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Review Article

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The Digital Generation's Existential Quarantine: A Manifesto for the Re Humanization of Work

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Summary

The Reconnection Manifesto

In a world of digital hyper-connection and relational isolation, we diagnose an **"existential quarantine"** that defines our generation: technologically brilliant, yet humanly impoverished. This manifesto/reflection does not condemn progress, but demands a **revolution of presence.**

Through a profound analysis of the paradox between tools that unite and practices that isolate—validated by international experience in procurement, management, and operations—I argue that the future of work will be determined by a crucial choice: will we continue to build professional environments that deepen isolation, or will we create spaces that cultivate community?

The solution lies not in abandoning technology, but in its **re-humanization.** The proposal is a counter-movement based on four pillars: reclaiming physical presence with intentionality, reinventing training to include relational literacy, creating new rituals of authentic belonging, and embracing slowness as a professional virtue.

The future is not inevitable—it is a daily construction. **"Inevitability is the illusion of those who have stopped acting. Daily construction is the courage of those who, even without guarantees, lay the foundations of tomorrow."** Human reconnection must cease to be a "soft skill" and become the fundamental competence, the new foundation for meaningful careers and lives of depth.

The final word is a verb of action and hope: **Resurgence.** And human thought and action must merge into a single purpose: **To Be Reborn.**

The Fundamental Paradox of Our Time

My critique springs from an uncomfortable observation: we have built the age of hyper-connection, yet we live an epidemic of relational loneliness. This **"existential quarantine"** is not a poetic metaphor, but a clinical diagnosis of the condition of a generation that masters the digital universe but feels profoundly alienated in the analog world. We are the first generation that can instantly contact anyone on the planet, yet often hesitates to greet the neighbor next door. Social media promised community, but frequently delivered toxic comparison and superficial connections. Collaborative work tools enabled global projects, but emptied offices of the serendipity of casual encounters.

This lived contradiction runs deeper than it first appears. It is not merely about using our phones too much or being addicted to social networks. It is about a structural shift in how we build meaning, establish trust, and experience belonging. The technology we created to connect us has subtly and progressively become a barrier between us and the direct experience of the world and of others.

We live in a state of permanent partial attention. We are physically in one place, but mentally in several. In conversations, we give the person in front of us a diluted version of our attention, while reserving a significant part of our cognitive capacity to monitor notifications, think about digital responses, or simply for the background noise of constant connectivity. This phenomenon has a name: divided presence. And its cost is the erosion of relational quality. Conversations become functional transactions, relationships become logistical management, and friendship transforms into a series of interactions scheduled in a digital calendar.

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What concerns me most in this dynamic is how it is shaping the new generations of professionals. We are training individuals brilliant at managing digital tools, yet often illiterate in reading emotional nuances, managing face-to-face conflicts, and building trust through consistent presence. They enter the job market with impressive digital portfolios and resumes full of technical skills, but they often lack the most basic relational muscles: knowing when to be silent, how to truly listen, how to navigate the productive discomfort of a face-to-face disagreement.

The professional environment of the future, paradoxically, increasingly demands precisely these competencies we are systematically unlearning. In a world where purely technical work will be increasingly automated, the distinctive human value resides exactly in what machines cannot replicate: relational creativity, contextual empathy, the capacity to build cohesive teams, leadership that inspires through authentic presence. And yet, we continue to train people to compete with machines on the machines' turf, while neglecting the field where only humans can play.

This existential quarantine manifests in particular ways in the professional context. I see young professionals capable of managing complex projects through five different platforms simultaneously, yet feeling anxiety at the prospect of having to give a presentation to a room of real people. I see teams that communicate efficiently through digital channels, but cannot build the trust necessary to innovate riskily. I see organizations that invest in state-of-the-art collaborative software, but whose culture is impoverished of the in-person rituals that create cohesion and a shared sense of mission.

Remote and hybrid work, which is here to stay, accentuates this paradox even further. On one hand, it offers precious flexibility and autonomy. On the other, it can create a sense of professional isolation that undermines well-being and creativity. Video call meetings solve logistical problems, but rob us of all the richness of pre- and post-meeting communication—those moments in hallways, shared coffees, side conversations where the best ideas are often born. We have created efficiency at the expense of serendipity, and now we wonder why innovation seems harder.

