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TAMPA BAY LEADERSHIP REVIEW

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WHAT'S INSIDE

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Three Reasons Why Self-Doubt Can Actually Be a Good Thing

By: Kris Kelso
Keynote speaker, entrepreneur and author

Kris Kelso

Have you ever felt like you didn't really measure up to the assumptions that others have made about you?

Do you wonder if your success may be the result of luck and timing, rather than your intelligence or hard work?

Have you ever worried that at some point, everyone is going to figure out that you're just making it up as you go, and figuring it out on the fly?

If so, you may have had a run-in with "The Impostor," that inner critic that tries to convince you that your success isn't real, and that you're living a lie.

And you're far from the only one who feels that way.

Research has shown that up to 70% of the population experiences impostor syndrome—the feeling that their success may be accidental, coincidental or even fraudulent—at some point in their life. And further studies have shown that impostor syndrome **tends to be more prevalent among high-achievers.**

That's right—people who are ambitious and competitive and who push the boundaries; people who are not satisfied with coasting through life; people who take risks and try new things—these people are more likely to wrestle with the feeling of being an impostor.

Those feelings of self-doubt can be debilitating if they're allowed to dominate and limit you, but they're not entirely bad if kept under control. In fact, the feeling of being an impostor might be a sign of good things that are happening.

Here are three reasons that experiencing impostor syndrome might actually be a good sign.

1. It Means You're Pushing Your Boundaries

You won't feel like a fraud when you're staying in your comfort zone, but stepping out and taking a risk can make you feel vulnerable. When you're trying something new, or among people who intimidate you, the doubts will begin to creep in.

When you hear the voice of your inner critic starting to say things like the statements below, that's a good sign!

You don't belong here.

You're in over your head.

These people are out of your league.

You can't keep up.

You have nothing to offer this group.

It means you're in a situation and among people who are going to challenge you, grow you and inspire you to do more and think bigger. You should not be running from those situations; you should see them for the gift that they are and lean in to those opportunities.

There's a famous saying that has been attributed to a lot of different people: If you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room.

The corollary to that is this—if you think you're the least smart person in the room, stay there! That's exactly the place you need to be. When the inner critic tells you to get out, that may be the best sign

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that you're in the right place.

On the other hand, if you're never feeling any self-doubt, then perhaps you should ask yourself: "Am I playing it too safe? Am I taking enough risks? Am I growing?"

Feeling confident 100% of the time may be a sign that you're stuck in your comfort zone. But the occasional feeling of doubt likely means you're continuing to grow – and that's a good thing.

2. It's a Sign of a Learning Opportunity

You rarely learn in your comfort zone. You don't improve by continuing to do what comes easily. Improvement usually involves some level of discomfort.

Impostor syndrome is most active when you're stretching yourself. When your inner critic says, "You're about to fail at something," you should translate that to mean, "You're about to learn something."

When we were children, we learned by doing. We tried, failed and tried again. Want to learn to walk instead of crawl? Pull yourself up and give it a shot. Fall over? Try again.

It's a natural way to learn, driven by curiosity, hunger and a dissatisfaction with the status quo. There's more out there—not just more to have, but more to do and more to be.

We learn by doing. We learn by failing. We learn by trying and failing and trying again.

Failure, then, is not the opposite of success – it's an important part of the process of success. No one has ever achieved anything great without some failures along the way.

- Abraham Lincoln failed in business, had a nervous breakdown, and suffered multiple political defeats before being elected president of the United States.
- Henry Ford's first company went bankrupt, and his second company also went south when, after a dispute with partners, he was forced to walk away with only the rights to his name.
- Before creating his namesake company, Walt Disney's Laugh-O-Gram Studio went bankrupt, and he was fired from a Missouri newspaper for not being creative enough.

Each of these leaders was ultimately successful because they learned from their failures. Their failures were the experiences that paved the way to their ultimate success, and if they had let the fear of failure keep them from trying new things, we likely would not even know their names today.

Whenever I attempt something new, I'm determined that there are only two possible outcomes – I'll either succeed, or I'll learn. Those are the only two options (and neither one is bad).

Never let self-doubt or the fear of failure keep you from trying something new. Instead, use it as a signpost of learning opportunities and take advantage of every one you can.

3. It Keeps You Humble (and Safe)

Entrepreneur Barbara Corcoran, who built and sold a $66 million real estate company before becoming one of the famous investors on the TV show Shark Tank, has talked about self-doubt and the fact that it's a positive sign, not a negative one.

