategies, pushed forward on innovation, and invested heavily to ensure that shoppers and consumers can be confident in the safety, quality and integrity of the products they purchase and use.

As critical as data and analytics are to the decisions we make every day, and as focused as we are on shopper behavior and changing demand for the products we make and sell, the insights we learn from executives navigating this environment are invaluable.

Available as a [videocast](#) and as a [podcast](#), here we feature an edited version of IRI's conversation with Fabian Garcia, president of Unilever North America. In this episode of IRI Growth Insights C-Suite Conversations, Fabian talks with Andrew Appel, president and chief executive officer at IRI, and Jennifer Hetrick, IRI's Unilever team leader, about Fabian's dramatic onboarding; the value to Unilever of his 40 years of business experience just as the pandemic set in; Unilever's initiative, United for America; creating and supporting a strong corporate culture and a company that makes a difference in the communities it serves; Unilever's partnership with IRI; and more.



IRI: How did you end up at Unilever, and what attracted you to the organization? Also, what are your thoughts about working at an organization with such a strong social mission?

Fabian Garcia: Andrew, you were one of the first people I met, and little did we know what the year was bringing for us. Let me start by saying thank you to you, Jennifer and the team hosting me today. It's a real pleasure to be here and share with you my own personal experiences that span four decades of CPG – but more importantly, the past year, which probably was the most intense. So let me start by saying that when I left Revlon (as CEO in 2018), I was pondering retirement on the one hand, adviserships on the other hand, or becoming a consultant, but I came to realize kind of quickly that I needed to have my hands on an operation. I like to have impact. And I like to do that at scale.

The other thing that I really look for is companies that have a meaning and a purpose. Because after you work for so many years, you want to lead in a company where you share the values of the people, you share the mission of the company, and you wake up every morning thinking that you're going to make the world a little better within your own area of influence. So I remember when the headhunter called me. The first thing she said to me was, "Please don't hang up; listen to this." She went on to tell me the story about Unilever, and frankly, this was a very easy decision because as a former competitor to Unilever, I always admired the company.

I think **UNILEVER HAS PIONEERED IN THE AREA OF HAVING A CLEAR MISSION TO IMPACT THE WORLD**, talking about responsible capitalism and leading the categories in which it competes, demonstrating to the world that you can actually do well and do good for the world.

So the decision was easy. I thought the company had a challenge in North America. Basically, it hadn't grown for the prior eight years, and I thought that was a perfect combination: on one hand, a great business challenge and, on the other hand, an absolutely great company with great purpose, with great brands and, ultimately, an organization and resources that could be brought to bear for growth. So that's what brought me here. And frankly, as the pandemic started, the authenticity of these values came into play

because I didn't have to explain to people what the right thing to do was – it was very clear. We had three objectives: the safety of our people, the continuity of our business and the impact that we had in our communities. Very early on there was a global declaration of what we were going to do coming from Alan Jope (CEO of Unilever).

He effectively said that, worldwide, we will do \$100 million worth of donations. We thought we could do something different here in the U.S. because giving money is an easy way to help, but the more personal way to help is to put in your personal time and do something special for the communities where you compete. And that was the beginning of the United for America movement, which was all about putting in our own time on the 21st of May. Everything that we produced that day, every dollar that we spent in advertising, and even within the circumstances of the lockdown at the time, by virtual volunteering, we mobilized our people and people from 100 of our partners to do something – including IRI, of course. I remember that, so thank you once again for your help in that area. It was an absolutely terrific thing. We ended that day with the highest number of volunteering hours in the history of the company worldwide. We're very proud of what we did, but as always, there's a lot more to do.





CLARITY

IRI: Your arrival at Unilever was within weeks of the beginning of the pandemic. Will you please share some insight into how you guided such a large organization so nimbly?

