

## Who Gives A Crap's Simon Griffiths on 10 million reasons to build team resilience | [Transcript](#)

**Clare Desira:** One of the biggest concerns for leaders in community focused organisations is the wellbeing of their staff. From the Top Five Movement, this is the Leading Generous Teams podcast, and I'm Clare Desira

As a founder of the Top Five Movement I've worked with thousands of leaders and their teams across 40 countries and while I've seen how exciting it is to lead teams, it can also be extremely challenging. Let alone right now.

The pandemic has had a seismic impact on community focused organizations and it's taking its toll on the people working within them. So this show is dedicated to you. Generous leaders who recognise that the resilience, mindset and mental health of your teams has never been more important.

Hit subscribe now to never miss an episode. And if you're ready to start building your team's resilience or to help them reset, refuel and recharge, head on over to [topfivemovement.com](https://topfivemovement.com) and see what we have to offer. Let's get into it.

Interview

**Clare Desira:** Welcome to another episode of Leading Generous Teams. Today our guest is the wonderful Simon Griffiths, the CEO of Who Gives A Crap. A well-known Aussie brand that sells good-looking forest friendly toilet paper, paper towels and tissues to people all over the world. Who Gives A Crap donates 50% of their profits to help build toilets for those in need. And as much as Simon loves toilet paper, he started the business for its impact. This company's on a mission to improve access to hygiene, clean water, and basic sanitation in developing countries. Since founding the company back in 2013, Who Gives A Crap has donated more than \$10 million dollars. Thank you so much for joining us today, Simon, how are you?

**Simon Griffiths:** Really good. Happy to be here.

**Clare Desira:** Terrific to hear. What a full and exciting eight years you've had with Who Gives A Crap. I know as a team, you felt the pandemic well before many of us even realised it was going to be a thing. So tell us about the impact of the pandemic on your team, right from those early days.

**Simon Griffiths:** Yeah, I think probably even before people would expect. So in January when there were the initial cases in China, we were talking to our production partners, who we have very close relationships with, about the impacts. The Chinese government was thinking about how to start managing the outbreak. So we were really in the thick of it from the end of January. We saw toilet paper sell out in Hong Kong shortly after that. I remember meeting up with someone in February for a coffee in Melbourne who'd just come from Singapore who was telling me about what had happened there and how the Singaporean government was dealing with everything.



# LEADING GENEROUS TEAMS

HOSTED BY CLARE DESIRA

It wasn't until the first day of March that we saw kind of the same thing happen in Australia. And so I think our daily sales kind of doubled that first day of March. Then the second day of March they were up five X, the third day of March 12 X, the fourth day of March 30 to 40 times a regular day of sales, some more than a month in a day, which is not normal at all. I think at that point we realised our systems aren't built to deal with volume fluctuations that big. So we were starting to lose track of how much inventory we had for our subscribers and our business customers. And we want to make sure that our subscribers and our business customers never, ever run out of product again.

So we had to move our store to sold out to basically protect our inventory. When we did that, we set up an email sign up so you could find out when we'd be back in stock. We expected a few thousand people to sign up for that wait list, but we ended up with more than half a million people on there. That was kind of when we knew things were a little bit different to what a regular March of a normal year would look like.

**Clare Desira:** Wow. What a few days! Tell me, what has that impact then been like on your team as a bunch of humans. You've shared before that you are a bunch of humans trying to run a business, and what an important thing to remember. You're also really famous for having this incredibly high retention rate there at Who Gives A Crap. So, what do you do to help their mindset and resilience and mental health of your team to navigate changes of that magnitude?

**Simon Griffiths:** I think this was a really interesting one because, even as an executive team, we were a little bit split on what action to take. Our supply chain and operations side of the business was saying, turn it off. When we're not going to be able to deliver this many orders how the hell are we going to recover from this?

