

Scott Rechler:

Welcome to recalibrate reality. The future of New York, our guest today is Brian Chesky, the CEO and co-founder of Airbnb last spring, as COVID-19 decimated the hospitality industry, Airbnb was counted out as just another casualty of the pandemic, but Airbnb didn't just survive it thrived in this episode, you'll hear how Brian is deemed the, find the odds to finish 2020 with the largest IPO of the year. And while he believes that new York's best days are still ahead. And so now let's recalibrate reality with Brian Chesky. So Brian, thanks for taking the time. Welcome to recalibrate reality.

Brian Chesky:

Thank you very much, Scott, for having me today.

Scott Rechler:

So, so the purpose of this program is to recalibrate reality of the future of New York. I think about a more equitable, more sustainable, more prosperous New York post COVID. And when I, when I think about what you did with Airbnb, it was sort of like the poster child in the, in the, the heart of the pandemic as to whether or not, you know, Airbnb was going to survive, right? People were writing off the obituary, just like they were writing new York's obituary, prematurely in the mix. And then not only did you survive, but you found a way to thrive and ended the year with this IPO that exceeded all of the expectations. So, so one of my hopes is that we can learn from your experience of having to deal with something like COVID and how recalibrating and thriving on the side and how we can do some of that for, for New York. So, so first off as you think about that, you know, it was when you were going with, was there ever a moment when you thought that you weren't going to be able to pull through it for Airbnb?

Brian Chesky:

No. There, there were certainly moments. Other people didn't there were article headlines from top publications, like will Airbnb exist? Is this the end of Airbnb? Can Brian Chesky save Airbnb? It's got, I got to tell you having entered 2020 thinking, you know, we're riding high, going public. We lost 80% of our business in eight weeks. And I'm sure that's not like that different than anyone in New York. Cause you'll see, it saw a lot of your businesses fall off a cliff. We did too. And I felt like a business dropping by 80%. It's like a car going 80 miles an hour and slamming on the brakes. Nothing good happens. And it was a very, very difficult period, but I've learned from other crisis. And what I've learned is most important that you control is your psychology. And I think that's critical in a crisis. And so you can have, I think two different roads.

Brian Chesky:

One road is why me, Oh my God, this is terrible. You can worry. You can be up all night. And if that happens and if you're right to worry, the problem is as a leader, it's kind of like this, your psychology becomes psychology organization. So if I'm working in a company, a leader thinks we're really screwed. I might think that as well. The other choice for a leader is reject optimism and confidence. Now you never want to project blind confidence because then people think you're not being honest. So you have to find something worth, being confident in. And so what that means is in a crisis, you have to turn a crisis into an opportunity. Every single crisis I've ever been in, I asked how can this become our defining moment? How can this crisis make us better? And I think part of that is letting go of the past.

Brian Chesky:

You know, the travel, as we know it is over and it's not coming back, but doesn't mean travel's not coming back. It just means it won't come back. Like before Airbnb, as we know is over a new Airbnb was born. And I would say the same is true of New York, New York, as we know is over, but that's not something to fear because maybe the new New York is better than the old, newer, because we now have an opportunity to rebuild. And I think most times you rebuild, you can rebuild with so much more knowledge than you built the first time as we exit this crisis, you know? And it seems like as vaccinations roll out, I think this crisis is exiting. I think we, I leave with more optimism than I enter, but that's not obviously how most people probably felt last April.

Scott Rechler:

Yeah. I always say you can't be a prisoner of the past. You've got to be a pioneer of the future. And, and I think, you know, it's interesting when you were going through that crisis, you said that people were writing those headlines. I remember in the spring, I guess you were doing a funding to, to create financing, to bridge you to the other side of this. And I was getting calls from some of the New York finance years that were looking at, at making investments since. So what do you think of the future of Airbnb? And my answer to them was back up the truck because these are the moments where you want to invest in companies like that. And I, and I give the same answer and gave the same answer. When people say, what do you think about the future of New York back up the truck. This is the time where you want to invest in, in a place that has proven that they can reinvent themselves and rebuild a better and stronger than, than before. And I know how much you love New York. I mean, I mean,

Brian Chesky:

I'll just say one thing about that, Scott, you know, after about a decade of us with all of our success, I met a lot of people said, Oh man, if only I met you 10 years ago. And so you're right, somebody has to bet sooner than others to back up the truck and make a bet. And if you want to make a bet, I think you want to bet on resiliency. I would in times of uncertainty bet on resiliency. I think Airbnb has proven to be resilient in this crisis. I think we're stronger than we were before the crisis. I think you can't say about every hospitality company. And I think the history of New York tells a history of resilience. I'm from New York. I'm not from New York city. I'm from Albany, New York. My parents were social workers. You know, I, I was kind of typical middle-class kid, never really, you know, new people of power growing up.