"Thank God you doubt yourself because the one thing that I have learned is true of every single person who is exceptional in whatever they are doing is self-doubt. Without it, you become big-headed, arrogant," she said. "The curse of being competent is self-doubt, because competence rides on your own self-doubt. It's the edge of doubt that makes you a performer in anything you do."

Arrogance and recklessness are not signs of strength—they're weaknesses that can get you into a lot of trouble. A healthy amount of self-doubt will keep you grounded and humble, even while you're doing great things.

The Key is to Overcome It, Rather Than Avoid It

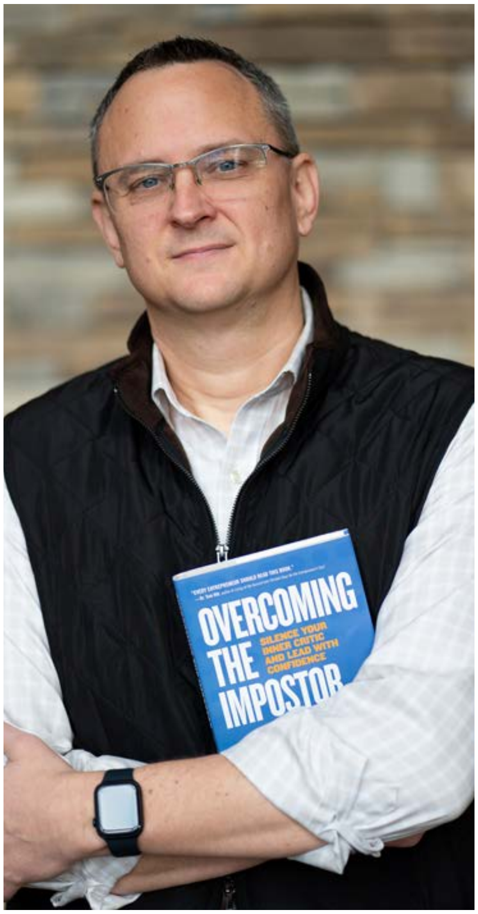
It's been said that courage is not the absence of fear, but the will to act in spite of the fear. That means you can't have courage without fear! Fear is part of the formula for courage to exist.

The key, then, is not to eliminate fear and doubt, but to overcome it.

Recognizing those feelings of self-doubt as a sign of great possibilities will help you to lean in when your instinct is to run away. Reframing failure as learning will give you the courage to take a risk and try something new.

Remember that nearly all of the successful people you know, or have heard of, have experienced fear, failure, and self doubt on their journey to success. That should let you know that when you experience those things, you're in good company!

Kris Kelso, PCC is a keynote speaker, entrepreneur, and is the author of "Overcoming The Impostor: Silence Your Inner Critic and Lead with Confidence."



TAMPA BAY LEADERSHIP REVIEW
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From a Family's Second-Generation Business to Lasting Generational Impact

By: Lauren Thomas Compton, CEO of Thomas Financial

Lauren Thomas Compton

In a rapidly evolving world, the legacy of family businesses often hinges on the ability to adapt and grow while remaining true to foundational values. As the second-generation steward of our family business, I was fortunate to share my experiences to an audience of UTampa students, where I highlighted the importance of investing in oneself, cultivating sound habits, lifelong learning, fostering a spirit of gratitude and giving back—all essential components for both individual and organizational success.

The Journey Begins: Investing in Myself and Working My Way Up

My journey in our family business began in 2004, shortly after I graduated from UTampa with my MBA. Our firm, Thomas Financial, was started over 50 years ago by my dad, Rick Thomas. We specialize in life insurance, group benefits, wealth management and 401k planning.

My dad started selling life insurance in 1972 while he was a senior at UTampa, which was known as Tampa U back then! He played football for the Spartans, a program that lasted from 1933-1974. Before long, he went into business for himself and started Thomas Financial.

In 2011, my dad encouraged me to transition into sales—a move that would ultimately shape my career. It was not easy, and I faced many challenges. We had no training or formal mentoring program, so I bought books on selling by Peter Drucker and Brian Tracy and enrolled in a sales course called "Prospect or perish."

This course taught me how to identify my ideal client and understand the metrics behind successful sales calls. This course also helped me realize that my average commission on a case at the time was $2,000! **That is a lot of smiling and dialing!** And **not** enough for me to contribute meaningfully to our family, so I used the exercise to reassess my ideal client and what I could offer.