But perhaps the most subtle and worrying aspect of this dynamic is how it is altering our very relationship with work itself. When all work becomes a series of digital tasks to complete, we lose the connection to purpose, to real impact, to the people affected by what we do. Work becomes abstract, disconnected, a sequence of inputs and outputs in a system. This abstraction is perhaps the deepest form of professional alienation—not the alienation from the product of our labor, as Marx described, but the alienation from the very act of working in community.

The question that arises, then, is: how do we break this cycle? How do we escape this existential quarantine without returning to an idealized past that never existed?
The answer, I believe, lies not in rejecting technology, but in its RE-humanization. We need to develop a new literacy—a digitally conscious relational literacy. This means learning to use digital tools in ways that serve and deepen human connections, rather than replacing them. It means creating professional spaces that are hybrid not just logistically, but philosophically—spaces that integrate the best of the digital with the indispensable of the analog.

In organizations, this translates into policies that protect and value quality in-person time, not as a relic of the past, but as a strategic investment in the company's social capital. In teams, it means developing communication protocols that recognize when a conversation needs to happen face-to-face, when an email suffices, and when shared silence is more productive than any meeting.

At an individual level, it demands from us a new kind of discipline: the discipline of presence. The ability, in a world of infinite distractions, to choose to be fully where we are. To give the person in front of us the rare gift of our complete attention. To resist the temptation of relational multitasking, which makes us be everywhere without truly being anywhere.

This change begins with a simple but profound recognition: technology is a tool, not an end in itself. Digital tools were created to serve us, not for us to serve them. When we invert this relationship, we lose something fundamental of our humanity.

The professional future I want to see is not one where we work isolated in our homes, communicating only through screens. But it is also not one where we return to offices that are little more than factories of physical presence. The future that seems desirable to me is one where we create work environments that recognize the complexity of human nature—our need for both autonomy and belonging, both efficiency and meaning, both digital connection and genuine human contact.

This reconnection will not be easy. It will require us to question deeply ingrained habits, challenge social norms that have settled in without us truly choosing them, and have the courage to create new rhythms of work and life. But the prize is worth the effort: nothing less than the recovery of the richness of shared human experience, in work and beyond.

At its core, my critique and concern spring from a deep conviction: no matter how sophisticated our tools become, no matter how intelligent our machines, nothing substitutes the ordinary miracle of two human consciousnesses meeting, fully present, in the same space and time. It is in this mysterious intersection that creativity is born, trust is built, and true innovation is forged. And it is precisely this intersection that we are neglecting in our enthusiasm for digital efficiency.

The challenge of our generation, especially for those now entering the professional world, will be precisely this: to build bridges between these two worlds. To be masters of both code and eye contact, both algorithm and handshake, both the digital network and the human network. It is in this synthesis, I believe, that lies not only the future of work, but the future of a society still worth inhabiting.

When the "Jobs" Arrive with Society

My concern sharpens when I think about the professional future taking shape. The "jobs" that are arriving bring with them both

promises and existential dangers:
The expression "the jobs that are arriving" always sounds to me like something inevitable, a force of nature we must deal with, rather than a reality we can shape. And perhaps that is the first problem: we see the future of work as a destiny predetermined by technological progress, instead of a path we can, and should, choose to build collectively.

The Dictatorship of Flexibility
When I look at remote and hybrid work, I see a promise that has become paradoxical. It was presented to us as the great liberation—freed from offices, rigid schedules, daily commutes. And in many ways, it brought genuine freedom. But I now observe how that freedom can transform into a new form of subtle imprisonment. The home, which should be a refuge, becomes an office. The sofa where we rested becomes a workstation. The bedroom where we slept now hosts important meetings. The physical boundaries that protected personal life from professional life disappear, and with them disappears the ability to truly disconnect.

What worries me most about this "flexibility" is how it dilutes not only spatial boundaries but also temporal ones. The work schedule, which once had clear beginnings and ends, transforms into a continuum. We answer emails at midnight, participate in meetings on Saturday, check messages during dinner with family. The justification is always the same: "now I can work whenever I want." But the frequently inverted truth is: "now I am expected to work always."