Brian Chesky:

You know, my friends were like friends of social workers and I never really met an entrepreneur growing up, but I have memories of going on train when I was like, you know, in the eighties and nineties, you know, I was a kid and my dad would take me on the train in the morning and we'd go to New York and we wouldn't stay overnight. We were not really, they were expensive hotels. We couldn't stay in New York, but we'd spend the whole day there. And I have so many fond memories of New York. And my recollection in New York was I felt like every time I went there, I felt like I was in the center of the universe. I'm like, if I was at a place where the gears of the world returning, this feels like that place, there's no reason to believe that's not going to continue that New York, isn't going to have a bright day in front of us because I think there's just so much opportunity. And I think this is an opportunity for reinvention.

Scott Rechler:

Yeah. And I think your, your points, right. Which is that you need to think about rebuilding, but rebuilding something different than what was before that. So, yeah,

Brian Chesky:

Rebuild before. I mean like the world is never going back to 2019. We should let go of that idea that 2018 is ever coming back. It's never coming back. And I think when I say that, sometimes that's a little scary to people and I say, but that's not a bad thing. Did you like everything about the year 2019? No. Could we have done things better? Yes. Well now is our opportunity together to create something better than before,

Scott Rechler:

Right? I mean the, you know, to your point, you're an artist, right? So New York is this incredible canvas now that we can recreate was on that canvas. Right. And before we had challenges, whether it was inequality, congestion, affordability of housing opportunity, right. So the sustainability, so that's the objective here now is how do we, you know, rebuild New York and try to build it better and address those, those challenges that, that we faced before, you know, when you were making decisions. Cause one thing about Airbnb and we've always talked about you are a community in its own. Right? Right. I mean, you're a community of all these different groups of people. And so I know, and I find with my own company or public policy decisions, when you make decisions, there's always going to do some, some do a little bit better. Some have to make some sacrifices. And you in that role have to think about all your stakeholders and how do you try to make decisions that are best for the sustainability and prosperity for everyone, but realize it's not going to be equal for everyone. How would you go about that during the heat of the crisis?

Brian Chesky:

Yeah. It's a great, it's a great question, Scott. I mean, I, I, you know, the designer in me believes problems are design problems. That's just how I'm oriented. So I see every problem in a sense of design problem. And I've always kind of viewed the way we think about corporations. You know, in this new century, we have to design with a wider aperture. It's not enough just to serve shareholders. It's not enough just to serve customers. You have to also serve your other stakeholders. In our case, via five, we have our guests who are our customers. We have our employees, we have our shareholders. Everyone has customers, employees, and shareholders. We also have partners. There are hosts 4 million hosts around the world. And something else everyone has, is to serve society. In our case, we call them the communities we operate in about a hundred thousand communities.

Brian Chesky:

But I think this is, there's like a, a major transformation and how business being done. I think what I'm hearing from a lot of business leaders is they believe that they have to take the other stakeholders into account when the design products, here's the key thing I'd say, I don't think shareholders have to suffer in order for a company to be responsible. I do not believe it's zero sum. It's only zero sum when you don't think about it ahead of time. In other words, I believe one could design a win-win win, where customers, employees, society, all benefit. I call that just a good design. Can we design something? So everyone benefits rather than assuming that for somebody to win, someone else has to lose. I'm not blind to know that there are sometimes winners and losers, but that's often just a suboptimal design. We can design something better for more people to reinvent yourself. That's the other thing is you kind of need the world to kind of be open-minded to change. And I think the world is more open-minded to change than it's ever been in my lifetime.