We did not always have a clear path for succession, mostly because my dad truly believed he would live forever, which was part of his charm, and his love for his clients and his profession.

I wanted to add value to the company and myself, beyond being a salesperson working for a family business, so I became a certified financial planner (CFP) and went back to school to earn a Masters in the Studies of Law, with a focus on Business Law.

I paid for my sales and CFP classes and tests, and new degree out of my own pocket. I consider those essential for my development and career trajectory. Little did I know, I was setting myself up for my current role as **CEO of Thomas Financial**.

The Power of Sound Habits

At the core of personal and professional success lies the establishment of sound habits, and I am a big believer in having a strong morning routine. I get up at 5:45 Monday through Friday and start my day with gratitude.

I put on my workout clothes, and while I drink coffee, my dog Dallas sits on my lap and watches me go through the 400 emails that mysteriously landed in my inbox since I left work the day before.

I am very intentional about not checking my email after I leave the office, and I don't expect my team to answer my emails after hours or on the weekends. If I have something urgent, I will call them.

If I am feeling particularly stressed or in need of guidance, I read a few pages from a book called "Lincoln on Leadership." I workout, and after that I check in with my teenagers to see what is on tap for the evening. By the time I get to my desk I feel energized and prepared for the day.

If there is an unpleasant task I am dreading, I do it first, so it is out of the way. That is something I learned from, "Eat That Frog," by Brian Tracy, a great book about time management. If you have two frogs, eat the ugliest frog first!

I also make it a habit not to bring my phone into meetings with clients or the team. Even having it on the table in silent mode can be distracting and is not needed.

At Thomas Financial, we are remote on Fridays and several weeks during the year. The team is expected to manage their day as if they were in the office.

Here are some remote habits I recommend:

- Schedule the day like any other day, with a start and finish time.
- Set up a dedicated workstation at your house.
- Put a professional background on your camera or blur the background – nobody wants to see your bed, even if it is made.
- Always turn your camera on when meeting with your team and clients.
  - It is professional and shows you respect others' time.
  - If there is no camera, make it a phone call instead.
- Dress the part and always be camera ready.
- If you take notes, share that with your audience in case they hear typing.

Another habit that is not only important to you now, but to your future self is systematic saving!

Whether it's directing some money from your paycheck into your savings account, emergency account, or kids' college fund, do it. If you can max out your 401k, great, and at the very least

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contribute enough to get your company's match. It is a simple yet profound practice that can lead to long-term success.

Lifelong Learning

I listen to books about business, leadership or inspiration on my way to work. Some of my favorites are Jim Collins, Simon Sinek, Adam Grant, and Ariana Huffington. Learning never ends, no matter what profession you are in.

UTampa offers many opportunities for professional development for both students and the community, with events like the Fellows Forum, the Entrepreneurship Speakers Series, and the TECO Leadership Series. These events are great opportunities to network and engage with peers and industry professionals to exchange knowledge and learn from others' insight.

Mentorship has also played a crucial role in my learning journey. I have an amazing mentor in our office named Leslie Darrigo. When I started in sales in 2011, Leslie was the chief underwriter, and she would take time to go through my sales presentations to simplify them and make them a "no-brainer" for my prospects. Today Leslie is the COO celebrating 40 years with the firm!

I also work with business coach Debbie Lundberg and executive strategist Neen James. The investment in their mentorship has helped me personally and professionally, providing expert guidance, accountability, strategic thinking and helping to improve my communication with the team.

They helped me identify my strengths and understand my weaknesses so I could delegate things to others that are better at it than I am.

Simon Sinek said, "We can't be good at everything – embrace what you are **not** good at doing and hire the very best to do it." We have done that with our team at Thomas Financial and we invest in them so they can continue to grow.

Learning my strengths and weaknesses also helped me realize I could never personally replace the powerhouse of a salesman my dad was, and led to the introduction of new revenue streams which continue to help our business succeed long after he retired.

Gratitude, Influence and Giving Back

There are many ways to express gratitude. Some people pray, some people write in a meditation journal. I like to do it while my eyes are still closed in the morning and say to myself, "Thank you for my many blessings."

Practicing gratitude plays a significant role in my emotional well-being, relationships, and quality of life. If I feel anxious, I repeat my mantra in my head to calm me.

It also helps strengthen my relationships. I feel very fortunate for my life, and as my sister in law, the **other** Lauren Compton, would tell you, nothing in this life happens by accident. My husband and I work very hard, and our kids are smart, strong and resilient, and everyone shows up for their part. It is important to me to show them my appreciation and tell them how grateful I am for them.