Whereas, our marketing and growth and creative teams were rubbing their mitts together like we'd hit the jackpot! And so it was a really interesting sort of dynamic or split in the business. One side of the business knew that we had our work cracked out for us over the next few weeks in particular. And the other side was thinking about the long-term impact of this and the potential marketing benefit that had come from it. At that moment, our team realised that in a way, this was this moment that, as an online business with a distributed team who were used to working remotely, we'd been training for this moment for the five or six years prior. And so it was our time to shine in a way. And if we could figure out how to crack this problem and get toilet paper to the most people possible, that was ultimately going to result in an amazing donation come end of financial year, because we donate half of our profits to help build toilets in the developing world.

As a result, our team jumped in head first and started working early mornings and late nights, trying to figure out how to crack the problem. And eventually, realised that we could repack our big 48 roll boxes into smaller packs, so we could increase the number of orders that we would be able to ship out.

We hired and trained 25 freelancers in a week so we could triple our customer service volume. And then we set up a secret invitation only version of our website and sent just enough emails every day to bring just enough people through that online store to take our warehouses and our couriers to their maximum daily limits.



# LEADING GENEROUS TEAMS

HOSTED BY CLARE DESIRA

And so we ran this secret online toilet paper club for about eight weeks before we were able to officially come back in stock and at that point emailed over 600,000 people who were on the waitlist, which is a totally crazy phenomenon. And the icing on the cake was coming back in stock.

And then a few weeks later, June 30th 2020, being able to make a \$5.8 million donation, which was this amazing outcome that was the pat on the back for the work that everyone had put in up until that point.

**Clare Desira:** How incredible to have that. You can think of when most teams work together really intensely on a project like that, maybe they get to kick back at the end of it and have a drink and a high five and look back on what they've achieved. And not only did your team get to do that, but then they also get to hand over a cheque for \$5.8 million. What a way to celebrate.

**Simon Griffiths:** Unfortunately, we actually didn't get to have the drink. The sad part of that story is that everyone had worked so hard to get to that point. Our American team we're coming into summer and the case numbers were starting to come down to much lower levels. So people were excited to go on summer holidays, which was great. Our Filipino team were very much in the thick of a deep lockdown and our Melbourne team just went into the start of their second lockdown as we hit the end of June, or not the start of the second lockdown but cases started to skyrocket and we had panic buying kick off, and then eventually the second lockdown was announced.

So no one actually got to meet face to face and have that drink together, which was a pretty sad, unfortunate outcome. But I think probably harder was people had been expecting that at the end of this, they could take some time off and go on holiday and recover. That was certainly the case for our American team, which was great, but our Australian team, most of our team members had holiday plans cancelled.

You know, when you're on holiday in Victoria, you try to go somewhere warm. And when you're told that you can't leave the state, it's a bit of a sad state of affairs in the middle of winter. So people ended up not getting that holiday break that they were expecting. And I think that was what ended up pushing a lot of our team, myself included, really to our limits through particularly August, September was kind of when we're really feeling it.

**Clare Desira:** Yeah, as a fellow Melbournite I hear you with that. So what are you doing to keep your team connected and to really support their mindset and resilience during this time?

**Simon Griffiths:** As I'd said before, we sort of had the advantage over a lot of companies because we had a distributed team. We did have coworking spaces that we would normally bring the team together one to three days a week. In the Philippines because the traffic's so bad our team didn't want to come together on weekdays and they wanted to do it once a month on weekends instead. So we had this advantage where we knew how to work a hundred percent remote. But we were faced with the same challenges as a lot of businesses, that this is not a typical remote environment. You know, people's kids are home from school, there's a lot of other stuff going on outside of work.