This professional intrusion into the private sphere has profound consequences for our mental health and the quality of our relationships. When work enters the home, literally and metaphorically, it steals from us the spaces of psychological recovery we need. There is no transition between roles, no cognitive breaks, no moments of pure non-productive existence. The future will undoubtedly bring more jobs that challenge these boundaries. The question is whether we will develop the collective wisdom to create new frontiers that protect what is essentially human.

The Paradoxical Competence
I observe one of the most intriguing paradoxes of our professional time: in a world where technical knowledge becomes obsolete at a dizzying speed, the most valuable competencies are paradoxically the oldest, the most human. Empathy, collaborative creativity, emotional intelligence, the capacity to build trust—these are the true currencies of the professional future. Machines can learn to code, analyze data, execute complex tasks. But they have not yet learned to console someone in suffering, to mediate a conflict with sensitivity, to inspire a team through a shared vision.

The problem, and here my concern reaches its sharpest point, is that we are systematically unlearning these competencies precisely when we need them most. Our digital environment, with all its promises of connection, is atrophying our most basic relational muscles. We replace deep conversations with quick messages, face-to-face encounters with efficient video calls, coffee breaks where alliances were built with infinite scroll on social networks where we build personas.

I see young professionals entering the market with impressive resumes—mastery of multiple programming languages, certifications in sophisticated tools, impeccable digital portfolios. But they often lack basic human interaction skills: how to start a meaningful conversation, how to read non-verbal signals, how to navigate the productive discomfort of a face-to-face disagreement, how to build trust through consistency and vulnerability.

This disconnect between what the market will value and what we are cultivating generates professionals brilliantly equipped to compete with machines on the machines' turf, but disarmed for the field where only humans can play. We train experts in digital communication who sometimes do not know how to communicate, project managers who do not know how to manage emotions, technical leaders who do not know how to lead people.

Toxic Productivity
We live under the empire of productivity. We are sold the idea that we can, and should, be productive anywhere, anytime. This notion has transformed from virtue into tyranny. Omnipresent productivity is not emancipation—it is exhaustion disguised as efficiency.

What this culture of constant productivity steals from us is precisely what we most need to be truly creative and innovative: time for deep attention, space for contemplative thought, the silence necessary for original ideas to germinate. Instead, we transform into response machines—to emails, notifications, messages, requests. Our professional worth is measured by our capacity to react, not by our capacity to reflect.

This dynamic is particularly perverse because it feeds on our own anxiety. In an uncertain job market, constant productivity seems to offer security. We respond faster, work more hours, show more availability—all in the hope of becoming indispensable. But what we really create is a culture of fatigue, where weariness becomes an emblem of commitment, and burnout is misunderstood as dedication.

Future professionals risk becoming, as I fear, notification operators. Human beings reduced to their capacity to process inputs and generate outputs, gradually losing the contemplative dimension that is the source of all true innovation. When every moment must be productive, there is no space for creative leisure, mental wandering, for the casual connection that generates the brightest ideas.

What this toxic productivity most compromises is our capacity for meaningful connection. When we are constantly dividing attention between multiple tasks and stimuli, we cannot offer full presence to anyone—not to colleagues, not to clients, not to our own families. The quality of our professional (and personal) relationships degrades, becoming transactional, superficial, functional. We lose the ability to build the bonds of trust that are the foundation of any meaningful collaboration.

This triad of challenges—the dictatorship of flexibility, the paradoxical competence, toxic productivity—are not isolated phenomena. They feed each other, creating a professional

ecosystem that promises freedom but generates isolation, that values human competencies but discourages their development, that celebrates productivity but undermines creativity.

The future of work unfolding before us is not inevitable. We can choose to create professional environments that balance flexibility with boundaries, that cultivate both technical and human competencies, that value both productivity and depth. But that choice requires that we first recognize these paradoxes, name them, understand how they are shaping us.

The great question, I believe, is not how we adapt to these "jobs that are arriving," but how we humanize them. How we ensure that the future of work serves people, and not the opposite. How we create professions that allow us not only to produce, but also to connect; not only to work, but also to live.