Someone else I am truly grateful for, and who has been the biggest influence on my life and success, is my mom, Sandy Thomas. She is such a beautiful woman, inside and out. She taught me many things like:

1. The power of positive thinking. When I was a little girl, she would play tapes for me when I went to sleep from a guy named Bob Mowad. He would talk about stinkin' thinkin' and how to get out of a rut.

2. Gratitude (for anything and everything). We would be in the car going to soccer practice, and my mom would say, "I am so thankful for my safe car." As a 10-year-old, I just rolled my eyes, but now I get it!

3. Generosity. She taught me to give my time and resources back to the community. Both of my parents were very involved in UTampa, where they met in college, and that influenced my commitment.

SAVE THE DATE

TECO ENERGY CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP UPCOMING EVENTS

Fall 2025 Leadership Speaker Series
Oct. 8, 2025 | 4:30 – 5:30 p.m.

2026 Leadership Summit
Feb. 17, 2026 | 7:15 a.m.– 1 p.m.

Spring 2026 Leadership Speaker Series
March 25, 2026 | 4:30 – 5:30 p.m.

For more Center for Leadership information, scan QR code:

4. Kindness towards others. My mom has the biggest heart. I can think of so many times growing up when she saved an animal on the side of the road because it was lost, sick or hit. She could never leave it to suffer. She also always helped women down on their luck. She taught me it is not my job to judge others' human experiences, but to treat all with dignity and respect.

She gave a voice to the voiceless, and that had a strong influence on the organizations I support, such as The Spring, Metropolitan Ministries and ASPCA.

My dad also taught me a lot about giving back. He came to UTampa on a football scholarship as a transfer student from Virginia Military Institute. He was the first alumnus to be the chairman of the Board of Trustees, which he was very proud of. He led several capital campaigns to raise money for the students and the buildings.

He was generous of both his time and treasure, because he felt that his foundation at UTampa, both on and off the field, **contributed to his opportunities and his success.**

At one point, because of his involvement, he was able to name a building. There were many options, and he picked the parking garage because when he was a student, he parked cars at the Florida State Fair, which took place right on campus. That parking lot was where the Rick Thomas Parking Garage is today.

At UTampa, I am proud to be part of the Financial Ambassador's Council, Steering Committee and Legacy Society.

Here's something you can do to show gratitude: donate to your school. *U.S. News & World Report* measures alumni giving as part of the University's rankings. Not by the amount of the donation, but by the number of alumni who contribute. Having a higher-ranking school can make your degree more valuable.

Perhaps the gratitude you have for your time at UTampa will inspire you to give back as a heartfelt expression of appreciation. **And while you are at it, make that annual gift a habit.**

Conclusion

Investing in yourself is the most powerful decision you can make. Embrace the habits of lifelong learning, for they will guide you through the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Your influence extends beyond your own life—contribute, uplift those around you, and cultivate a spirit of gratitude.

As you work your way up, don't forget the importance of giving back to your community and empowering others on their journeys. Whether you work with your family business, or a business that seems like family, be intentional about fostering a culture of growth and generosity that will resonate for generations to come!

The Power of Action: Marcus Aurelius and the Path to Sustainable Leadership

By: Bella L. Galperin, Ph.D., Dana Professor of Management and Senior Associate Director of the TECO Energy Center for Leadership

Bella Galperin, Ph.D.

Last November, I was invited to participate in the African Research Initiative Conference (AfRIC) and Ph.D. Project-Africa Doctoral Consortium in Alexandria, Egypt. Building on AfRIC's 2024 general theme of Fostering a Sustainable Innovative Entrepreneurship Research Ecosystem, I was honored to give a keynote address on the role of climate leadership in Africa and beyond. At the end of the conference, we visited the Greco-Roman Museum, which showcased treasures of Alexandria's history, once known as a hub for Greek culture.

While the museum originally opened with only 11 galleries, it has since grown to 25 galleries featuring a large variety of coins from different countries, chronologically arranged, and dating back from 630 BC to the Ottoman period in the 19th century. As I wandered through the museum, marveling at the spectacular artifacts, my eyes caught sight of a striking white marble statue of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Standing two meters high and weighing five tons, the statue is considered to be one of the most impressive pieces in the collection. It was discovered beneath the Sayed Darwish Theater in Alexandria during excavation work at the theater site.