# LEADING GENEROUS TEAMS

HOSTED BY CLARE DESIRA

It was a 'work from home during pandemic' rather than the remote environment that we were used to. So we tried a lot of different things to try to build that face time and give people the downtime they needed, but also the time to connect with the other people on the team. We did a lot of stuff that, you know, some of it worked well, some of it didn't work so well, I think mixing extra Zoom calls with drinking alcohol probably was one of the failures where we realised that our team actually didn't need any more screen time together and bringing the alcohol into the mix just wasn't actually all that productive! So that was one of the fails. I think one of the things that we did really well was throughout the entire pandemic where it was affecting our team, was we were taking weekly check-in surveys to see how the team was going and understand how their current levels of productivity were being affected week on week. And we found that towards July, August, September, people were definitely feeling it a lot. They weren't doing their best work. As an executive team, we knew in ourselves that we weren't doing our best work and it was because none of us had taken the time to rest and recover that we really needed. For the Melbourne team because they felt like they couldn't go on holiday somewhere, but right across the business, there was also this feeling of not wanting to take time off and let your other teammates down because we kind of felt like we were in it together.

As an exec team, we realised that that's not a great place to be, no one was doing their best work. We needed to have a circuit breaker to get us through to the holidays at the end of the year. We ended up introducing, with two weeks notice, an extra week off for everyone in the team, which we called our no week and our slow week. So for the no week, we said if you take one day of leave we'll give you four days of leave bonus for free. So, essentially an extra week off. The second week, the entire company will have no formal standing meetings. So, everything in your calendar will be cancelled and we'll have half the company on the no week while the other half is on this slow week. And then the next week we'll alternate. We did all of that with two weeks notice so there was no choice to try and ramp up work to get things done before taking the no and slow week. The only choice was to figure out what to deprioritize and what work to move to the next quarter in order to enable us to have those two weeks as a company. The idea of the slow week was that people could then reconnect with their top priorities and figure out how to move the big rocks, whatever they were for that individual. And the no week was really just about giving people that time off that I think we really knew everyone needed, ourselves included.

That's something that a lot of companies have done since then so it might not seem all that innovative today - Spotify, for example, is giving all of their team a week off in the first week of November this year - but we did this in September last year and it was really kind of revolutionary and something that was incredibly important and well received for our team.

**Clare Desira:** That's incredible. I love how you've described that and I love the no week and slow week and I think there's actually some value in that any time for a business to prioritize and approach like that just to get that mindset and that circuit breaker. We don't just need circuit breakers in pandemics. We actually often need circuit breakers to get out of just the daily grind and those patterns that we don't realise that we're falling into. So I think there's something to be said about not just doing it in a pandemic as well.



# LEADING GENEROUS TEAMS

HOSTED BY CLARE DESIRA

**Simon Griffiths:** What we took out from that was that people got a lot out of it. So we started to think about how we could incorporate the ideas of a slow and no week into our everyday, weekly, quarterly, yearly kind of cadence. And so now pretty much everyone in our business has parts of their week that are blocked out and labelled slow. And people know that that's a time where you shouldn't book meetings with that person, because they're trying to get into their own sort of deep work mode. So for me, that's my entire Monday and my Friday afternoon. And then every quarter, we now have a company-wide slow week where every meeting gets cancelled off.

People can still collaborate and work on things together, but they are meetings specifically scheduled with both sides opting in, in that week. So it allows people to get into the deep work and move the big rocks that they need to, once a quarter. We've started to think about how we can take those principles and apply them across the business throughout the rest of the year as well.

**Clare Desira:** I love that. Thank you for sharing that really practical example, something for the listeners to think about and translate into their weekly rhythms as well. Thanks Simon. So through this big Who Gives A Crap adventure, and I know some of your ventures before this as well, you're often doing things that no one has ever done before and I know that that would take a lot of courage. How do you build your mental health proactively and look after your mindset?

**Simon Griffiths:** This is a weird one. For me mental health comes down to feeling really good and that's really different for every single individual. For me, I don't feel good unless I am a bit outside of my comfort zone, unless I'm learning and have that strong growth mindset mentality. This is a bit of a balancing act because if I'm too far out of my depth for too long and I push too hard, then ultimately I'm going to end up in not a great mental health state. But I also know that if I'm staying in my comfort zone for too long, I get bored and frustrated and also end up in not a great mental health state as well.