Scott Rechler:

Yeah, no, and I, I couldn't agree more. And I think your point on responsibility to communities key as you know, our corporate motto is doing good and doing well. It means doing better to your point. It's gotta be, win-win win across the board. You, one of the things that's worrying me about this recovery is that as you, you look at the headline news, right? The numbers, and particularly with the latest, you know, stimulus or recovery plan that's been put out, you know, I really think we're going to have this great bounce back. It's going to feel like the roaring twenties as V-shaped recovery. And, and, but when you look below the surface away from those headlines, I think there's going to be wide groups of white parts of our population, of our communities that are going to be left behind in his recovery. And frankly, a lot of these, these, these people actually were, were, were challenged going into the COVID crisis.

Scott Rechler:

So it's almost like it would look like a V-shaped recovery from outside looking in. But when you look down, it's almost a K shape, but the K's a little more faint in terms of what's happening. How do we, how do you think like Airbnb? Because when I think about helping these they're they're, they're displaced, right? Their jobs may not be coming back to your point. What it lists is existed in 2019 may not be here in 2021, 22. But I would imagine that Airbnb is in a, in a pretty good position to help create opportunities for those people to, to find new ways to be entrepreneurs or new jobs in that mix. How do you think about that?

Brian Chesky:

Well, here's what I'd say, Scott. I agree with your concern. I think it's, it does appear, you know, the roaring twenties came after the Spanish flu and the war and the Spanish flu did not have nearly the level of lockdown as this. I think that we value something when it's taken away from us and travel human connection, connecting the real world was taken away. So I think you're right. I think that you can't even possibly forecast how it's going to come back because we never had gone through this before. And I, my general is most forecasts about recovery are understating. The human desire that being said you are. Right. I think that there's a major risk that many people get left behind. I don't just think it's because of COVID. I think that maybe a big risk is technology itself. I think that technology is an accelerant, but technology as an accelerant has a way of disrupting an industry so fast that some of the protections are road and people have trouble participate in this economy.

Brian Chesky:

I mean, it's moving so fast. It's like a train it's like, it's like, it's like people are at a subway. Stop with the train is moving so fast. You can't get on the train. Here's what I'd say. It doesn't have to be that way though. And I'll just speak for myself because we're not going to solve every problem. We have 4 million hosts in the United States. I'm sorry. We have 4 million host around the world. We have 4 million hosts around the world. 90% of them, 3.6 million people are what we call individuals everyday people they're healthcare workers, students, teachers, school teachers, one of the top two professional United States and Airbnb. So most of these people are everyday people, including in New York. I think that Airbnb could be an economic lifeline for not only them, but for millions, more people that have found themselves unemployed or underemployed 55% of our hosts are women.

Brian Chesky:

Our platform has generated more than \$110 billion. So what's 55% of 110 billion. That's approximately the amount of money women have earned on this platform. And so I, the reason I say this is to say the following. I actually think it's an opportunity to create more equality because it's like, it's like, it's a little

bit like the house kind of half burned down and we have to rebuild the house. If we had to rebuild the house, we can rebuild it more mindful than the first time we built it because maybe the first time we constructed all these systems, we weren't, as we weren't as cognizant of inequality as we are now,

Scott Rechler:

You know, you, you, you said it's a design problem. And a common theme that's come up in these conversations is a recognition that this incredible acceleration of technology that, that subway, that left people behind is that government and our current systems really aren't capable. Don't have the, the, the, the, the system, the capabilities in place to actually deal with this design problem, because it wasn't designed to deal with it. So it really comes down to the private sector. People like yourself, like myself, other people in the private sector to partner with government to say, we're going to take on this design problem. And you know, what always amazes me is that the power of your brand that I remember, I think it was the last time that I was with you in New York. And we, we were, I, I introduced it to Robert de Niro and here he is the greatest, the greatest actor of all time.

Scott Rechler:

Right. And we're having this conversation and he w he finds out that you're the CEO of Airbnb. And he's like, you found that Airbnb, you're the guy who founded Airbnb. And he was like, blown away. That's the case. So it shows you the power of that brand and that community that you built. And that's really think, as you think about some of these challenges, whether it's equality, whether it's sustainability, you know, you can use the power of that brand, that power of that community to, to help initiate that change. And like you said, you can only speak for yourself, but yourself with Airbnb in that community is pretty large.