FG: I think there's many levels. The first thing that I learned is that you need to have clarity. You need to have clarity of objectives. You need to have clarity of purpose. And you need to have clarity of communication. And when it came to clarity of objectives, it was crystal clear. The three things I just mentioned: safety of our people, continuity of our business and impact on our communities. When it came to the clarity of communications, we realized very quickly that we needed to speak to people frequently. In those days, frequently meant daily and then weekly, and we needed to bring them a message of transparency. I remember that we used a simple phrase to say to people: We will tell you what we know, when we know it – even if what we tell you is that we don't know. And if you recall, in the early days of the pandemic, the narrative was very much about uncertainty.

That's this notion of **GIVING PEOPLE CLARITY THROUGH UNCERTAINTY**, which gives people a sense of assurance that the management is sincere, authentic and obviously telling them the truth.

And that worked really, really well in telling people what they needed to know.

The other thing that I found very interesting when it came to clarity was giving people clarity on expectations. For example, "In the next 90 days, we want to try to tell you, first of all, whether we are going to stay working remotely for those that could work remotely for an extended period of time." As opposed to, "I will tell you this month what's going to happen next month." We thought that the impact on the lives of people was really important. When it came to people in our factories, we gave them certainty that we would do everything we could to keep them safe. So we gave them PPE. We ensured that everybody had temperature checks coming in. We made sure that everybody had a questionnaire declaring who they had been with so we could do contact tracing. We had a plethora of measures to ensure that people knew that our plants were safe – our manufacturing facilities as well as the distribution centers.

So all in all, this notion of clarity and transparency was quite important for us. My experience having worked many times in crisis helped. I've gone through a few earthquakes, and I went through SARS a couple of times when I was with one of my prior employers as head of Asia. I have been through MERS, and as a Latin American national from Venezuela, I have seen inflation, recessions and coups. These events prepare you to believe in your instincts. And you have almost an automatic response to these kinds of events that is framed within those three objectives.

It was a time of learning, I would also say, because the pandemic was very different than any one experience that I had before, in the sense that it was global. I remember watching television in April and just thinking that we don't really know how long this is going to last or is it going to get better, or is it going to get worse? We had a lot of different information – you know the story very well.



INSIGHTS

Another thing that I found fascinating, and this is not paid advertising, was this notion of the partnership with IRI. This is the first time in my career that I have had at my disposal the kind of resources that you bring to bear.

[IRI was] at the forefront of what was happening with consumers because, of course, **YOU HAVE INFORMATION LIVE, LITERALLY IN REAL TIME.**

And perhaps one of the things that we put in place that we haven't talked about is the monthly conversations where you would come to us to say, "This is what we're learning." Sometimes I would pose a question to you: Tell me what's happening with consumer habits; tell me what's happening with people consuming more at home; tell me what's happening with e-commerce; or tell me what's happening with people becoming cash strapped. And you had the insights; you had the data; you had the front-line understanding of what was going on.

So those monthly reviews – I remember they all had the same pattern. You had 30 slides. We went through the first five. We just talked and had discussions and kept going on: Why do you think this is happening? And asking to please give me some further insight. And right after I hung up with you, I would pick up the phone, talk to Liz Tarpinian, Consumer & Market Insights director, or talk to our business leaders and say, guys, you need to get onto this program because it has the best prediction I could find of what was about to happen. So, in this public forum, I want to say thank you because what you did for us was absolutely outstanding. And we have now established a tradition. So when a month goes by that I don't talk to you, I feel like I am missing something.

IRI: To give you credit, you embraced the themes as we were trying to stay a month ahead of you. And so the first conversation was on supply chain. The second conversation was on new buyers. The third conversation was on assortment. The fourth conversation was on e-commerce. You display a desire to learn and then decide to take action. I could feel it through your organization that you were able to initiate a set of decisions in pace – against that backdrop of safety of the people, do the right thing by the consumer and the brands. But the organization, for its scale, was probably the most decisive and fast-paced because of that openness to hear information and then make decisions quickly.