I've learned over the years how to find the balance between those two and in that almost flow like state for me personally. But have also discovered the problematic side of getting that balance wrong and have dealt with some of the longer term health impacts of not getting that right as well. So really learned that the costs of that just aren't worth taking things to a place where it's not sustainable.

**Clare Desira:** Yeah. Gotcha. What do you do to put boundaries in place to help you maintain that fine balance? Cause I imagine that you've got to be looking out for certain signs or there's things that you need to be doing to help hold you in that space as comfortably, I guess, and uncomfortably at the same time. So you're out of that comfort zone.



# LEADING GENEROUS TEAMS

HOSTED BY CLARE DESIRA

**Simon Griffiths:** Yeah, I think what I learned going through some of the harder sort of mental health stuff that I have been through over the last 20 years or so is that often the challenging thing with mental health is you don't know yourself when you're falling into that space. And so, you can put guardrails on your calendar or how you work, but sometimes you will fall outside of those guard rails and you won't realise it. It's someone else telling you that you're not behaving the way that you normally would or that something isn't right. What I've found is that, for me personally, I realised that my mental health and my physical health are actually very intertwined. When I've pushed myself too hard, I ended up having trouble sleeping because I burn through my melatonin. This is getting very physiological, but what that meant for me is I can put guardrails around my week, but I also need to do regular, physical health checkups where I get my hormone levels checked to understand whether things are starting to get out of whack because I'm pushing too hard or not listening to a part of my body that I should be, or something's just got out of whack in the three to six months prior. So I try to do that every quarter - in reality I end up doing that about once every six months - and that gives me a read on what's going on with cortisol and melatonin, which I've discovered are the two things that have significant contributing factors to my personal mental health. So I think they're probably the biggest takeaways.

A lot of the stuff that I do with my regular working week I think is the standard things that people do: not working two hours before bedtime, trying not to have screen time in that time, limiting the amount of time I'm working during the day and making sure that I'm not working weekends. And then slotting in exercising, eating well, sleeping well, doing all that stuff which I think is relatively well understood. But the bigger breakthroughs for me have probably been on understanding what's going on inside my body from a hormone perspective and how that ultimately impacts your quality of sleep, mood, wellbeing and everything else. And then there's some stuff in the middle, like I track sleep with an Oura ring and do a few other bits and pieces so I can stay on top of monitoring as well.

**Clare Desira:** Wow. So much data to work with, I love it. Thank you for sharing that. Simon, at Top Five we talk a lot about helpful, encouraging and productive thinking or focus when we're working with teams. And I'm curious, when you're thinking about your team or yourself, what do you think right now as we head hopefully out of this pandemic, what do you think is helpful, encouraging and productive to remember?

**Simon Griffiths:** That's a really good question. What I think we've probably learned most through the pandemic and in the years prior is about the power of purpose and how, if you can find that purpose both in your business but also at an individual level and connect people deeply into it, then you start to allow people to really tightly align on the direction that we should be moving in and work together to achieve pretty amazing things.

I think we've always known this. It's been a part of our DNA. But figuring out how to connect our team into that purpose, by getting the metrics of the business to align to our greater good, has been something that we've worked really hard on over the last few years. We probably first read about this from Dan Pink's Drive, where he talks about where motivation in the workplace is coming from not paying people more money. You don't want to have a base level of income, paying people more money doesn't actually improve motivation.



