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# Leadership Week Live Notetaking

## Creating Social Change Workshop

**Linsell:** Thanks for coming to this session. We've had some great sessions. Yesterday we had Alice Mander and the DSA leading a kickass panel, and Dr. Emalani Case leading an equally inspiring evening session. Recordings of those evening sessions are going up on our website in the next few days. Today we have an equally awesome session with two heavyweights of the progressive scene in New Zealand and people working to create social change - Wellington City Councilor Tamatha Paul and Greater Wellington Regional Councilor Thomas Nash. Thanks for being with us today. It's a pleasure to host you and we're pumped to share this session with you and all the students. You may know Tam as last year's VUWSA president, a great advocate for students and doing a great job of holding the University to account, and this year being on Wellington City Council and holding portfolios for Climate Change, Youth and City Safety. Thomas, is an elected member of the Greater Wellington Regional Council, holding portfolios for climate, and with a pretty storied background of campaigning for social change here and overseas – especially in relation to disarmament. He even has a Nobel Prize somewhere on the shelf. Just so you all know how this session will go today, we hope it will be an intimate, interactive space. Pop questions in the chat or raise your hand. It's not being recorded. It's a safe space. The session will be shorter than anticipated, maybe an hour or an hour-and-a-half. We'll focus on hard practical skills. Tam and Tom, do you want to start off talking a little about your journey into leadership and any key influences along the way?

**Tamatha Paul:** I have a much shorter history than Thomas does. Kia ora koutou. My name is Tamatha. I was the VUWSA President last year. I keep getting pulled back by the University to speak at things, which is cool. I thought maybe I burnt those bridges, but here we are, still friends. People working at institutions, on the inside, appreciate when the institutions are held to account; don't be afraid to make change. A bit about my background; I come from a small town called Tokoroa in the south Waikato. It's a cultural paradise with economic challenges. Being from there, we are a cultural paradise; we're a really diverse town made up of lots of Māori, Pacific Islanders, ethnicities, cultures, but we have been neglected in terms of social and economic support from our local body and our local MP, Louise Upton. Because of that, I always grew up with an appetite to change things, and an imagination of how things could be better, especially for my communities. I always imagined better. It didn't sit well with me, the way we are treated with policy being made for us but not by us. In Tokoroa, you don't get much knowledge of how that change happens; you think it's through single key leaders. I decided to come down to Wellington. From my perspective this is where everything happens. The big movements culminate here. I came here, pretty scary, none of my form came down here. I was the first person in my whanau to go to university. Wellington has been good to me. When I started it was so cool; I learnt issues I cared about that impacted me at home such as lack of mental health support systems, prevalence of sexual violence, housing standards, all those things, they were issues students were rallying about actively. I learnt about our power as students and how radical movements in the world were led by students, and academics and professors of universities. That was an awesome

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journey for me where I learnt a lot about grassroots organization. Change happens at the Beehive, but also from organized communities - and organized money. I found a passion in organizing people and trying to influence change that way. I believe in the power of the people. Some of the main things I campaigned on at university; the pivotal ones were - when I started there were no policies around sexual harassment in the student community [trigger warning, not in depth]. There was no policy that set up the processes in which students could report instances of sexual harm or what that process would look like. There was no information or clarity, despite that 1 in 3 students will experience sexual harm during their time at University. We did Thursdays in Black, started by Jan Logie back in the 90s I think. It was international, and we picked it back up in 2016. We did a bunch of lobbying. We got in the rooms with people at the University who had influence, we launched a blog called metoostudents, where people could go on and show the prevalence of sexual harm, and the need for a policy and process for survivors to get what they needed and restore their mana. The pivotal thing was that every Thursday we'd wear black. There were stalls. We created a movement. When I was president after 4 years of campaigning we finally got a sexual harassment policy instated at University. It's the most engagement with policy they've ever had. That showed the power of the student movement. Now we have a restorative process that centers the survivor and what they need/want to restore that mana. That was one of the key things we worked on at university. We did a massive rally at Parliament about the fact that students had to wait 6 weeks to see a counsellor. The Uni said they're not a district health board. The local government said it wasn't in their remit, and we went to central. We built an organic movement and were able to be part of an awesome project involving an increase of 3 million dollars to student health. 4 more counsellors were hired. These tangible changes such as a sexual harassment policy, and an increase in funding and capacity for mental health, were 2 tangible outcomes I was able to contribute to. That came from the power of an organized collective of students. That's what I want to focus on; the changes we can make. I'm on council now, also reflecting the power of the students, in that we do deserve to be heard at a local government level. That's what I'm doing now. Thomas?