FG: When I was interviewing with the company and trying to understand this enigma as to why a company with the best brands and great resources is not growing faster, part of the conversation at the time was about having silos and procedures. We have what I'm going to call a more conservative style where people were cruising – that was some of the narrative with how we were doing things. And you know, crisis cannot be squandered. The crisis provoked a need for us to, first of all, cut all the silos and become more of an enterprise-centric unit. So it's not about the beauty and personal care or the food or the homecare businesses; it's about the Unilever North America enterprise and how we could grow much faster by further developing the units that were growing and reallocating resources from those that were not growing as fast.

We had categories that were booming and still are booming because, of course, as I simplistically put it, we sell soap, soup and cleaning products. Some of those are just benefiting from the consumer changes. But we also had other categories, like the other ones where the markets were not growing as much because people were at home, and we were not enjoying those different occasions associated with the category usage. So in a way, because of the crisis, we needed to be faster – we needed to be focused on one Unilever, as opposed to three divisions. That's one thing.

The other thing I would say is that

having a combination of **EXPERIENCE AND DATA AND INSIGHTS ALLOWED US TO MAKE DECISIONS** that proved to be right in the marketplace, and we were just trying to stay one step ahead.

That's the other big lesson here: You were a month ahead of us, and we were trying to catch up with you, but we were leaving a lot of people behind because we were moving faster than many. I am sure everybody has heard the story about it: It doesn't matter how fast you run, you just need to run faster than the other guy. So yeah, this is like when a bear is chasing you. So now I reflect back and ask, How do we keep these practices, the decision-making agility? Or as we characterized it internally, How do we keep the elephant dancing? Because we were dancing real well and real fast. Oh, by the way, we're still dancing.





INCLUSIVITY

IRI: Unilever was recently named one of the top 10 companies for executive women by Working Mother Media. You were saying that you're trying to create an environment that breeds inclusivity. Can you talk about some of your goals in that area?

FG: So let me frame this first from a personal point of view, and then I'll talk a bit about what we're trying to do, what we have achieved and what's next. Unilever is a pioneer in sustainability, not just environmental sustainability but inclusivity as well and social responsibility. And when it came to inclusivity, the company declared early on that it wanted to have gender balance. It took eight years for us to get to where we are now. And of course, these recognitions are not only great for the company but a tribute to a very deliberate effort to get here.

First, **MY OWN OBJECTIVE IS TO LEAD A FRAMEWORK WHERE THE COMPANY WILL GROW** in mid-single digits compounded regularly and consistently over time, even after I leave. And second is that I leave behind the most inclusive, diverse and agile company in North America.

I put those two declarations out there because I think it's important to move up from a very high level that we already have when it comes to inclusivity. Gender equality has been achieved already across the company; we have reached our goal of 50% of managerial roles across Unilever's global business being represented by women. And we are even higher in North America. We had achieved that goal here a couple of years before the rest of the world. And there is a lot more behind inclusivity that we have achieved. We have made progress with parental leave, family support and flexibility to offer a work environment where women thrive. This is all terrific, but this is just one sliver of what we have to do.

THE NEXT STEP IS RACIAL INCLUSIVITY. So it's about achieving a profile of our workforce and our executives that represents the communities where we market and live.

And that's an area where we need to make a lot of progress with African Americans, Latinx and Asian Americans. We have already, for the first time ever in the history of the company, disclosed where we are, and we have declared that we need to achieve our goals within the next three to five years. Now, this is more complex, I believe, than the global programs we will call for because, obviously, we want to be inclusive around the world, but here it matters a lot. So there are many campaigns that we need to put in place to do this, to achieve that. We have started up training programs for inclusion and establishing leadership accountability. We are aiming to achieve a workforce that represents those populations, as I said, within three years. We are trying to ensure that globally we are buying \$2 billion from companies that are owned by minority owners. And here in the U.S., we have made progress. That number was about \$50 million, then we moved it to \$150 million, and we will have taken that number to half-a-billion dollars within the next three years, all the way up to 2025.

As a one of the largest advertisers in the world, we want to make sure that **WHAT WE ARE COMMUNICATING WITH THE CONSUMER REPRESENTS THE CONSUMER.**

So we need to make sure that all of our advertising is reflective of the consumers to whom we market our brands.