Brian Chesky:

Yeah. I mean, again, more than a hundred billion dollars of income generated on our platform. And hopefully just the beginning, I think we've only scratched the surface of Airbnb. We have 4 million hosts. There's no reason there couldn't be tens of millions of hosts all around the world. The other thing I'll say about government and private sector is this. I believe that there is a lot of suspicion of large institutions today. There's a lot of suspicion of large corporations. And I think, you know, government has a role in holding corporations accountable, but that does not mean government should not partner like the relationship of government and private sector. Can't only be government being skeptical of the private sector and trying to hold them accountable. That is not gonna end well. It's not gonna end well for the government and not going to work for the people.

Brian Chesky:

And the reason why is when you have the situation, I'll just, I'll speak for tech. If government and tech don't partner together and government thinks its only role is to regulate tech. Well, you have is a lack of partnership. If a lab can partnership, then you have a situation where tech people aren't, you know, working with government to find more economic opportunities. We're not sharing information. And so you end up having a situation where we're like speaking past each other. I don't believe the private sector alone is going to fix this. And I'm pretty sure so long as we're in a capitalist economy, the government is not going to fix this. The only thing I know how to do is for government in the private sector to actually partner together. And that's what we tried to do. And we can talk about New York, but we've worked with a thousand cities around the world to collect remit taxes.

Brian Chesky:

We've collected, committed billions of dollars taxes. We've updated regulatory schemes. We want to be good actors. I think most people, I, most business leaders I talked to do not fit the characterization of like greedy business leaders. Most people I know do want to do the right thing. And I just think we need more all franchise across aisles. And I do think, you know, business does need to take more stakeholders into account. Most business leaders I've talked to don't disagree. The best thing for shareholders is society wants to exist. Why would that possibly be bad for shareholders? Of course, it's good. We just need to step into the future. And I feel like don't you feel like many of the biggest problems in the world are such large problems. They can only be done with cooperation, global warming. Who's going to solve that problem. Only everybody like staving off the next pandemic. Who's going to solve that problem. Only everyone, you know, inequality, who's going to solve that problem. Only everyone, every large problem in the world. I believe only everyone participating together is going to fix it. And when most people work in the private sector, then you can't expect government alone to fix the problem. They don't even have most of the technology. Most the resources, it's a partnership. That's what you said. I think it's totally the right way to think.

Scott Rechler:

Right? And if anything, if you look at this pandemic and the how quickly they were able to create and discover, and then distribute the vaccines right now, right? I mean that's a public private partnership, right? And to your point, I think it's critical that this needs to be, you know, when you think about it partners, or if you're doing a partnership, you need to have an alignment of interest and trust, right. And if it is just a regulatory, a relationship, that's not the partnership. And so, you know, if you can do public private partnerships,

Brian Chesky:

Lack of trust and a lack of trust is a lack of collaboration, lack of understanding, then you're stuck, then you can't solve something.

Scott Rechler:

Right. And, and the right incentives and alignment. Then I think, you know, I know that's been something you focused on a lot relative to thinking through what are the incentives as being, you know, a form of hospitality that may not be a hotel that has to pay hotel taxes to just to create the alignment. So people understand what's the objective, what's the goal. You can unleash private sector, innovation, private sector, you know, discipline and, and, and in ingenuity without sacrificing anything as a community, which I think you, you know, you face all over the world.

Brian Chesky:

Oh yeah. And one of the things, I mean, this sounds kind of obvious when I say it, but you can't partner without meeting people and listening to them and having conversations. And so the first step that we did when we started having challenges with governments 10 years ago, you know, I, I, growing up, I thought, when someone doesn't like, you should avoid them. And I'm like, well, that they're trouble avoid them. And I hired a woman who was my first executive. She became my COO you've. You've met her Belinda Johnson. And she told me when people don't like, you, you should meet with them. And that was like, kind of like completely, you really, I should meet somebody. Doesn't like me, isn't that going to add Bentley? And she said, no, if you meet people who don't like you or have a problem with you, it's suspicious.



Brian Chesky:

And you you're you're you listened to them 99 times out of a hundred. They may not like it in the meeting. They'll like you more and they'll understand you more and you will never leave the meeting worse off than before. And I feel like 99 times out of a hundred, when I meet with government officials, we both end in a better place to be started because, you know, in order to have alignment of interests, you need to listen to each other. And I found that, you know, most government officials do not understand new technology companies. I don't blame them. It's hard to keep up with Airbnb versus Bitcoin versus this or that. So it's art, it's onus on us to communicate to them. I would encourage the government to have an open mind. And the reason they should have an open mind is because I think that business is a solution to many of the largest problems in the world in partnership with government.