**Thomas:** Kia ora Tam. I'm Thomas; I'm from Palmerston North. Tam said Tokoroa was a cultural paradise, Palmy is probably an economic paradise with cultural challenges. Grew up there, went to Victoria many moons ago. I did politics and French with a focus on international relations. I enjoyed that. Then I got a job randomly - back in the day, early internet days, where you could get a newspaper with job adverts with a letter - at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Geneva working for the New Zealand Ambassador. That set me up. While there I got introduced to the world of the United Nations, humanitarian aid and disarmament, and met some cool people who were campaigners and they were cooler than the diplomats. Better parties, more fun, said what they believed. I quit my job after a couple of years and moved to Canada to join the international campaign to ban landmines. That campaign had won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 for its work in bringing about an international treaty to ban and eradicate the use of landmines. While I was in Canada I got involved in more campaigns around weapons and protecting civilians in armed conflict. I got involved in this big campaign around cluster bombs. It's a horrific area of work. I feel exhausted and anguished thinking about it now. The people affected by it are affected deeply. That's my background working on those international campaign topics overseas. Lynne mentioned the campaign to abolish nuclear weapons. I was involved in that; that

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campaign was also awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for bringing about an international treaty to make nuclear weapons illegal, which unbelievably had not happened until then. A background in organizing an international level for changes to law and policy in relation to protecting civilians in armed conflict. I was exhausted after 15-16 years of work on that. I had to take a break and recollect myself here in Aotearoa New Zealand for 3.5 years, finding ways to contribute.

I did a bit of political campaigning work. I stood for Parliament with the Greens in Palmerston North. Didn't get in. Then for Council, also with the Greens, in the Regional council, and did get in. Keep trying. I've also been involved in an organization, NZ Alternative. It's doing some thinking and writing and convening and hui around the idea of what role Aotearoa NZ should have in the world, which is relevant now, with people saying they wish they had our Prime Minister and COVID-free country. More recently, Tam and I have been involved in setting up an online mini-TV program, a talk show called Aotearoa Town Hall. I grew up in Palmy, in a family of 2 academics. My mum and dad came from England before I was born, growing up in a comfortable academic family with plenty of privilege. It's important to acknowledge that. I had an understanding of social class. My dad came from an extremely poor family in Birmingham, and my mum from a well-off family in the south of England. I was always talking about power and structures of power and justice. My dad was a Marxist, had a huge collection of books on that stuff. When I think about the world, I think of it as one we have created through social systems we've invented because we thought they were good, and that we can change. I look at things as a snapshot in time that it's up to us to change. The other thing is that I can acknowledge some names I recognize on the call, who have done amazing stuff I know about, and some that I probably don't know about. Mihi to all of you, kia ora koutou.

**Lin:** Thank you for sharing. If you guys feel comfortable, turn your cameras on. Please ask questions in chat or use the raise your hand function, or just physically raise your hand. The next little piece we want to talk about is practical skills in campaigning. Thomas you said to me, people usually don't get to go to "campaign school", if there is such a thing. They come at it organically. What are 3-4 practical skills you think are most useful for creating social change?

**Thomas:** I'll give you 4 - maybe not all concrete things, but they are principles for organizing that have emerged from things I've done that help guide the way I look at the world and social change. 1 is understanding the structures of power and injustice that exist. It's important for someone like me, who carries a lot of privilege, the positionality, those structures of power, how they work, economic structures, political, legal. Those things are all there. We have built them. They certainly have been designed for a certain reason and by certain groups who benefit the most. In my work around international campaigning on conflict it's important to understand "we should eliminate landmines", you can't do that in isolation from other structures of power around capitalism, militarism, patriarchy, that exist.