There is a lot going on here, and we have made this commitment internally as well as externally. We have just appointed a North America director of Diversity & Inclusion who has more than 20 years of experience in the U.S. Her name is Tish Archie-Oliver, and she joined us in December. She's already making a great difference. I am encouraged by the progress, I am more encouraged by the commitment, and I am even more encouraged by the fact that when this company says it is going to achieve something, we will. So thank you for the question because this is critical for us as a company, but also critical for us as a society.

IRI: Congratulations on achieving so much already. I hope that it becomes the standard instead of the goal. You're paving the way, and it's important to see how you've expanded it beyond your own workforce. It touches every piece of your operations. We see that even in the United for America campaign that you mentioned earlier, in your partnership with Luminary. Can you expand more on that partnership and as a component of the United for America campaign?

FG: United for America stacked up to the volunteering on May 21st which was all about donations and helping people get food on their tables in the very beginning. And then in the second phase of the pandemic, we wanted to be more surgical with our approach. There were three specific areas that we wanted to focus on. The first one was this so-called She-Cession. It has a lot to do with this notion of inclusion, but we all have seen the statistics that women and people of color – and women of color – have been the hardest hit by the pandemic, more than any other group. On the notion of She-Cession, we needed to partner with someone that provided resources for women or businesses owned by women. And that's where Luminary came in. Luminary is led by a woman by the name of Cate Luzio. She's brilliant, and in her mission in life, she has created this hub, which is a network of relationships, training and capability creation. It's a network where women go to find answers to what they need to do to thrive in their businesses and in their careers. So we provided funds for 250 annual fellowships to women-owned businesses with the objective that at least 50% of them went to women of color. In the end, that number went all the way up to about 68%. So that was well done. We gave them resources that they needed to pivot and grow their businesses. Women who owned businesses that had cash issues and needed to know what to do to survive, they could find the answers in Luminary.

I had the distinct pleasure of meeting Cate – virtually of course – and when you talk to her, you understand what she has achieved throughout her life from being an investment banker to empowering thousands of women to continuing to thrive in the business world. So that was one focus.

Another focus was to enable kids to connect to education by either helping them get gadgets like iPhones or computers, or even access to Wi-Fi, so they could continue their education. It was for those underprivileged families that do not have access to remote education so that they were not left behind.

And the third area, which is an area that remains critical for everybody, is to put food on the table and continue to give donations of products. In the second phase of United for America, we partnered with our retail partners, all of whom you know. Many have helped us facilitate bringing a change to those latter two areas that I mentioned – to individual customers of theirs and consumers of ours so that we can make a difference in their lives.

IRI: Do you do you feel like you're a better organization because of so much commitment to diversity inclusion? Do you feel like your team members are more open and closer to the evolution that is going on in American society and other places?

FG: People who work here are connected to our mission. Many of them are here because of that mission.

The way I will describe our organization is that **THERE IS AN ELEVATED LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT, COMMITMENT AND MEANING** to people who work here.

And that is a catalyst of morale and motivation, and they all understand that this is not just about making money and driving your EBITDA. It is important that you grow and drive your EBITDA so that your impact can be even larger, and that's what people understand really clearly. But it is a good place to come to work every morning or to turn on your computer every morning. You can see it in people's faces when we completed and celebrated the achievements of United for America – teary eyes, people completely proud of sharing with their families what they made happen in the communities where they live.



IRI: Some of your brands are very centered on specific purposes. The first one that comes to mind is Love Beauty and Planet – one that was even an IRI New Product Pacesetter in 2018. The brand stands for sustainability, small acts of love and beauty. You’ve got a new brand that also has a purpose that you recently launched with Walmart called Find Your Happy Place. Please tell us more about that partnership.

