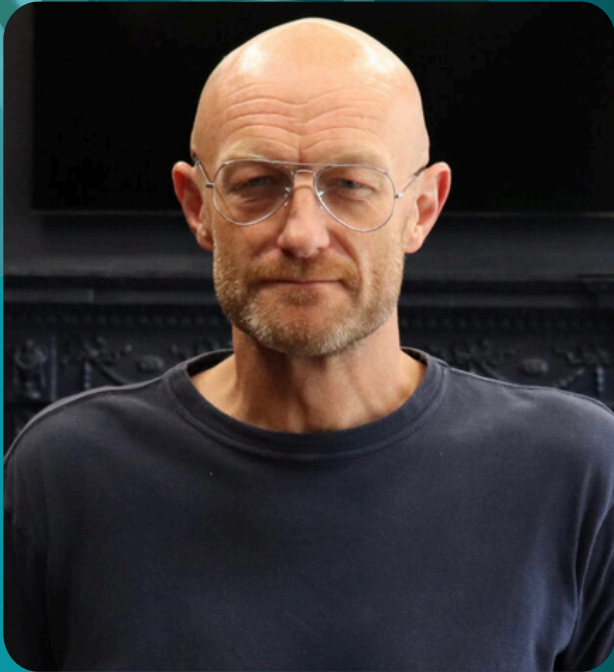


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Get To Know Our Guest

**BOB
SHEARD**

Bob Sheard is a leading brand strategist and practitioner, and the author of *The Brand New Future: How Brands Can Save the World (LID Publishing)*, a book shortlisted for the Business Book Awards that sets out a practical roadmap for building successful brands that contribute to a more just and regenerative world.

As the *founder of the brand design agency FreshBritain*, Bob has designed more than 200 global brands across his career, working with names such as Nike, Levi's, Dr. Martens, Arc'teryx, and New Balance. His approach is defined by going deep to find a brand's truth and the results speak for themselves: FreshBritain helped reposition Dr. Martens around "rebellious self-expression," guiding the brand from €90 million in turnover, amid a double-digit decline, to a €3.5 billion flotation in eleven years.

Today, Bob is widely recognized as one of the most influential voices on what brands are for and what they owe the world.

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HIGHLIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

- **KG:** You've had such an interesting career. A brand strategist, C suite advisor, founder, sustainability advocate, author, educator, mentor, just to name a few. *Is there a red thread that connects all of this for you? What was the driving force behind all that you do?*
- **BOB:** *The red thread is opportunism, just seeing where I think I can add value and going there. Others would say it's a heavy dose of ADHD, continuously moving on to the next thing. I'd say sort of it's really the product of a restless mind, ambition. It's part restless mind.*
- **BOB:** *For someone who used to work on a market stall in Bradford, it's an exciting prospect to see where that kind of thinking and that the way my brain works and see where that will take me. so that and it has taken me into education, into boardrooms, into publishers and yeah, just that's the red thread really.*
- **KG:** *At some point you must have made a conscious decision that, well, I'm going to do this. I'm going to pursue the curiosity of my mind. When did that happen?*
- **BOB:** *I went to a school, comprehensive school in Halifax, West Yorkshire, which has since been closed down and I was studying for my A levels. I did my A levels and I did four and I did them in economics art, general studies and history and I got three Es, so just about scrape to pass and then one A. And that A along with another guy at the school was the first A our school had ever got at A level. And they were beaming that the school had managed to get this A. And so at that point I realized maybe there's a brain inside there somehow that can, once I know where the goalposts are, I can figure out a way.*



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- **BOB:** Retook my A levels, so I got sufficient N grades to get to the London College of Fashion. And it was a very interesting conversation to go onto the building site to tell the guys I'd got entry into the London College of Fashion, because I kept that secret. So was at that point you kind of realize, I've got the ability to find a way. *So then I realized, I didn't quite know, but it's a continuous journey, isn't it? It's just trying to figure out that sometimes your thinking thoughts are the people don't have and they add value.*
- **KG:** *I've always wondered, you're a branding expert, and I always wonder what that does to a child's mind to be categorized or branded, if you'll permit, that they are a certain way, that they should follow a certain path. And for that child to break those shackles and then decide to be creative and pursue and make up a path as they go along?*
- **BOB:** You've got these three brothers who went to this local primary school, couldn't speak a word of Indian English, didn't have a great time in the industrial North, but managed to find a way to create the most amazing careers and what really struck me was I went to Chicago and the three brothers were there and all their kids were there but for the first time. I said, the really interesting powerful thing is the harvest of your mother's and father's sacrifice in being first generation. I just think that's such a powerful argument for immigration that actually there is a dynamic dynamo type power in a second generation immigrant to not want their parents life to be a sacrifice in vain and therefore they go a bit further, a bit faster to make their lives worthy of the sacrifice of their parents. And so I just don't think anyone makes the case, the economic case for that enough.