# LEADING GENEROUS TEAMS

HOSTED BY CLARE DESIRA

Instead it comes from Autonomy, where we're setting clear goals and getting out of the way and allowing people to achieve them; Mastery, where people are working on core skill sets that they truly care about; and Purpose, where the work they're doing today ties into the greater good of the organisation. Every company has a purpose. We're really lucky to have that very clearly defined, but I know someone that runs a toy company and they talk about their purpose as delivering wows to kids and they rally their team around the goal of maximizing the wows that they can deliver. So if you can figure out what that purpose is and align your team and your metrics to that purpose, it becomes this incredibly powerful thing that allows you to work together and achieve great things. I think we saw that through the pandemic, that was what our special sauce was in breaking the back of the half a million person waiting lists that we had. But this is something that for us goes well beyond the pandemic and the lessons that we've learnt through the pandemic will inform how we think about strategy and metrics moving forward.

**Clare Desira:** I love that. Thank you. I've read you once shared when business is good, we're all sailing towards that same star. And when the going gets tough, we're anchored through it all by your purpose, which I just think is gold.

Simon, we might finish up there and I'd love to ask you when you picture generous leaders in the B corp world or for purpose space, who comes to mind?

**Simon Griffiths:** Recently I was super blown away by Mel and Cliff from Canva announcing that they were putting 30% of their wealth into a foundation. These are some of the most "wealthy" people in Australia, who are coming through as the next generation of business people. Prior to that move, when you thought about social enterprise you probably thought more about an organisation, like Who Gives A Crap or Thank You. Someone who has always had that social impact embedded into the business model. I think what Mel and Cliff have done is shown that any business can be a social enterprise if you think carefully about the ownership structure.

And so coming back to purpose, I think what they've done is they've now unleashed this purpose across their business in a way that is just amazing. And they've done that by being incredibly generous, that they've essentially said we're going to dedicate a very large percentage of our wealth to improving people's lives. So to me, that kind of blew me away as incredibly generous leadership. I think they'll end up having the largest foundation in Australia and they're not yet 40. If that's not generous leadership, I don't know what else is! So that's one that's top of mind for me at the moment.

**Clare Desira:** Great example. Thank you. We are big fans of Canva and of course, big fans of the foundation too. So that's all from us today. Simon, you've given us so many recommendations and tips throughout your interview today. And I just want to say a big heartfelt thanks and hats off to the generous leadership that you provide your team. So many up and coming B Corps and social entrepreneurs and just generally people in the world. Thank you so much for the work you do.

**Simon Griffiths:** Yeah. Thank you.



# LEADING GENEROUS TEAMS

---

HOSTED BY CLARE DESIRA

## *Post Interview*

**Clare Desira:** It's always so fascinating to dive behind the scenes of cracking leaders and their organisations, and today was no exception. Anyone who's had any interaction at all with Who Gives A Crap as an organisation can quickly feel the fun and the playfulness of the culture through everything that they do. And while these types of cultures can be really fun to imagine they don't happen by accident. They take a lot of openness and investment and commitment over time.

Simon generously shared many tips and insights today that you might like to experiment with. I know I'll be definitely experimenting with some of those ideas. I wanted to extend on three of the things that Simon shared.

The first is the unique ways that our leaders recharge, reset and proactively look after their resilience. We often hear from leaders around things like exercise, others do journaling, some do things like measuring their sleep as Simon suggested today with that Oura ring, and even a suggestion, which we've never heard on the podcast before around going to the lengths of measuring melatonin and cortisol levels. Some really interesting things to explore there. Now, of course, Simon mentioned this and I'll mention it too, that when it comes to looking after our own physical and mental health there's never a script that works for everybody. We're certainly not providing advice and any tips that we share are not a script to go by, it's just about that opportunity to share different ideas so that each one of us can make a decision around what is most helpful for us.

We've got a recharge menu which would be happy to share with you actually. So just email us at Top Five and request a copy of our recharge mindset menu and mention this episode and we'll be so happy to share that with you. What we have on that is a template that gives people an opportunity to proactively and with commitment, collect detail around what it is that supports them to recharge, whether it is in within one minute or five minutes or ten minutes or over a week, if that's the luxury of time that you've got. It's about how each of us can understand ourselves better and put together ideas and a bit of a menu that we've got to choose from so that we are more likely to take those opportunities to recharge and proactively build our own mental health mindset and resilience.