FG: First of all, Love Beauty and Planet is a great example of the power of the people of Unilever and how they bring the power of mission to the market. This brand is a brand that is all about mission and purpose. Find Your Happy Place is a brand we created with Walmart. I have to give a lot of credit to Latriece Watkins and her team at Walmart because they have been a partner with us for co-development of brands with purpose and brands that meet a specific consumer need.



So Finding Your Happy Place is a very timely brand, a very timely innovation, because now that we're all trapped in our homes trying to be as safe as we can be, **EVERYBODY NEEDS A LITTLE BIT OF TIME TO GET PAMPERED AND FIND THEIR HAPPY PLACE** for relaxation and getting away from the tribulations that have been associated with COVID-19.

We developed a full range of new products that offer aromatherapy, body care and candles at an affordable price. And that was an opportunity for Walmart to attract consumers that were buying those premium-looking products but at higher price points in other more premium retailers. It was a full win-win solution to a business opportunity that had an impact on people's lives. Walmart consumers, obviously like many others, needed to have that opportunity to feel relaxed and escape into their happy place during the tribulations of this pandemic.

IRI: You clearly moved at a pace as an organization that was very impressive, but looking back, can you share what you think worked well and what didn't hit the mark?

FG: This is a complex question because it's multidimensional. So let me start with the organization. We talked a bit about that clarity and transparency we want to keep, and that's obviously something that I think we hit the mark with. I think from an organizational point of view, we also eliminated a lot of unnecessary work. We were really focused on the three objectives I narrated in the beginning, and that gave clarity to people, so we focused on the bigger things and the bigger clients. We articulate now that part of our strategy is to win big with our big brands and our big customers.

Another thing that hit the mark was our ability to explode e-commerce. You and I talked during many meetings about how to continue to drive our e-commerce business ahead of the market – 70% of our business in e-commerce is winning market share. So that has been a big win for us. And it's one area where we needed to learn as we went. The good news is we had a great infrastructure, but that infrastructure had not been put into play at the kind of standard of operating level that was required this year. And it's not just one retailer or one business model; it is all of them, perhaps with the exception of direct-to-consumer business. Although it grew, it didn't grow as fast. But we're talking high triple digits for turnover increases in e-commerce. That is something that we need to continue to build because

the expectation is, now that the consumer has pivoted up to not just the safety but the convenience of e-commerce, **THE PROMISED LAND OF E-COMMERCE BECOMING 30% OF RETAIL IS NOT FAR-FETCHED ANYMORE.**

So that's where we're going. Perhaps the 30% is different by category, but we're seeing the number already in some of our own categories. So that's something that worked very well.

When it comes to retailers, **THE ONE THING THAT I THINK HIT THE MARK IS THE RELATIONSHIP** that we were able to forge with our retailers.

I don't want to single one out in particular because all of them partner with us as the market leader in the categories where we compete to help grow those categories and also to bring solutions quickly to problems and challenges they were all having that were all different. Just to mention one, we were sending a lot of ice cream during the offseason. People needed a lot more product. We needed to pivot our resources to supply. Ben & Jerry's had a historical year – we're getting to a billion dollars in retail. These are big numbers and lots of pints of ice cream that have left out the door.

The other thing, of course, is if you think about COVID-19, **IT ACCELERATED THE TRENDS** more than it changed trends.

So one trend, for example, that it accelerated was plant-based food consumption. Here we are launching vegan ice cream and vegan mayonnaise and making sure that we are responding to those trends that are now way more important than they were before. So those things hit the mark. I would say that part of our innovation in other areas, like deodorant, didn't hit the mark because the consumer wasn't in the market. So we now need to relaunch some of that innovation and help the consumer come back, and as mobility and normalcy start to return, as the market leader and the category leader, we need to make sure we bring consumption levels back to where they were before COVID-19. And, of course, we have a program to do that.

Last, but not least,

is not just plant-based foods, but the notion of **HEALTHIER EATING AND MORE NATURAL EATING** – all of those trends are now reflected in innovation. **IN FOOD INNOVATION, WE HAVE A MUCH FASTER PACE** of bringing things to market.