The next thing; believe that change is possible. Often, people working in social change don't believe that change is possible. They're fighting in a way because they have a will to fight, but they have a sense of fatalism that creeps in. Believe that the change you're seeking is

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possible to achieve. It's useful to pick out some wins you can have on the margins. Sometimes you can't get the big goals straight away but you can get some little ones along the way, which is motivating for yourself and those close to you. We don't need an incrementalist approach persay, but having wins on the margins can boost motivation.

Third; pay attention to human relationships of trust and confidence. A lot of that is about communication and being patient in a way that creates space. I often think about - when people try to persuade me of something, and I don't agree, he'll batter away and say you should do this, believe this, and I don't want to. A better way of persuading is "creating a room of the possible". Instead of me saying to you "you should come over here into my position", a good way is to build a room in between us we can both step into. Those ways of framing things and opening up space can be important. Nobody wants to be convinced of anything. I never got taught about relationships. Maybe education is better now. Nobody told me that the way to succeed in work is having good relationships. When I think about successes I've had, and failures, it's almost 99% of the time about relationships rather than a technical/knowledge based failure.

The last thing is logistics and organization, spreadsheets, budgets, agendas, how meetings work. These nuts and bolts things are critical. You cannot have a successful social change campaign without those logistics. This is so frustrating; again, at university, nobody wanted to do that kind of stuff. It was dismissed as "admin". It was highly gendered, too. This is the critical work that underpins not just social change, but big institutions that do things that affect our lives like Parliament, that work is the thing keeping it going. Spend time learning about it. That's my opening stanza on that front.

**Tamatha:** I agree with all of those things. That relationship point is very important too. I only just realized it last year; super important to have those. Organize people and knowing people that are good at different things is super important when you all have something you want to achieve. I have a few things I found helpful. I'm actively working on them too, and you can always get better at them.

The first is: stories are important. Being Māori, we come from an oratory tradition. The way we preserve our knowledge of everything was through telling stories. The same sentiments are true nowadays too. You go on Facebook and there's so much fake news and misinformation, and evidence for everything you can find is there, and because of that, people have become suspicious of science and statistics and evidence. You can see why. It's an information overload. Around the council table, when someone comes at me with statistics and numbers, I tune out. There's something special about stories as communication. We read them as children. Stories stay with us. When I think about issues I care about, it's important you have stories you can message and try to tell. That's the key tool. When people come to us with submissions on a topic, and they tell us a story about going for walks as a kids during lockdown who could run free without endangerment, that's an engaging way to make someone listen. Whenever there's an issue you care about, it's important to prepare yourself. When you're trying to communicate to a decision maker, telling a story powerful to you or your family is a way to have an impact.

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This is more of a practical tool; messaging and communication - the way we give our information to people - values are important. There's a good book on this, *A Matter of Fact*. There's a website called *The Workshop*, an NZ organization about how to talk about everything from climate change, multimodal shifts, welfare, poverty, in a way that makes people care. What I've learnt is that when you point out the worst things about an issue, like "oh my God, far out, Māori are 15% of the population but make up 50% of the prison population" - it's stats, it's negative, it makes people feel sad, paralyzed by their fear or hopelessness. With climate change, "we're going to live in a burning hell where we can never swim in our rivers", that makes me sad, that makes me want to curl up in my bed and do nothing. If I go and I talk to someone and say "the thing that makes my childhood the best was swimming in clean rivers", that's what makes people think yeah, I do value those things and I want my kids to have access to those. Storytelling, values. There is a time for those realities, but people have so much going on in their lives, especially post COVID. People losing jobs, struggling to feed families, P epidemics. Shaming people into making change isn't an effective way to create allies.

Another tool is organizing people. With *Ihumātao*, we see Pania Newton everywhere, but she will say she stood with so many people who allowed her to do all that mahi. I helped organize the student volunteer army; the first thing we did was figure out what we wanted to achieve, then started organizing people. We used social media, the power of the internet, to organize people, having Zooms, building up that community, that trust, and we showed how to manifest change. Make it inclusive and open but also a safe space. Make sure it's a judgment free space. Meet often, and identify people in your collective who are leaders. Buy them a coffee if you can, do something thoughtful. Within these movements for collective change, we have to build leaders, because that's how it becomes sustainable. You have to pass the baton to other people sometimes, and they can pass it back to you when they're burnt out. Change is a long term game. And you get more authenticity when you have a group around you pushing for the same things and co-designing together.