White marble statue of Marcus Aurelius (121-180 AD) at the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, Egypt. November 2024. Bella L. Galperin

Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher who ruled from A.D. 161 to 180, once said "Do not be wise in words but be wise in deeds."[1] This quote emphasizes the importance of action over mere words, suggesting true wisdom

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The Power of Action: Marcus Aurelius and the Path to Sustainable Leadership

is not demonstrated through eloquent speech or clever rhetoric but rather through tangible actions. Aurelius's words remain highly relevant today, particularly in the context of sustainability leadership.

According to a survey by global professional services firm EY, over half of CEOs say sustainability is a higher priority now more than 12 months ago (Segal, 2024). EY surveyed 1,200 CEOs from large companies across 21 countries, five industries, and 300 investors. As sustainability and climate issues take the center stage for senior executives worldwide, sustainability leadership is becoming increasingly vital.

Sustainability leadership involves guiding and inspiring others to prioritize long-term environmental, social, and economic well-being, integrating sustainable practices into organizations and communities. As noted by Atlas Renewable Energy, one of the largest independent renewables businesses in Latin America, "…sustainable leadership is not a purely values-driven play. It's having the skills to do more with less, driving greater productivity…" Aurelius's quote serves as a powerful reminder that actions speak louder than words, offering valuable guidance for sustainability leadership in the following ways:

Moving Beyond Greenwashing

Many organizations promote sustainability through marketing but fail to take meaningful action. Leaders need to ensure that their sustainability initiatives result in measurable environmental and social impact rather than superficial gestures. Greenwashing, the practice of making misleading or exaggerated sustainability claims, has become a major issue in corporate and governmental sustainability efforts. While many organizations highlight their environmental commitments, their actual impact often falls short.

Interestingly, the EY survey referenced earlier revealed agreement on sustainability issues between executives and investors. Notably, 73% of CEOs and 67% of investors believe companies are engaging in "greenhushing" due to fears of being accused of greenwashing (Segal, 2024). Greenhushing refers to the deliberate downplaying or withholding information about a company's environmental efforts. This occurs for various reasons, including fear of scrutiny, skepticism, or a preference to remain low-profile until meaningful progress is made. Unlike greenwashing, which exaggerates sustainability claims, greenhushing conceals them, often leaving stakeholders unaware of a company's true environmental impact and initiatives. While greenhushing allows businesses to refine their environmental strategies without the pressure of public expectations, it can also reduce stakeholder engagement and transparency, both critical to trust and corporate responsibility. To truly embody sustainability leadership, organizations must ensure their initiatives are visible, go beyond marketing, and translate into real and measurable progress.

Align Actions with Claims

Organizations must ensure that their sustainability messaging accurately reflects their operations and long-term strategy. For instance, a company claiming carbon neutrality should go beyond carbon offsets and actively reduce emissions through energy efficiency, renewable energy investments, and sustainable supply chain practices.

While executives recognize the value of sustainability, integration into core operations often falls short. A recent survey of 320 senior professionals, 75% of whom were at the C-suite, director, or management level, across various U.S. sectors found that two-thirds of executives consider sustainability 'very important' to their companies' commercial success. Reported benefits included enhanced brand and reputation (74% of respondents) and stronger stakeholder and community relations (70%) (Segal, 2025). However, only 37% stated that sustainability is 'very integrated' into their core business strategy. Companies with greater sustainability integration reported more significant benefits across all areas: 67% cited increased sales, 65% noted improved efficiencies and cost reductions, and 70% reported stronger employee attraction and retention. Additionally, these highly integrated companies found that mandatory sustainability reporting enhanced value creation opportunities.

As sustainability gains importance, leaders will also face increasing pressure to demonstrate the return on investment (ROI) of their sustainability efforts, according to the Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance (Tonello, 2025). Measuring and reporting sustainability ROI is crucial for building stakeholder trust and ensuring long-term success. It goes beyond short-term financial metrics, emphasizing long-term financial, environmental, and social value. To lead in sustainability, organizations must not only integrate sustainable practices into their long-term strategy but also transparently report their sustainability ROI.

Transparency and Accountability

Companies should openly share their sustainability goals, progress, and challenges not just their successes. However, a significant gap remains between most organizational actions and the deeper transformations needed to achieve net-zero[2] and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Adopted by the UN in 2015, the SDGs, also known as the Global Goals, serve as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all by 2030. The introduction of the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) standards has enhanced transparency by providing a framework for transitioning from voluntary to mandatory sustainability reporting on a global scale. While these standards promote accountability, companies may face legal and reputational risks if they fail to comply, make reporting errors, or commit to sustainability targets they cannot realistically achieve within the promised timeframe.