I feel good about the balance between how many hit the mark and how many didn't hit the mark. We are going to release results for the fourth quarter and the year on the 4th of February, so please be attentive to that because it will give you a flavor for the kind of achievements that we put on the board in North America. They all reflect this balance that I'm talking about here that we got a lot of things right and have a few things to fix.

The one thing I would also say is that I need to give credit to the supply chain. Because, as you said very well, it all started the third week of March – I will not forget that. We were growing single digits in January and February, and then everything broke loose. It's one of those black-swan events where you don't believe the magnitude of the increases that we experienced until they were real, and they were sustained. I remember asking Liz, "Will you please double-check this number because I cannot believe that consumption could have grown 30% in two weeks. This has to be a typo." Then the next phone call was to the supply chain lead asking, "Are you shipping all of this?" It became really stunning to realize how fast, how quick, how high the peaks of demand happened. The supply chain did a magnificent job to respond as quickly as they could. It's interesting because we've gotten a lot of accolades for customer-service responsiveness against the backdrop of the worst customer service KPIs we have ever had. We were in the 80s in some categories, and our target and our delivery has always been in the upper 90s.

IRI: How did the pandemic affect your innovations?

FG: I would probably take the most emblematic of these changes. In the beginning of the pandemic, I received a phone call from the guy who runs skin cleansing globally. He says, "Fabian, we should get into hand sanitizers." And I said, "You know, I've been around a couple of times in the hand-

sanitizer business, and that business comes and goes. But I have too many priorities to worry about hand sanitizers." So half an hour later, he calls me back and says, "Hey, maybe we should get into hand sanitizer." So, you know, he called me like 10 times that day. And I said, "Perhaps we should get into hand sanitizers!"

Within six weeks, we had stood up three factories here in the U.S. and factories outside of the U.S. that were **ABLE TO MEET FDA DEMANDS AND FDA STANDARDS** so that we could get into hand sanitizers.

We stood up a business that saw us get leadership in hand sanitizers in Walmart, for example, with 38% share in the middle of September. And we did that in six weeks. We had product specs from the past, but we didn't have them branded. So we ended up bringing, first, Suave, and then we introduced the Dove hand sanitizer that not only kills 99.9% of germs, but also moisturizes your hands. So we did, indeed, get into hand sanitizers, and that drove our growth, along with liquid hand soaps and body wash, to unprecedented levels. Seventh Generation also saw increases in demand that were multiple, especially in disinfectants. That put a great challenge in the supply chain because we needed to get the usually hard-to-find chemicals that go into Seventh Generation at higher levels, and the suppliers were not ready to speed up as fast as the market. But we were able to solve for that.

In food and refreshments, we have seen just absolute madness. I don't know what it is with pandemics and mayonnaise, but boy, we're at it 24/7. And also with ice cream. But that one I understand because I, myself, find comfort food quite important these days. The amount of innovation and the amount of sheer production of not just the Ben & Jerry's and the Talenti's of the world that were growing fast before the pandemic, but some of our classic brands like Popsicle and Breyers – all of those brands were growing at a fast pace. It has been amazing what we have been able to do to innovate in not just new products, but also innovate in the ways we were bringing those products to consumers.

If you think about it, before the pandemic, we were running a very efficient supply chain. So we had maybe 5%-10% capacity unutilized at the max, and our engineers and supply chain planners figured out through machine learning and advanced analytics what the right SKUs were for the right customers at the right time and deployed that intelligence so that we could supply the market.

I think **INNOVATION WENT FAR BEYOND** new products.

It went inside the company to find better ways to cope with unprecedented change. And that, to me, is a reason for celebration. Again, this is one of those lessons that needs to stay with us because although the pace of the market has changed, I hope it's not as crazy fast as it was last year.

I think we now know how to respond to **CONSUMER NEEDS THAT ARE UNANTICIPATED AND UNMET** much quicker than ever before.

I'm very proud of what we have done and am quite conscious of what we need to keep doing.

IRI: Thinking about 2021, what keeps you up at night? Are there specific trends that you think are sustainable?