One practical short one is: conversations are underrated as a tool for change. I learnt that in Ireland when abortion was legalized, they did a survey of swing voters and asked them what, ultimately, helped them to make their decision between yes and no. 40% of them said it was conversations with people they loved and trusted. That speaks to the power and potentiality of conversations. That goes back to what I was saying earlier about the internet and how it's hard to distinguish true information from untrustworthy. There's nothing more trustworthy than being around the dinner table with people you trust and love. *JustSpeak*, *Action Station*, always do campaigns about kai and korero, family potlucks. That's how change happens. In the immediate ways through organized people, but around the dinner tables too. Enable people to have those conversations with tools and information. The theme of 2020 is difficult, challenging, dangerous conversations.

When you organize around an issue, it can be cool to organize a visual stunt. When we did the *Wait Is Over*, the 6-9 week wait time to see a counsellor - we didn't use this idea - but we wanted to do a huge winding wait line out the front of Parliament. When you do things that visually convey what you're trying to say, it works for the media. They take a photo and don't need to add much more. People walking past can gauge what you're trying to achieve.

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Another example; when there were some people doing suicide prevention campaigning at Parliament and did 600 pairs of shoes, and the pro-lifers have also employed this tactic, you can see what they're trying to convey. The last thing related to that is being clear about your objective. Don't be airy-fairy. With the mental health campaign, we wanted funding for counsellors. Have a conversation with the people in your community and ask for short-term, medium-term, long-term objectives.

**Linsell:** Does anyone else want to jump in with a question? Otherwise I will ask one. Okay. I'll do that then. I've been watching a lot of RuPaul's Drag Race recently...

**Question:** Kia ora. Thanks Thomas and Tamatha for sharing your tips for campaigning. As someone who's campaigned before, financing isn't talked about a lot. It takes a lot of money to get around and petition. I wondered what you guys thought about that. I know with kaupapa Māori campaigns, the expectation is often that iwi will somehow fund campaigns and things. It's quite unfair. What do you think about funding? How did you sort this out in your own campaigns?

**Thomas:** I won't address the specific point about expectations on iwi. I don't have a lot of experience in that area, but I agree with you it seems unreasonable. There are institutional grants, say the government or charitable foundations, that often give a lot of money. Those are really hard to get and take a lot of work to do the applications. They can be quite onerous in terms of the reporting requirements and the effort put in to service those grand relationships and agreements. They can be good if they're long-term, 2-3 years. At the other end of the spectrum, the crowdfunding model. Through Pledge-Me, there's a group in Wellington producing a book called The Residents. They raised \$20,000 from last night to this morning. That works. Those are 2 ends of the spectrum. Something I've learnt; Tam and I, we applied for this grant through the UNESCO National Community in NZ, they gave us \$5000 for the production of Aotearoa Town Hall. We incurred costs ourselves. That was helpful. Fundraising. I have found that there's an onion. When it grows, it starts off with a little bulb, then gets layers, and layers, and another layer. The best way to start is with the core. I start by asking people I know well who might be willing to fund something. You don't start with the outside of the onion, a large multi-year donor agreement with an institutional funder. That's really hard. In New Zealand, we have a fragmented system of fundraising. There's a lot of turf protection; people who keep getting the same funding yearly from the same group and you can't crack it. Doing the work and being credible and being visible to a degree will make it more likely for you to get money. Tam and I have been approached by some for support towards Aotearoa Town Hall, that's just by being out there and giving it our all. If you do good work, money won't always come, but it might come.

**Tam:** I've never had to fundraise because I've been part of an organization that has money; VUWSA, Justspeak. But I did campaign for my election. That was a lot of crowdfunding. Something I've been thinking a lot lately is that it's important that if you can, resist the urge to go to problematic funding sources. Don't get it from people who gamble. Don't go to people who get funding from oil if you're doing environmental campaigning.