In a Deloitte Global study on the challenges of sustainability, 25 global leaders from the investment, business, academia, and non-profit communities were interviewed. The findings revealed that even experienced leaders struggled with keeping up with the economic, social, ethical, and regulatory changes, as well as uncertainty regarding their role as corporate citizens (Cleveland et al., 2023). One key approach suggested in the study to help leaders navigate these challenges is a strong emphasis on accountability and governance. As one interviewee noted, 'If you don't have governance, you can't talk about having environmental or social disclosures… To be transparent, you need governance. It's the foundation and the base." To enhance accountability in sustainability integration, some companies are assigning responsibility to the board of directors, the chief financial officer, or a cross-functional sustainability steering committee. These efforts help ensure a genuine commitment to action—not just words.

Engage Stakeholders in Genuine Change

Sustainability is not just about external perception-it requires actively engaging employees, customers, and communities in meaningful action. According to Accenture and the World Economic Forum (WEF), stakeholder alignment plays a crucial role in sustainability leadership (Shook et al., 2022). For sustainability to become a source of competitive advantage and drive financial performance, organizations must embrace a truly stakeholder-centric approach. Vasu Vats, Vice President and Xeljanz Global Commercial Lead at Pfizer, emphasized the importance of this mindset, stating, "Today more than ever, it is critical to understand the day-to-day practicalities of stakeholders' lives—not simply their opinion of what we are already doing."

Accenture and WEF identified three key factors in building a 'Sustainable DNA': comprehensive planning, measurement, and management. However, a gap exists between leadership perceptions and employee experiences:

- **Planning**: While 68% of leaders believed their organizations had developed a robust sustainability plan, only 21% of employees felt their employer's commitment went beyond superficial efforts.
- **Measurement**: 69% of leaders said they tracked and monitored progress against measurable sustainability goals, yet only 34% of employees considered these goals realistic.
- **Management**: 72% of leaders believed they had the right management in place to balance financial performance and sustainability, but only 50% of employees felt encouraged to consider customers and stakeholders in their daily decision-making.

Addressing these gaps is critical for organizations to foster genuine sustainability leadership and ensure meaningful, long-term impact. These findings suggest a misalignment and lack of communication between leaders and employees. The Deloitte Global study also emphasized the importance of direct engagement and open dialogue with stakeholders. One interviewee highlighted the role of communication in sustainability integration, stating "Quality of dialogue is critical here… We are at a tipping point where investors, auditors, businesses, and others need to collaborate to find solutions and address challenges. It is okay to disagree, but we need to have dialogue" (Cleveland et al., 2023). By fostering transparent conversations and stakeholder collaboration, organizations can bridge the gap between leadership vision and employee experience, ultimately driving more effective sustainability integration.

To drive meaningful change in sustainability leadership, organizations must actively engage all stakeholders. The University of Tampa exemplifies this approach by adopting a multi-faceted, multidisciplinary sustainability strategy that involves the entire university community. For instance, the Lowth Entrepreneurship Center at the Sykes College of Business hosted an Entrepreneur Speaker Series panel in March, featuring an industry expert, a student leader from an environmental group, and a faculty member from another college specializing in environmental studies. Organizations must cultivate a culture of sustainability by fostering collaboration across diverse stakeholders, ensuring that sustainability becomes an integral part of their operations and decision-making.

Closing Thoughts

Marcus Aurelius did not preach about leadership-he led by example. His reflections continue to offer timeless lessons, guiding leaders through action rather than words. In line with Aurelius's wisdom, the path to sustainable leadership demands action. Leaders must move beyond greenwashing by: (1) Actively integrating sustainability into their long-term strategy and transparently reporting sustainability ROI; (2) Prioritizing transparency and accountability; and (3) Engaging all stakeholders to drive meaningful change. True sustainability leadership is not about saying the right things — it is about doing the right things. Only through tangible actions can organizations ensure that their environmental and social commitments lead to lasting and measurable impact.

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1 For more information on the leadership lessons from Marcus Aurelius, refer to the article published in the Tampa Bay Leadership Review, Fall 2021 issue.

2 Net zero refers to a state in which the greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere are balanced by removal out of the atmosphere.

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