Brian Chesky:

And so we started Scott, we met with government officials and I think a thousand cities, a thousand cities. I mean, we, we, we, and then w it's not like one person, I mean, who do you meet in the city of New York? You got to meet a lot of people. You got to meet the governor's office, the mayor, the city council, but then you also have to meet state officials because state law, so state assembly. So, so every city has multiple constituents. If you take a thousand cities, plus all the constituents in those cities think about the sheer number of meetings we've had. And you know, when I started this company, my friends, I thought we could come up with, we call the model city. I thought we'd make an agreement in one city and roll it out everywhere. And the one thing I've found is we do a deal in like Portland or Seattle and you go to another city and they say, what's great. Well, we're different. And so one thing, the other thing I've learned is every city thinks they're different. They are different. They think they're more different than they are. Cities. Think they're more different. They are. And I would know, cause I, because they didn't talk to a thousand a minute, I talked to a thousand of them. So I know the cities aren't as different as they think they are just deep down below the surface. They all have many of the same issues.

Scott Rechler:

Yeah. Well, I think that, you know, the, the key thing to your point is you need to be investing in those relationships before you need something, right? It's a, it's about listening to their concerns, letting them hear what your, your vision is and, and building that trust and that we talked about so that when it comes time to actually have to make policies or solve problems for the community at large, they look at you as a partner. Right. And I think that's something that is, is as a key factor, you know, in terms of thinking through cities. I mean, obviously one of the things that's happened in this pandemic, there's been a shift about where people have been traveling, right? There's been a little bit of a people avoiding dense cities like New York or San Francisco because of the concerns around the public health and moving to some of the smaller cities that have been able to capitalize on it. And, and, and actually, you know, been in some ways, reinventing themselves in a post COVID world to be more focused on tourism, you have a lens into that. So I'm curious as to you think that is a permanent shift where the smaller cities are going to be a place where people might migrate to for vacations or time in, you know, in different working there, living there, or versus the bigger cities.

Brian Chesky:

There is no question in my mind, no question whatsoever that in the future, many more people are going to travel to small cities, rural communities, and even national parks, I think. And I think the more rural, the more benefit. So like, let's start with national parks. There's 400 national parks. The United

States, most Americans live a tank of gas or a national park, and most have never been there. And by the way, national park vacation is pretty cheap in the grand scheme of things. And so I encourage people to go. Most people have never traveled to a rural community because there there's no Eiffel tower in most rural know in rural community. But I think the Airbnb way of traveling allows a small town to be interesting because you don't need to have the loop. You don't need to have times square. You know, you just need to have a community.

Brian Chesky:

Every, if you have a community, you're interesting because the people, not the landmarks, the people, not, the landmarks become the point of it all. And this, I do believe the genie's out of the bottle. I believe people were forced travel the places other than big cities. And I believe as millions of people are forced to travel to national parks, rural communities, small cities, the genie's out of the bottle. And they said, those are really interesting places. So the playing field is being more leveled, but it doesn't mean they're not going to visit New York or big cities. I think it's an and not an or so I don't think it's a shift from big cities to small towns. I think the shift from big cities to everywhere. So it's an expansion I would, if I could predict, I would say the tourism industry, the MACRA will, boom.

Brian Chesky:

I think it will grow. And the reason I think it's going to grow is a couple of reasons. Number one, you're going to have this phenomenon of people going to big cities to get any everywhere. The moment that happens, you have just more outlets. The more choices you have, the more purchases usually make, right? There's more like if you could only go to big cities, you gotta, like, you gotta, it's gotta work for you. But like now people that's number one. Number two, a lot of people have more flexibility. They can work from home. They can work from zoom. So I think people are going to have three-day weekends every weekend. I think some people will go to the office five days a week when the pandemic is over. I think most Americans, my instinct will not go to the office five days a week.