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Avoid duplication. See what's going on in the space. You don't want 10 of the same kind of kaupapa going for the same funding. This happens a lot in the environment and mental health spaces.

If you do go the funding application route in a more social type of campaign like Black Lives Matter, some kind of campaign around a minority or oppressed group, there are lots of people who want to be allies. Utilize those people, enable them to contribute in a useful way. Build up relationships with people in charge of funding in and around your community. Here at the Council we give more than \$1 million in funding yearly. We have good relationships with people in our community. That's really important; having good relationships.

**Question:** Starting a campaign could be difficult for some, how do you actually be the start of it?

**Tamatha:** Have a look at what's going on in the space out there. There are few issues that haven't been kickstarted in some way. We had a debate a couple of months in Council about whether we should let petitions with 2 signatures be looked at by Council; and no, because if it was a good idea, it'd have more. If you are the first one, have conversations, organize, figure out the solution, and everything comes organically from there.

**Thomas:** I'd avoid trying to start something myself. I'd only ever start something in a partnership or team. It's too hard. You might make mistakes. It's good to learn from mistakes, though. Self-awareness and ability to take advice are super important qualities. In social change and politics in general they're slightly lacking.

**Question:** How do you balance efforts across 'early adopters', 'masses' and 'naysayers' in terms of engagement with your audience?

**Thomas:** It depends on the stage. In general I focus my allies on early adopters and allies, building out from a core, then working outwards for the kaupapa. If you focus on the naysayers, they will suck your energy, and take a lot of time. Sometimes deliberately. Some people you'll never get on board, never persuade them. Spending time on that is not worth it. That shift from feeling like you have a strong core to moving out, it's hard to judge. It's a political judgement question that you get better at and can get good advice on. I'd also like to hear about Lin's drag race addiction.

**Lin:** Let's keep going with the questions from our attendees.

**Question:** What do you do when the student community is rallying hard but it's the people at the top that won't make the ultimate necessary change? Tam how did you maintain motivation to keep up the mahi?

**Tam:** I can think of a situation in which there's been a lot of rallying that didn't pay off. When you have lots of people rallying hard, like with COVID this year for grade bumps or getting the Hall of Residence fee flagged, if you're rallying hard and there's been a good campaign built up and you're doing well and it still doesn't move, then I think - immediately I'd question

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what my elected representatives are doing. You should be asking what VUWSA's doing, and the various elected representatives. Are they being transparent about conversations with those leaders? When campaigns and movements are built up, strong leaders get the ability to drive change home, and if that's not happening, you need to hold your own leaders accountable. If that doesn't work, and there's nothing you can do, it signals you're dealing with a long-term change. This is something Thomas and I will do a project about. A lot of the challenges we face are the products of a systems failure. The reality is that systemic change takes a long time. Going back to those issues with the Uni, those are symptomatic of a model or system in which universities navigate within. That gets at the core of: what is the purpose of education? Is it a public good or a money-making exercise? Some things are long-term. But you still get wins out of that. There will be a national inquiry into student accommodation now, so that's great. That's one win from that. That goes back to reflecting about why you're doing something, grounding you and allowing you the capacity to keep going with issues you care about.

**Lin:** Bam! I have another question for Thomas in the first instance. How do you make people aware of and convince them of invisible forms of power?

**Thomas:** No form of power needs to be invisible. How do you help people see power? That takes a bit of time and a bit of reading and talking and storytelling. The first thing to do is to understand power structures and systems ourselves, then we can help to have conversations with other people about those structures of power. I don't know if there's anything more insightful I can say. People who benefit from existing structures don't want to talk about power. They like the idea of things being the way they are just because they are. Some would reject the idea of structures of power, saying it just makes sense. Some would like to keep powers invisible. The first step is getting a strong confident sense yourself of where power sits, who has it, who doesn't, and how it can be shared.

**Tam:** A good point at the end. I always think to myself: who isn't at the table? It was cool being a Māori woman as the student president, but you can't get comfortable in those positions. You have to be actively making space for other people. We were able to get a seat for the Māori Student Association on the student services levy body. I wanted to share an excerpt about invisible power. What do we do when the people at the top don't move on the change we want to make? By Arundhati Roy; "many of us have dark moments of" - *cut out*

**Lin:** While we wait, I have another question for you Thom. How do you courage politicians on both sides of the aisle to get on board with what you're trying to do?