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- **KG:** You're a futurist and you talk about how countries have brands, and those brands can change a people, a cultural ethos of the future itself of the entire planet. When I think about this vision, it comes across to me as very humanist, very universal, a kind and compassionate one. *In that context, I was curious about the theme of this podcast being ethics and integrity, what do these terms mean to you?*
- **BOB:** *I think with ethics, that's kind of our moral compass. That's guiding principles and protocols of our life. And integrity is how we deploy our behavior to meet that compass. So that's our moral codes, if you like. So moral compass, ethics, integrity is moral code.*
- **BOB:** *Ethics for me is all about saying what you're going to do and do what you're going to say. There's a level of authenticity and intent around it. Integrity is being transparent, open and honest when you don't match your ethics. It's all about authenticity. It's all about being transparent and open. I think true integrity is like acknowledging we're all human at the end of the day. We all have frailties, vulnerabilities, fragilities, and sometimes you don't match your ethical code. And I suppose being honest and authentic about when you've not met your own standards is where integrity lives.*
- **KG:** Perhaps an organization or leader may need to make a decision one way, and when it doesn't feel like it's aligned. With ethics, stated ethics, then what you're saying is integrity would help you understand that transparency about that decision, that call between the push and pull between two values or two types of stakeholders, integrity would guide you in being transparent about it. And that's that's the way to manage that kind of complexity.

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- **BOB:** *It's one of the biggest problems in politics right now. The way we've designed politics means that in terms of leadership, they're always seeking perfection. And so it's very, very, very, very difficult for them to make a mistake and admit to the mistake or be inconsistent, but then admit to the inconsistency because they have to present some kind of political perfection. And what they forget is that we don't, we don't love perfection, we respect it, but we don't really love it.*
- **BOB:** *Actually if they just were honest and had integrity about the gap that exists between their moral code and their moral compass, then we're more likely to believe them and more likely to follow them.*
- **KG:** You've had such a fascinating career. one of the things that holds my attention, I'd love to hear more about your adventures, advising leaders doing spectacular things and creating whole new things that didn't exist before, that changed the course of a country, of a brand, of the story of a particular product in all of these experiences, *was there a time when you personally felt challenged by an ethical dilemma? What was the lesson you learned so that we can learn along with you?*
- **BOB:** For the ethical dilemma, I'm just a little guy in a room asking for my fees, which were agreed, which are basically a rounding error, you know, on a sovereign wealth fund and on a private equity fund. It's just nuts. And I was faced with having to cut costs and we're having to say, we've got to now, look at our headroom and how do we cut costs? Well, in a business like mine, you've got your offices and you've got your people.



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- **BOB:** I went to a party that night and it was a 54th birthday party and I met a guy there that used to work for me. He runs brands and everything and he's a bit of a name. *He just said, you know what, the three years I worked for you were the best three years of my career and your team are amazing, you've got the best team I've ever worked with.*
- **BOB:** *It was a really poignant moment because I was like, I'm having to decide to make these cuts and the easy thing to do is first, know, last in first out kind of thing. And I just thought, I'm not gonna do that. I'm just gonna do everything I can do, whether it's bringing in my own personal money to keep the team together and do what we have to do to keep our team together, to keep our talent together. Cause at the end of the day, without them, we've got nothing. We've got a history, we've got a heritage, but it's without the team, without the people. We don't have anything. And I'm not going to let the bad decisions, I'm being generous there, the bad decisions of my clients forced me to make bad decisions with regard to my people.*
- **KG:** *As a business leader, has this informed your radar for bad clients? Are you now able to discern faster red flags and say, these are the kinds of people I won't work with?*
- **BOB:** *I'm a people pleaser. I don't necessarily see what I should see straight away. The process of having a conversation and dialogue and the intent to pay means everything. And the fact we talk, you know, once a month about it and there's been no angst, there's been no anger. It's just them having to deal with it the way they have to deal with it and we have to deal with it the way we have to deal with it. But we've had continuing conversations. The worst thing that can happen is when, which happened with the fund, they just stop email, they stop being in touch and you're left in a vacuum of knowledge and a vacuum of conversation and you just feel not loved. You feel abused and not loved.*