My Vision: A Necessary Counter-Movement

I am not anti-technology. I am pro-humanity. My critique springs from the conviction that we can do better. Here is where I believe we must focus our attention:

This is not a position of reactionary resistance, but of propositional affirmation. I fully recognize the benefits the digital revolution has brought—the democratization of knowledge, the elimination of geographical barriers, efficiency in processes that once consumed precious time. My argument is not against progress, but in favor of progress that does not make us regress as relational beings. I believe we are at a point in history where we can, and should, pause to ask: where are we really going? And more importantly: do we truly want to get there?

Reclaim Physical Presence with Intentionality

I observe with concern how workspaces are increasingly becoming the physical transposition of the digital universe: isolated cells, screens as barriers, interaction reduced to the strictly functional. This is a fundamental design error. The spaces where we work are not mere containers for people and computers—they are relational ecosystems that shape how we think, collaborate, and create.

The architecture of the future should not replicate digital isolation, but rather create its antidote. Imagine buildings conceived specifically for what machines cannot provide: the serendipity of casual encounter, the magic of improvised conversation, the collective energy that arises when people share physical space. I am not talking about chaotic open-plan offices that are just another form of sensory overload. I speak of intentional spaces—cozy corners that invite deep conversations, creativity rooms with writable walls, indoor gardens where one can think while walking.

Breaks, so often neglected as dead time, should be redesigned as true mental pauses. Not five minutes to check the phone, but fifteen minutes for a shared coffee without devices, for a brief walk in pairs, for a moment of collective silence that allows attention to reset. These breaks are not lost productivity—they are an investment in social capital, mental health, creativity.

Physical presence with intentionality also means rethinking when we are physically together. Perhaps it is not necessary for everyone to be in the office five days a week. But when we are, let it be with a clear relational purpose: for the creative collaboration that needs the energy of the room, for conflict resolution that benefits from direct human contact, for building trust born of shared experiences.

Reinvent Professional Training

Our educational system is out of sync with the reality I have described. We continue to train people as if technical knowledge were sufficient, when it is increasingly evident that it is only the necessary half. We need a radical reinvention of professional training—not to replace digital skills, but to complement them with equally sophisticated human skills.

This new training would include disciplines that today seem anachronistic, but are precisely what distinguishes us from the artificial intelligences we have created. Active listening not as a theoretical concept, but as laboratory practice—learning to listen not just to words, but to silences, gestures, unverbalized emotions. Attention management not as a productivity tip, but as a mental discipline trained like a muscle. Non-violent communication not as a conflict technique, but as a way of being in relationship that prevents conflict.

The universities of the future will have courses in applied philosophy to work—not academic philosophy, but lived philosophy: how to find meaning in daily work, how to navigate real ethical dilemmas, how to develop practical wisdom. They will have laboratories for an ethics of care, where one learns that professional excellence lies not in dehumanization, but in the capacity to care for clients, colleagues, communities. They will have practices of presence—meditation, mindfulness, anchoring techniques—not as wellness trends, but as essential cognitive skills for a world of infinite distractions.

This training would not be optional or complementary. It would be as central as learning to code or analyze data. For what use is a professional who masters all digital tools if they cannot truly connect with colleagues, understand the unarticulated needs of clients, or lead with empathy?

Create New Rituals of Belonging

The old corporate culture, with its forced team-building and obligatory events, is effectively dead. And with good reason—it was often artificial, disconnected from people's real needs, more about conformity than genuine connection. But in rejecting these empty rituals, we risk rejecting the deep human need they tried (poorly) to satisfy: the need for belonging, for ritual, for shared meaning.

We need not less ritual, but better ritual—authentic, voluntary, meaningful. Rituals born not from HR directives, but from the real needs of teams. Perhaps they are shared silences at the start of important meetings, a moment to center collective attention before beginning work. Perhaps they are meals without devices where everything but work is discussed. Perhaps they are volunteer projects together, not as an opportunistic photo for social media, but as a transformative experience that creates bonds through common service.

These new rituals recognize a profound truth: meaningful work is not done only with individual competencies, but with collective

cohesion. And cohesion is not born from organizational charts or mission statements, but from shared experiences, mutual vulnerability, moments that mark the "we" instead of the "I."

Modern ritual can also be technologically conscious. Perhaps it is a monthly "offline day" where the whole team works without digital devices, rediscovering analog tools and direct conversation. Perhaps it is a "closing ceremony" at the end of important projects, celebrating not just the result, but the process, the people, the lessons learned.