**Thomas:** That used to be easier when I wasn't affiliated with a political party. It's about relationships, communication, being open to having conversations with everybody, listening generously, opening up space. Easy for me to say, with lots of privilege. It's also about framing in a way that might allow people with different views about the solution to enter a collective problem solving mode. Again, if people feel they're being persuaded, they don't like that. If people feel they're part of a team, then it's less adversarial. Trying to avoid someone getting entrenched. They might then find it hard to maneuver. At the moment, with the hapua-whenua viaduct behind me - I'm trying to get the Northern Explorer back on track,

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because it's been suspended since COVID. On this live campaign, what I'm trying to do is not box Kiwirail into a corner. I want Kiwirail to have room to maneuver so it can bring the service back without looking like it's doing a massive U-turn. I won't say they're failing, or that they need to change its mind, I'll say they have a great opportunity to restore the link.

**Tamatha:** Focus on the middle. There's more potential - it's a better use of your time and energy to focus on the people that may move on the issue, rather than focusing on those on the other side of the spectrum. It can happen. It is happening with climate change. Norms change over time, but that's just - it takes time.

**Tamatha:** Quote from Arundhati Roy here:

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/confronting-empire/>

**Question:** Aotearoa NZ is relative small country. Some of us people, from all cultures ages, cultures, beautiful diversities is advocating passionately for like issues. What needs to happen for like-ones to become one?

**Thomas:** Different people coming together as a community?

**Question:** I can't speak for this group - I belong to a different age group - but I've been working on climate change and disaster resistance for a long time. I'm a strong advocate around sustainable development goals. I'm from a different culture, and a proud Kiwi now. What I see is - what like minded people, and I say us, come together to actually create the change we want for Aotearoa New Zealand. My question is - there is still fragmentation. We are a small country. We compete around the same things, but asking the same things, related to human rights. What needs to happen for us to come together and kick the doors open for change?

**Thomas:** I wish I knew. If anybody does -

**Tam:** Town Hall could be a start.

**Thomas:** We could! That's been interesting. That's been an open space for putting problems on the table and people from all fragmented areas of society endeavour - and we don't try to find the solution but we get the perspective. It's a mixing bowl where we get the ingredients in and at some point maybe we'll try make a cake or loaf of bread. We're getting the ingredients in the mixing. From basically nothing we have got a community of tens of thousands of people seeing the different korero we've had since the beginning of lockdown. There's thousands on the page. That's heartening and encouraging. Tam and I reach different audiences, with overlap. It's hard to bring people together, but we've had Black Lives Matter, School Strikes for Climate. There are examples of it working.

Maybe also starting small. That was one thing cool during the lockdown. Lots of people on their streets had little Facebook groups that popped up on their streets. The more that happens, the more you can build out and learn from each other.

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**Lin:** Tam, do you want to talk more about the vision for Aoeteroa Town Hall?

**Tam:** We would like to have - we want to break down systems change, and when you're campaigning for these things, you hit a roadblock because the changes you need to make can't be made within the systems we have. When you get into these big institutions, you realize it's layers and layers of self-reinforcing complexity. We're not sure what form that'll take. Whether it's a webseries, a podcast. We're exploring that at the moment about what it is we're trying to achieve. At matariki we got the privilege of having a yarn with Tama Iti, one of the OG activists in NZ. A prolific guy. We've been sowing seeds about what we want to do with this platform. We're on Facebook, Instagram, AotearoaTownHall. Check out the RNZ Citizen's Handbook by White Man Behind a Desk, Robbie Nichols. You learn so much about the history of Aotearoa and the systems we have and why we do.

**Tamatha:** Carwyn Jones, myself, and Rhianna Morar are doing a session on constitutional transformation tomorrow night at 7. It'll be super cool and relevant. Tune into that one if you can.

**Lin:** And we also have one with Pat Shepherd from the One Percent Collective tomorrow during the day!

[End transcription]