The second tip I wanted to touch on was this couple of weeks that Simon mentioned. They experimented around no weak and slow week, really making a conscious effort across the team to deprioritize, to not attend meetings and to really focus on some of that deep work. And so the question is how can you experiment around bringing this into some of your rhythms?



# LEADING GENEROUS TEAMS

HOSTED BY CLARE DESIRA

Whenever we're supporting teams and leaders at Top Five to develop and build focus and results, there's often this assumption that it's about more more more, you know, to produce more. You need to do more, be more and have more. But some of the growth that we see in teams is when they actually make a commitment to do less. Some of the ways that our tools work is actually about supporting people to do less. It's not about sitting around and not doing anything all day, but it is around less indecision or less worry or less negative spirals or less jumping at shadows. A focus on these things can actually open up a whole heap of space to allow us to consciously reframe and reset, to focus on more helpful, encouraging and productive thoughts available. So with this in mind, I wonder what you could do less of. What you could take from what Simon shared today about the Who Gives A Crap team, how they approached it and how you could really carve out no time and slow time might be something that is helpful. I know I'll certainly be giving that a crack myself.

The third thing I wanted to comment on was about purpose. You know, you can't really talk about Who Gives A Crap as an organisation without touching on purpose. Simon shared the name of a book called Drive by Dan Pink, which touches on the idea that motivation in the workplace doesn't necessarily come from more pay but it comes from elements like autonomy, mastery and purpose, and like Simon and the team have seen the impact of that, we see this a lot in our work too. It's really easy to mix up the idea that purpose needs to be creating your own version of Who Gives A Crap. Maybe it is, and that's incredible, by all means go for it! But purpose can also be as simple as getting in the driver's seat and making some decisions around what type of mindset you want to bring to your team, your loved ones and for yourself, and then taking deliberate actions to give yourself the greatest chance of showing up that way.

And it's really easy, especially at the time that we've recorded this when we're still living in pandemic times, to feel like everything is out of our control. But every day, even when there's loads of uncertainty, we get to make a choice around 'how are we going to turn up?'

I'd love you to experiment with this, perhaps over the next week. Here's a really easy way to do that. Pick two words that represent how you most want to lead over this time. Perhaps it's leading with purpose and joy every day, or perhaps it's love and focus every day. I want you to pick those words - pause the episode if you need to, and pick two words on how you most want to lead. Then over the next week, anchor to those words as often as you possibly can, perhaps by writing them down or setting a reminder in your phone that brings those words up front and centre.

Of course, this doesn't mean that you're guaranteeing that you'll feel those things every moment, but it'll give you an opportunity to circuit-break or focus on the huge number of micro decisions and chances that you have each day to turn up in that way. I think it's a really great start. So have some fun with that.

We talk a little bit more about purpose actually back in our season one episode with Ronnie Kahn as well, and also bonus episode four, where I shared some myths around finding your purpose. So we'll link to those in the show notes as well if you want to explore that idea of purpose more.



# LEADING GENEROUS TEAMS

---

HOSTED BY CLARE DESIRA

So much gold from Simon today, I think we will leave it there. A big hats off and thank you to Simon Griffiths and the team there at Who Gives A Crap. We really hope you enjoyed this episode and we'll be back again with another episode and generous leader for you. Can't wait to see you soon.

As we wrap, I want to say a big thank you to all of the generous leaders and their teams out there, making a difference in our world. I'd like to acknowledge the Wurundjri people of the Kulin nation from the country where this podcast is produced.

And of course, I want to say thank you to you, our listeners. Be sure to subscribe and never miss an episode.

And if you're ready to start building your team's resilience or to help them reset, refuel and recharge head on over to [topfivemovement.com](https://topfivemovement.com) and see what we have to offer. Wishing you the strongest mental health, mindset and resilience as you head into the rest of your day. Have a cracking day.