Brian Chesky:

If they do go to office, there'll be three or four days a week, especially over the summer. And some people will not work in their office over the summer. They want to go somewhere else. And so you're going to have that being a major expansive tourism. And then the, the one more dynamic that may be the biggest of all. I believe that traveling and living are going to blur together. The lines between those are blurred together before the pandemic, the simple mental model was people, either traveling for business or leisure, you travel for business. You're probably doing one or two days, you know, for a meeting or a couple of meetings for as a sign of respect or you're traveling for vacation once or two, one or two weeks a year. I think the new world, those things may still exist. I think business travel is not coming back quite like it was.

Brian Chesky:

I think there's an, I think, I think the days of road warriors getting on getting, going on meetings, I think that's kind of going to wane. Some people will do it, but most people won't, you know, you, I still will go to New York to see you, but I'll also zoom with you. And that will cut down some of my trips. And that actually means you can talk more. So that's not a bad thing, but there will be a new kind of business travel. What I call a hub and spoke when you have a lot of people working remotely. So a whole bunch of people that used to live in New York, you know, some people won't live in New York. They won't work in New York, but what they're going to do is if they work in Connecticut, they live in Connecticut. They're



going to want to come back to the office occasionally, because I think we're also finding 12 months into a pandemic.

Brian Chesky:

This is not sustainable. We can't just live the rest of our life virtually. I think that is going to wear on all of us. I think there's like mental health issues, loneliness, isolation, we're all treading above water. You know, trying to gasp for air, to like maintain relationships. It's hard. And the problem with virtual and zoom it's, you don't meet new people. How many new friends have people meet in the pandemic? I bet very few people have made any new friends or relationships in the pandemic. And that is not helpful, right? So people will con come in contact in the future. And I think a lot of people are going to travel to cities if they don't live in cities for let's call it like a week, a quarter, two, three weeks, a quarter. And so that will be a new kind of hub and spoke model.

Brian Chesky:

But the bigger thing is going to be this more people are going to realize if I can work from home, I can work from any home. And so what they're going to be is they're going to have this kind of medium term housing opportunity. People, you know, I always had a dream when I was younger. I was like, I'd love to like live in a different city every month. Not every day, not every week, that's exhausting, but every month or every two months, I want to go to Buenos Aires for a month. I want to go to somewhere else for a month. Now you possibly can. And I think you're going to find this really mobile world where more people are discovering the world. It's kind of getting the, world's going to get smaller, even smaller than it was before. And I think that's mostly an exciting proposition. It's going to come with some complexities. It's not all good. I mean, there's some downsides to that world, but I think it's mostly a good thing. I mean, a world where more humans are connecting as mostly a good thing, you know, there are some downsides, but it's on balance. A good thing.

Scott Rechler:

Yeah. Well, you know, to your point about, you know, workplace you of all people know the power of community. And one thing that we've seen when, and ourselves, and we've talked to a lot of our clients is the need to bring people back to the workplace at some point to reinforce that sense of community, to have that sense of mentorship, that sense of purpose, a sense of being a part of something bigger. And when you really think about, you know, a lot of the workplaces over time, and you said it, and you'll have making friends finding spouses, this is your town square. This is the place you come to convene with people to develop those unique relationships that you otherwise wouldn't be able to develop. But I do agree, you know, technology, the genie's out of the bottle. You said, I agree with you that, you know, on multiple fronts, technology's changed the way that that people can live, that people can work, that people can operate and people enter this post COVID world without a pivot through looking through that lens, they're going to be disadvantaged. Right. And that's, I think a big, big factor as we go through.

Brian Chesky:

Yeah. I think you said the word community. I'll just take a second on that. No, the word community in the age of the internet, like you heard like online communities, you know, I think there is such a thing as an online community. There is such a thing, but it's not like a real-world community and we should not fool ourselves into thinking that one can replace the other. There's a reason why are like physical being like, like let's just be realistic about it. Many of the physical communities are eroding. Many people don't know their neighbors. People don't not as many people are, are members of church groups or this or

that or other things. And I think we're seeing evidence of this in the high suicide rates in this country and the opioid crisis. I think, I think many crisis are, are, are actually crisis of loneliness.