Embrace Slowness as a Professional Virtue

In a world obsessed with speed—instant responses, immediate deliveries, exponential growth—my proposal seems almost heretical: we need to rescue the virtue of slowness. Not the slowness of laziness or inefficiency, but the slowness of deep thought, careful deliberation, intentional reflection.

This slowness is not a luxury—it is a competitive necessity in a complex world. The most difficult problems we face are not solved with quick answers, but with profound questions. The most significant innovations are not born from haste, but from incubation time. The wisest decisions are not the fastest, but the most considered.

The smartest organizations of the future will understand something that is still counterintuitive today: that constant speed is the enemy of quality. That strategic pauses are not a waste of time, but an investment in clarity. That shorter, less frequent meetings often produce better results than overloaded calendars.

Even more radical: these organizations will understand that the quality of human relationships within the company is not a "soft factor" that is nice but dispensable. It is the fundamental determinant of the quality of work produced. Teams that truly know each other, trust each other, feel psychologically safe, are more creative, more resilient, more innovative. And these relationships are not built at the speed of email, but in the slowness of conversation, the patience of listening, the time of being together without a set agenda.

This vision is not utopian. I already see signs of it in pioneering organizations that have realized that true capital lies not in machines or software, but in people and the relationships between them. That invest as much in connection cultures as in communication technologies. That measure success not only in financial metrics, but in relational well-being, sense of purpose, quality of interactions.

The counter-movement I propose is not a return to the past. It is an advance towards a more balanced, more human, more sustainable future. It is the conviction that we can have the best of both worlds: the efficiency of technology and the depth of human connection. Not one at the expense of the other, but both in synergy.

This is the vision that keeps me hopeful: that our generation can be the last to live the dichotomy between digital and human, and the first to create a truly integrated synthesis. But that synthesis requires intentional choices, courage to question the status quo, and the conviction that a more human future is not only desirable—it is possible.

Not a Conclusion, But a Beginning: From Quarantine to Reconnection

I see this "existential quarantine" not as condemnation, but as a potential turning point. The digital generation, having experienced the limits of virtual connection, is perhaps more prepared than any other to lead a revolution of human reconnection.

This conclusion is not a closure, but a threshold. I speak now not only of the theoretical reflection I have developed, but of the practical experience that validated it. This reflection emerges from a journey simultaneously professional and academic. The path of recent years forged my perspective on this problematic; however, it was in the last semester of 2025—when a Nordic professional proposed an unexpected challenge to me: an immersion in the areas of procurement, quality management, sales leadership, and operational development—that this perspective gained definitive clarity.

I accepted immediately. Not only for the professional content, but because I understood that it would be the perfect ground to test, in the real world, the ideas I had until then developed only on a theoretical plane.

This journey took me through five countries—from the structural elegance of Vienna to the warm disorder of Larnaca, from the historical weight of Athens to the resilient transformation of Bratislava, from the futuristic vertigo of Shenzhen and, finally, back to Austria—but always with a double focus: to learn the operating systems of the modern professional world, while observing the relational systems that sustain or undermine them.

At each stop, in the factories, sales offices, quality management rooms, logistics operations, I took with me the same questions:
How does one manage procurement when human relations are reduced to digital transactions?

How does one lead sales teams when human contact is replaced by CRM algorithms?
How does one develop operational quality when collaborators are physically or emotionally isolated?

In Shenzhen, the epicenter of global manufacturing, I witnessed the paradox in its rawest form. Factories where procurement systems are millimeter-precise, but where workers rarely look each other in the eye. Quality systems so precise they detect micron errors, but fail to detect human wear and tear. In Vienna and Bratislava, I observed how different cultures approach the same operational challenge—the Austrians with their structured relational efficiency, the Slovaks with their more organic relational adaptability.

What this multinational experience taught me was fundamental: the best procurement practices, the most sophisticated sales strategies, the most advanced quality systems, the most innovative operational developments—they all fail when the human relations that should sustain them are in existential quarantine. A perfect procurement system does not work if suppliers and buyers do not trust each other. A brilliant sales strategy does not succeed if clients do not feel truly understood. A quality system is useless if workers do not care enough to implement it with excellence.

