Let's Put the Thoughts Back in Thought Leadership
Transcript

[00:00:00]
It is time to put the thoughts back in thought leadership.

Here's what I mean by that...

Once upon a time I was writing for an online magazine.

And at the time, the big trend in the online world, around building businesses, building out robust bodies of work, developing thought leadership, was authority.

It was the big buzzword. *How do you cultivate authority? You must cultivate authority. You must demonstrate authority.*

And at the time I had no idea what that actually meant.

So I wrote an article about that, which meant I went around interviewing all the big names in the space who were telling us we needed to develop authority, convey authority, cultivate authority.

And I said to each of them, What do you mean by authority?

And over and over again, what they told me was "the first page of Google search results". That was what authority was to them.

I was flabbergasted.

In my head, [00:01:00] I assumed --I was so innocent-- I assumed that authority meant mastery of a subject real deep expertise.

No, it meant cultivating the external signals that told other people that you were the authority; that you did have that kind of leadership to offer, even if you didn't.

Blew my mind.

And that, I think, is the big problem with thought leadership today.

If you were right now to Google, how to be a thought leader, most of the results that you would get back are about how to position yourself as a thought leader; how to curate the signals that you are a thought leader; how to position your brand; how to appear to be a thought leader.

That's what the bulk of advice around thought leadership is about.

And that's the problem, because I think most of us who are trying to bring something new into the world-- which was what it means to [00:02:00] be a thought leader, to bring new things into the world, that influence and shape the world around us-- focus first on building a robust body of work.

There's nothing wrong with figuring out your positioning and your branding and figuring out how to get profile and get attention for your substantial and robust work in the world.
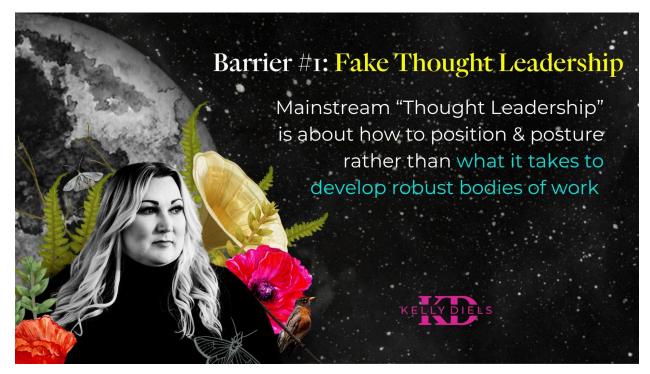
But first to be a thought leader, you must actually have thoughts. You must have a system of thought. You must have a theory of change. You need to be able to *externalize*. That is the overarching challenge of being a thought leader: how to externalize and get your thoughts out of your head and into systemic form.

You need to be able to get your ideas out of your head and into the world in some sort of systematized coherent way, with a language that gets those concepts across.

That is what it means to be a thought leader. And I don't see a lot of work or trainings or institutes or coaches helping you do that.

They exist. But there aren't very many of them and the dominant thread about [00:03:00] thought leadership is how to be that person on the stage, getting all the shine. Getting your name out there. Be in the first page of Google results. That's not thought leadership that is fake thought leadership. That is the gloss of thought leadership that should be the trophies that come with developing a real and substantial and meaningful body of work.

Barrier #1: **Fake Thought Leadership**

Mainstream "Thought Leadership" is about how to position & posture rather than what it takes to develop robust bodies of work

And that is why some of the people doing the most substantial work in the world often shy away from taking up their legitimate space as thought leaders.

They literally recoil at the phrase thought leadership because they think that this is what's necessary. It's not. This is not the game of thought leadership.

So to get the thoughts back in thought leadership, we actually need systems for building out robust bodies of work.

So, let me go through the other problems that prevent us from putting the thoughts in thought leadership, and by that I mean, the barriers to getting your work out of your head and into [00:04:00] coherent form.

There's a barrier or a problem around productivity. Supports and self-help around productivity are really about the factory line or the office and about doing low-level tasks at higher volume. That is not the job that we are taking on when we're trying to develop robust body of work.