Brian Chesky:

I think a lot of obesity is actually not obesity. It's people that are lonely in the overeat. A lot of drug addiction as people that are not just abstractly addicted to drugs, there's deeper issues, not always loneliness. Then why do I, why do I think this? Well, because I have a really interesting digression when COVID happened. A lot of people were afraid to stay in homes, you know? And, and we brought on the former surgeon general in the United States. His name is Dr. Beck Murphy. He was surgeon general under president Obama, the surgeon general, who I got to know quite well, also wrote a book at the same time. And the book was called together. And he basically said that he believed that the number one killer in America is loneliness. He believed that loneliness was killing more people than obesity or smoking because loneliness was like, when you meet people, they have always ailments.

Brian Chesky:

The thing below the surface is people are lonely. I'm a little lonely right now. I think the thing is it's hard to admit you're lonely. There's like a stigma. It sounds like, you know, you're sent off to a nursing home. You have no friends. Loneliness is part of the human condition. I think all of us have very few humans are probably had an experience of not being lonely at some point in the last 12 months. How is that possible given how isolated we've been? And my concern is some of the communities which communities do we even physically go back to w w w who were lonely. What's the antidote to loneliness. The antidote to loneliness to me is physical communities. And I think that people that are builders and developers should realize that they have a once in a century opportunity. They may, we, by the way, think of it. If this is an opportunity and maybe a once in a hundred year opportunity, we may never get this opportunity. Again, the roaring twenties, a lot of business opportunities I I'm sure were created. It seems like the same thing is true. Now, I think, you know, there's an old saying, make something the customer wants, but what the customer wants is community and connection. If you're in the business of community, it's going to be hard to go out of business. That's what I think.

Scott Rechler:

No, that's a great point. And I remember when this pandemic started, I began to think about that. We had a certain amount of social capital and that we were making withdrawals on every day. And, you know, in the heat of things, when things were really bad, it didn't feel as, as impactful. But, you know, to your point, you know, now as this has dragged on a year, you're feeling this sense of, of, of disconnect. And that's not just disconnect from people and colleagues, but, you know, it's the waiter that used to talk to the bartender, the Pope's person, the local store that is that part of the community. And that sense of place

Brian Chesky:

There was, there was a comradery to be in a pandemic, 8:00 PM here. I don't know if was 8:00 PM in New York, you would hear people like getting Cal bell sharing 70 l'm. Their DM is APM here, and they're not as loud anymore. Cause you know, if people are a little bit tired and I, but I don't think that comradery, that spirit is going away. I think, I think the silver lining of the pandemic and there was a silver lining because it was very horrible is that I think we all now acknowledge we're in a global world. You know, I, there are such a thing as borders and countries and communities and local cities, but I think the pandemic was a realization that we're going to, if we're going to solve problems, we're going to have

to be coordinated. We're going to solve them together. We're gonna have to work together. And I think that's also a huge opportunity. And I think there's a huge opportunity, not just the city of New York, but around the world. And a lot of businesses that were conceived in New York and Airbnb was in part conceived partially in New York, San Francisco in New York were kind of the two first cities. You know, what happens in New York spreads around the world. There's an opportunity. And maybe a way to think about is not only can New York reinvent itself, but New York can maybe set an example of how other cities can reinvent themselves.

Scott Rechler:

Yeah, no, there's no doubt. So my last question for you, you know, I think going through this, right, it's not, as I'm totally convinced new York's can come back better and stronger. You know, you can't rest on your laurels, right? You gotta be intentional just as you were describing it. And so let's, let's, let's pretend for a moment that you got a phone call were asked to chair a commission overseeing new York's recovery. And how do we accelerate and build back that better brighter, more sustainable, more equitable in New York. What are, what are a couple of the ideas that you would lean into if you were in that, that role?

Brian Chesky:

It's a great question. Let me, let me caveat my answer by saying like I have a unique lens. So my answer is going to sound familiar. I think that I would, I would recommend maybe curtailing some regulation to make it easier for sole proprietors to start businesses. I mean, you know, the old, like, you know how hard it is to like actually create a lemonade stand and comply to regulation that like, as a kid, I had a lemonade stand today. How many permits would I need? Right. So I think we should remember that we create laws to protect people, but we also have to enable more economic opportunities. So the first thing I'd say is, I'm not saying we big tech companies don't want to be regulated. I'm not, I'm not talking about me, but I'm saying for everyday new Yorkers, we should make it easier for them to start businesses and open things.