FG: Let's start by recognizing that 2021 started with a bang because of the 6th of January. We were all thinking, gee, what is this? And what are the consequences of what's happening? I think if I put that to one side but use it as a sharp reminder that things in 2021 were not going to return to normal because the world didn't change overnight on the 31st of December, the first thing that I would say is we are assuming that this pandemic is with us at least through the summer and that there is no such thing as a return to normalcy.

We are going to return to some new ways of living with COVID-19. So **WE HAVE TO RESPOND TO THAT CHALLENGE** from a consumer, customer and an organizational point of view.

For the consumer, obviously, this conversation we just had on innovation – we'll increase the pace and ensure that we are responding to the emerging trends that are going to stay and be flexible to return to the trends that are going to revert once that normalcy is reestablished and people start to go back to offices and are resuming economic activity. With customers, the shifting customer is very important because all of them, obviously, have benefited from e-commerce – some more than others because some were better prepared. But most of them now need to have a much larger component of e-commerce, but brick and mortar remains their most important outlet, with the exception of the pure-play retailers. We need to continue to respond to that. And as the consumer comes back, as traffic returns, we need to be ready to respond. But that is toward the second half of the year, I believe.

And when it comes to the organization, I think the single most important challenge we have as leaders is to keep our people motivated and driven through the continued tribulations of some form of lockdown and restricted living. Because we're all tired of being home.

We have demonstrated that when we're all home, we can work productively. There are those of us who have the luxury of working from home, but the people who are working from the plants are tired of having to use the PPE and having to, in a way, risk their lives to do their jobs, despite the great safety measures that we have taken. Obviously, we all want to get out of these conditions, but we can't. And that means that everybody has cycles. Every individual has cycles, and we, as leaders, need to be consistent at the top that we have to be absolutely watchful that our employees are safe – absolutely watchful that

WE'RE LEADING BY EXAMPLE to make sure that we keep our energies high and that **WE GIVE THEM THE CLARITY THEY REQUIRE** and the resources that they need, and the understanding. I see this as most important – that they get the empathy that they deserve.

At the end of the day, everybody has very different needs – some people have kids at home, and some people are missing their kids because they're not home. Some people are missing their friends at work, and some people are just depressed because the situation is so unbearable. That, to me, is the single biggest leadership challenge we have: to keep our organizations thriving through yet another year of this. And by the way, make no mistake, I don't want to be the prophet of doom, but 2022 is going to come, and we are still going to be wearing masks. Maybe by then they will be nicer to wear or better to breathe through, but when you talk about herd immunity as the ultimate exit of this crisis, that's not going to happen that quickly.

But we should finish on an uplifting tone. And I think the uplifting tone is that I do believe there is growth in this market. I think the economy has hit its bottom, and I am encouraged by what I hear. This is not a political statement, but obviously, having clarity from the top as to vaccinations, as to recovery of the economy and as to restoring clear direction for the country will give us a framework to help our people see that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Not all companies, but many companies and especially ours, are in a place and a position to thrive as we go forward.

IRI: How have consumers adapted and used CPG to help navigate their pandemic needs, now and into the future? And what does that mean for CPG?

FG:

At the end of the day, they have **REDISCOVERED THE JOY OF CONSUMER GOODS.**

This is what we need to keep in mind. We need to give our organizations, our peers and our partners a common view that things are only getting better from here for this industry. 

Let's continue the conversation. We invite C-Suite leaders to share their perspectives on the changing CPG retail demand curve in an upcoming episode of Growth Insights. Please contact your IRI representative or [email us](#).

About IRI

IRI is a leading provider of big data, predictive analytics and forward-looking insights that help CPG, OTC health care, retailers and media companies to grow. With the largest repository of purchase, media, social, causal and loyalty data, all integrated on an on-demand cloud-based technology platform, IRI guides over 5,000 clients globally in their quests to remain relentlessly relevant, capture market share, connect with consumers and deliver growth. IRIworldwide.com

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