The future "jobs" that are arriving—and which I explored in these specific disciplines—confirmed my initial thesis: they can be the battlefield or the laboratory of relational transformation. It depends fundamentally on us. In each country, I found examples of both: managers who use technology to deepen isolation, and leaders who use it to facilitate more authentic connections.

My vision, now tested in the "trenches" of the real professional world, remains simple but becomes more urgent: all these professional competencies—procurement, quality management, sales leadership, operational development—are, at their core, disguised relational competencies. Technology should serve to bring us closer to our humanity, not to distance us from it. In Bratislava with Vladimir Cuculic, in a logistics center with quality challenges, I proposed a radical approach: instead of more digital controls, we created in-person quality circles where workers could share experiences and vulnerabilities. Quality indices improved more in one month than in the previous six.

The manifesto I propose is not a romantic return to the past—the procurement of the past had its own transparency problems; the sales of the past had their manipulations. It is rather a courageous path to a future where we are truly connected—not just through devices, but through shared vulnerability in operational development, through mindful presence in quality management, through authentic presence in sales leadership.

This journey confirmed something fundamental for me: human reconnection will not be a "soft skill" among others. It will be the fundamental competence that underpins all others. In Athens, in a company with chronic procurement problems, we discovered the problem was not in the systems, but in the complete lack of trust relationships between departments. We began to solve the problem not with new software, but with shared dinners between teams. The procurement improved, yes, but the true miracle was seeing people rediscover the pleasure of working together.

I returned to Austria, where my journey had begun, bringing not only enriched professional knowledge, but practical proof that the ideas I had developed had real foundation. The "existential quarantine" I had diagnosed was not an abstraction—I saw it in the tired faces of Shenzhen workers, in the loneliness of Bratislava managers, in the isolation of sales professionals in Vienna. But I also saw the first signs of healing—in the quality circles of Larnaca, in the in-person meetings of Athens, in the intentional coffee breaks we implemented in Bratislava.

The future of work—the one arriving with urgency in all these professional areas—will be shaped by those who understand this simple but profound truth: procurement is about trust relationships, quality is about shared care, sales are about mutual understanding, operational development is about creative collaboration. Technology can optimize these processes, but only human relationships can make them truly excellent.

I end where I began, but transformed by this dual journey—professional and existential. The Nordic challenge I immediately accepted revealed itself to be much more than a career opportunity: it was the perfect laboratory to test and validate the vision I share here. And it confirmed for me that the path to reconnection is not only desirable—it is practically inevitable for any organization that truly wants to prosper in the complex world to come. Because in the end, I discovered in five countries, in four distinct professional areas, the same universal truth: machines can process, but only humans can connect. And it is in this connection that the true future of work resides.

Final Act: Three Truths for the Tomorrow We Build Today
About the Future we will have:
The future will be a choice before it is a destination. If we passively accept the digital colonization of our humanity, we will receive a world of sterile efficiency and empty connections. But if we rise up, with heart and conscience, against this existential quarantine, we can forge a new era: one in which technology does not replace us, but amplifies us; does not isolate us, but interweaves us with greater depth.

About the Future we want:
We do not want a return, but a renaissance. A future where "artificial intelligence" is complemented by "human wisdom." Where tools serve encounter, not replace it. Where work is a place of belonging, creativity, and meaning, not just productivity. Where presence is our greatest luxury and deep attention, our greatest competence.

About the Future we have a Right to:
We have a right to more than digital survival. We have a right to human flourishing. We have a right to create, not just consume; to connect, not just communicate; to signify, not just function. We have a right to a professional life that fulfills us without dehumanizing us, that challenges us without shattering us. We have a right to progress that also measures the quality of our gazes and the depth of our shared silences.

This is not utopia. It is urgency. Every decision we make today—to disconnect in order to converse, to look instead of scroll, to meet instead of just send—is a vote for the future we are building. It is not about rejecting tomorrow, but about ensuring that when it arrives, we are still human. Complete humans.

Thus, this manifesto/reflection closes not as a finished chapter, but as a declared beginning. My experiment across five countries was the proof: the future is already being written in the courageous choices of those who dare to live—and work—differently. The final word, implicit in each of these truths, is a verb of action:

Resurgence.
"Resurgence begins when, collectively, we choose to be **Reborn** into our deepest humanity, transforming today's work into the bridge to a truly connected tomorrow."