Brian Chesky:

We should, we should create a, a fast track. Like, and I don't know all the regulations. I know all the regulations in our business, and I know what hosts have to do in cities around the world. And the registration process are super onerous. Some cities they make you physically go up to city hall and wait in line. You have to make multiple appointments. This is friction. You're gonna have a drop-off if you want for, if you don't want as much like opportunity, then I would say add friction. That's the first thing I'd say. The second thing I'd say is get the power back to the people. You know, I've traveled the world. This is going to sound like a completely crazy point I want to make. But I went to Cuba. A number of years ago, 2000, I think 15 and 16 when president Obama and the white house and the treasury department and lifted some of the restrictions on Cuba.

Brian Chesky:

And I went to Cuba and what I found was an externally vibrant entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial community. That would be really odd in a capitalist communist country to have tons of entrepreneurs. It turns out they didn't have a lot of hotels. They have these things called pop Casa particular artists. They were tens of thousands of people basically doing Airbnbs before Airbnb. They don't have a ton of hotels, but they have these things called power [inaudible], which are basically living room restaurants. There's I think like tens of thousands of them. And the reason I bring this up is not to take a playbook of Cuba, but

to say the following, you know, if even a communist country can give power to people to start businesses, then one of the most entrepreneurial cities in the world, New York can no doubt give power to people and having experience I've had in New York.

Brian Chesky:

It wasn't the easiest thing in the world to do business. And, you know, people can have their criticisms. I hope we're passing most of the challenges, but I think, you know, if you make it easy for people to start businesses, they will. And they don't have to be big businesses. They can start anything, not just Airbnb. Look at what's happened with Etsy and Shopify and all these platforms. I think the future could be a future of entrepreneurs. What if millions of entrepreneurs rose up in New York, micro entrepreneurs, everyday people having supplemental income and you made it really easy for them to participate. And then big time entrepreneurs like you and people like you that have much more resources you got into business. You already are, but other people like you in the community building business, here's a great thing about communities. It's kind of an equal idea.

Brian Chesky:

A community is a group of people. You cannot design a community with a designing for many people in mind. So if you're in the community, building business, you're kind of creating a lot of jobs. You're creating a lot more jobs in the community, boom business, then a non-community billing business. So that's what I would say. I would say, B, can you revisit, like making it easier for people to start businesses because you need economic opportunity, can big businesses be in the community building business and can you give power back to the people so everyone can start a business. These th this, this, this is my lens because of the unique lens that I've had with Airbnb. I'm sure there's many more ideas, but man, can, I think we've only scratched the surface 10 years ago. If I asked how big do you think are going to be, can become, do you think people would say, I think the platform is going to journey a hundred billion dollars in economic opportunity. No one thought that was possible. Even us, we didn't think it would be possible. What if we're just scratching the surface in a revolutions in front of us? All we got to do is harness it and embrace it.

Scott Rechler:

Yeah. Well, I, I like the, the focus of, of main street, right? Because going back to the haves and have nots, we've watched wall street, do this main street suffer. A lot of, you can give the power back to the people in, you know, and, and, and energize that entrepreneurial spirit and, and make it easier. You're a hundred percent right. And you could see that really being a great driver for the recovery and the part of the segment of our community that needs the most support that we should be there for support. So it was a Brian, I appreciate you being here. This has been a really great to get your insights. And as we think about recalibrating for new reality of New York, you know, the lessons that, that you shared will be really, really helpful for us. So thanks.

Brian Chesky:

Thank you, Scott, for sharing. I just want to say thank you for being a leader in New York, and I'm excited to come back. And I, I think, I think that this is going to be an exciting place to be this year later this year in New York.

Scott Rechler:

Well, I look forward to dining with when you come here, so see you soon. Thanks, Brian. Thanks be well, that concludes this episode of recalibrate reality as rebuild for a post COVID world. Unlocking the entrepreneurial spirit of everyday new Yorkers will be a key in creating a more prosperous and more equitable New York, but both sides government and the private sector must play a constructive role in making this partnership work. Thank you again to Brian Chesky and Airbnb. Thank you to the regional plan association and the 92nd street, Y and thank you to the team for making this week's episode possible from 75 Rockefeller Plaza in New York. I'm Scott Rechler. See you next week.