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- **BOB:** *Whereas with the guys in New York, I still felt valued by them even though they couldn't pay me the value of my work in the way I wanted to, but I will get the money. And if it takes another three years, we'll still have, we'll get it eventually, but we'll still have maintained really strong, authentic and mutually respectful relationships.*
- **KG:** *What are your observations on the real world ethical dilemmas most relevant today? And for professionals out there in in whatever sector that are grappling with such situations, what would you advise them?*
- **BOB:** *There is a continual and sometimes very tiring debate now about sustainability and how we create sustainable life on Earth so we prevent things like climate change. My observation of the debate is entirely one-sided because it deals with the supply and production of things and it tries to turn that supply and that production into sustainable methodologies or regenerative methodologies. And for me, whilst that's important, it's the other side of the debate where we will get the solution and the other side of the debate is not in the supply, it's in the demand. It's not in the production, it's in the consumption.*
- **BOB:** *Generation Z will become the biggest global economic power by 2040. And that, think, globally, they'll be the first generation that will be more defined by what they know and what they do than what they own and what they have. So if we can lean into that, that there will be a whole consumer group more defined by their knowledge and their experiences than by what they own and what they have then that can help change demand. And if we can lean into that and redesign demand in that way, then global demand will be much less for things and much more for knowledge, intelligence and experiences.*



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- **BOB:** *Fashion is based on planned obsolescence. The world can't take planned obsolescence anymore. The product model is based on perfection. The brand model is based on lifestyle and the value model is based entirely on products. We have to change the product model to be less about perfection and more about imperfection.*
- **BOB:** *There's windows full of lifestyle photography and it doesn't work. It's all fake lifestyle. It's storytelling that is mythical and where it's going to move towards is going to move from lifestyle to purposeful life. We're going to move from storytelling to story doing.*
- **BOB:** *We rolled brand called Fourclas, entirely regeneratively manufactured and sourced. But they said to me, Bob, how do we grow now and make 20 % less products? And I was like, okay, that's a tough one, but you're not allowed to put the prices up. And so I went back to my friend, the brother from Berry. Here's how you grow without making things. You use your audience, which is your goal and you start to create pathways of growth through getting fit for alpinism, physio for alpinism, nutrients for alpinism, all those are pathways to growth. The gold which is your audience, your scalable authority which is alpinism, and you can then grow and not make more things. So you create a kind of a marketplace.*
- **BOB:** *That's how I think using that kind of model is how we can start to transform industries like fashion, because it used to be that fashion was ahead of everybody else in creating the change that everyone else followed in culture.*

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- **BOB:** There were a couple of people there that were having a very solid dig at Elon Musk getting his trillion payoff at Tesla. And I let them all talk around the table and they're all vilifying him. I'm not an apologist for Musk, *but the principle of somebody who can turn an entire industry from its reliance on fossil fuels and flip it onto renewables should get paid whatever that value is that creates, irrespective of whether it's Musk or not. And by the way, whilst you're decrying him, automotive has done far more to get ahead of history than fashion has. So clean out your own closet first. And so that's where I'm at with those kinds of conversations.*
- **BOB:** *The priority is actually profitability. Nothing happens unless it makes a profit. We have to figure out how we generate profitable growth, but above the economic threshold for purposeful economic life but below the ecological threshold for unsustainable life.*
- **KG:** If one looked at the priority of creating shareholder value, that remains central in most organizations. One of the top priorities at least and if one looked at that you can see that there are many organizations that are providing that while still continuing to engage in sustainability and employee well being. *Would you have one or two examples that you could share as case studies?*
- **BOB:** I found quite distressing to listen to was an interview with the CEO of H&M and the sort of distressing part and it was very powerful stuff, then one of the questions was around sustainability. And he said, well, our initiatives will be governed by legislation, which is a very standard sort of thing to say. it's but it basically says I'm not going to do anything until I'm told I have to.

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- **BOB:** *I found that really distressing because he was the CEO. You're the leader of a tribe of both employees, but you're the chief and leader of a tribe of people that buy your stuff and people that grow up. You have got powerful influence, powerful access. You've got powerful symbolic influence and material influence. So for you to say, I'm going to wait and see what legislation comes out was really distressing.*
- **BOB:** *And so the frustrating thing when I heard the dude from H&M was he's waiting for the politicians. That's not how it works. We all each have to take our responsibility. And when I look at the world today. And I see, what I can do. What can I do? And I think, what the things that have really damaged the lifestyle of the people I love are COVID, climate change, and conflict.*
- **BOB:** *The power we have as individuals. It brings into focus the importance of brands in helping shape the space for the pragmatists and the realists to move into. And it brings into focus our own personal responsibilities, which is the reason why you're talking to me right now is not because of what I have and it's not because of what I own. You're talking to me right now because of my knowledge and what I do. And that's what we all need to get our heads around is it's all incoming on our own internal meaning systems that if we can start to be more shaped by our knowledge and our experiences and what we do and less interested in the things we own and the things we have then we can shape the future to be the future we want to see. And we can help brands move in that direction, we can help culture move into that direction, and ultimately we can get policy to move there. But it's incumbent on us all as individuals. It's going to be eight billion acts of consumption that will change the way the profit motive works.*



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- **KG:** You talked about how Gen Z as well is going to be the defining generation in this shift. *What's your prognosis? I When you meet young people, are you seeing them recognize this power you're identifying for the within themselves?*
- **BOB:** *I think it's too much responsibility to say it's all on Gen Z. They want to have lived the generous lives that their parents have lived. They want the things their parents have had. They recognize that there is a responsibility in their generation to clean up the mess that our generation and previous generations have left behind, but they also want to enjoy life. So I think we have to all work together in a multi-generational solution.*
- **BOB:** *The short-termism of politics drives me absolutely crazy. I think we have got to look into the long-term. And the long-term truth is that we've got to make as good a decisions as we can make today as brand leaders, as business leaders, as individual consumers. Because our job is to create a window. And it's to create a window so that someone who's not born today, who will live tomorrow, them and their cohort will design the solution using AI, using the technologies of the future that will figure out the solution. Our job isn't to figure out the solution because we've demonstrably proved we can't do it right now. Our job is to encourage everybody to make the right decisions so it gives them the time to create the solution. So we slow down degeneration, we slow down decay, we slow down climate change, so we expand the window for someone who's not born yet to help create the solution.*



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- **KG:** *When you work with organizations and leaders today, what is one tip? The audience that's listening to you around the world and clients that work with you, what's the one tip you'd give them to create these environments for this type of decision making? How do we create environments within organizations where they are aligned with their ethics and integrity, are future focused, and are able to make decisions that are relevant for the future? Do you have a tip?*
- **BOB:** *It's kind of never trust the number. Numbers are very, very abstract and you can only trust the number. You can never trust the number when it's on its own. You can only trust the number when it's got another number before it or another number after it. And then you understand the relationship of the numbers. And so numbers are very abstract.*
- **BOB:** *The thing that shapes human behavior is not numbers. The thing that shapes human behavior is beliefs. If you can start to articulate beliefs and put beliefs at the heart of corporate strategy and see where that takes you as opposed to set some artificial destination based on numbers.*
- **BOB:** *Let's put a man on the moon by the end of the decade, not because it's easy, but because it's hard. And you'll organize lots of different people around a belief that something can be done if you've got a very simple objective. And that's what I would say. Let's start there. Let's start by redesigning corporate strategy so that **it's based on a foundation of beliefs first and let the numbers be the byproduct of the beliefs and the behavior and the culture and go there and do it from the bottom up. Don't do it from the top down. Include everybody in the creation of that belief system and then you'll have amazing culture that will drive the behavior, will drive the results and the numbers will take care of themselves.***



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- **KG:** *Do you feel this is still possible today with multinational corporations with offices scattered all over, multiculturalism, multi-generation workplaces? Is it still possible to build meaning from bottom up and allowing organizations and brands be guided by the people?*
- **BOB:** *Yeah, think not necessarily guided by the people, you include the people so they can see themselves in the story of that company. So ask them. They don't necessarily have to be part of the creation of the solution, but at least if you ask them, they can start to see their own place in the story of that company. And it comes down to the power of storytelling in organizations.*
- **BOB:** *It starts with storytelling. It starts with building a story that people can contribute to and see themselves in and making sure it's got a universal meaning.*
- **KG:** *Is there a quote, book, or advice that has had a profound impact on your way of being? and would you like to share that with us?*
- **BOB:** *There's something my dad said to me, if you do nothing, nothing happens. If you do something, something happens. So do something. Very simple, but very, very powerful.*
- **BOB:** *I've just been reading The Power of Now, and interesting in that he said, you history is simply a succession of now moments. And the future is just a succession of future now moments. What's really important is what you do right now.*

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- **BOB:** *As the power of one in the power of now that can, if that's multiplied by everybody, that can change everything. We've got what's called a white rhino coming at us. COVID was a black swan. Unpredictable, but it changed everything. Climate change isn't a black swan, it's a white rhino. It's big, it's massive, it's coming at us. We just can't get out of the way. So you've got a choice to make. Either you put your head in the sand and hope it doesn't run over you, or you do something about it.*
- **BOB:** *My sort of plea to the world's CEOs, my plea to the world's brand, creative directors, to our political leaders and to us all as consumers is that we all behave together to not get out of the way but to do something about it because it's coming and it's not going away.*
- **KG:** *I have to ask Bob. the panel behind you says votes for women and it's been snagging my eye all through. Tell me a little bit about why you have that as your backdrop?*
- **BOB:** *It's an original Suffragette poster. So I live in a flat populated by daughters. It's just a nice thing to have. I learned the other day actually from an Indian stunt woman who is called Ayesha Hussain. She was telling me that Jiu Jitsu which is one of the things she's an expert at, the suffragettes were experts at because they had to work out how to wrestle the policemen when they were on the floor and protect themselves. And so it's very interesting to know that they were martially trained.*



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