And when we're trying to get our thoughts out of our head, that is a totally different kind of productivity. And the advice about that kind of productivity about doing low level of tasks at higher volume are not going to help because the kind of productivity we need is more akin to what one of my former clients, Ije Ude calls *flowductivity*. We need to get in flow states so that we can produce high quality creative work.

We need large amounts of unstructured, uncontaminated, wild idling time for thoughts to cohere.

We need creative inputs.

We need to work with our energy, because [00:05:00] most people who are producing thought leadership are in creative ebbs and flows.

We're not consistently producing every single day. We are riding energy.

So you need to know what your energy patterns are and work with them so you can be in flow states. And you need to know how to get in and out of flow states without getting a flow hangover. So we need to know what the epic workflows are to create this kind of epic thought structures-- these thought palaces-- it's not the same stuff as productivity.

So we need to know what the epic workflows are --and really the bulk of self-help work around getting your thoughts out of your head are about conventional productivity and we are not doing conventional work, so we need unconventional workflows.

It is what artists use. It's what great novelists use it is. What scientists and academics. And mothers use to do epic work in this world. And it's [00:06:00] not the usual seven steps to productivity.

Barrier #3: We Speak Nerd

Experts are in love with their subject matter and start speaking a whole different language. We need to learn to speak People so that our ideas & systems are legible to them

The next problem is we speak nerd.

Okay. We are subject matter experts. We go all in. We go deep. We love our work. We are in love with our subject matter. We are practitioners. We are in mastery. And so we speak expert. We speak nerd, we speak practitioner. We forget how to speak people.

And if there's not a bridge, Between those two things, our people won't be able to hear us or find us.

We're speaking a different language. And so we need to understand what the person who we want to influence or who wants to learn from us. We need to understand what's going on with them. We need to understand what it is they're trying to learn. We need to know what's going on in their life. We need to know the words that fall out of their mouth and reflect them back.

And when we're over here in love with our subject matter, we don't speak that language anymore.

We speak experts. We have to learn how to speak people. We've forgotten how to do that. We need to know intimately and [00:07:00] forensically the person we're trying to influence or who wants to be influenced by our robust body of work.

The next problem is hypo cognition. And what I mean by that is we lack the words to explain what we're doing.

Barrier #4: **Hypocognition**

People often lack the language to describe their experiences (especially if it is not a dominant experience) AND we often lack the language to describe our work. We have to invent the words…while also speaking People

So a lot of time the people who are learning from us, our audience, does not have the language to express what's happening to them.

And so when we find the words to explain what's happening to them, a light bulb goes off in their head. They're like, oh my gosh.

That's exactly what it is. Oh, it's a thing and oh, you have a way to work on that. So when we give them the language for something they were already experiencing, a whole new path activates for them. They get out of shame, they get out of confusion, they get into action, they get into power. So when we give them the language magic happens.

They don't have the language for the experience. We need to map that out. We need to invent language, remember language, assemble concepts, assemble new words for that.

And the other problem with hypo [00:08:00] cognition is often we don't have that language yet.

We're swirling around in this conceptual area and we don't have the words because our work didn't exist before. So the language for our work doesn't exist. We need to invent it, create it, amalgamate. It, remember words that used to be used that we have forgotten.

So in thought leadership are people often lack the language to explain what's going on with them.
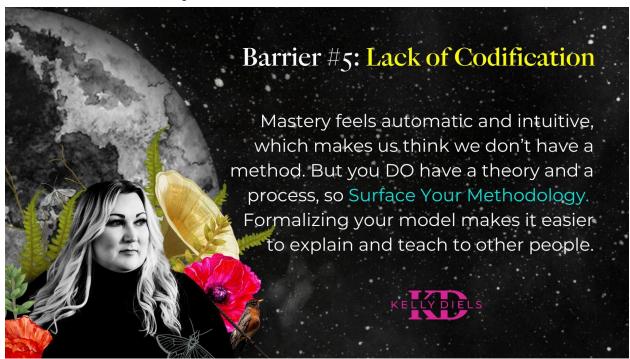
And we lack the language to explain our new and novel concepts that we're bringing into the world. So we need to invent or remember that language.

And we need to do that without forgetting how to speak people.

We need to do both things at the same time. We cannot be locked in jargon. We have to be comprehensible. We have to be legible.

The fifth problem with getting your ideas out of your head and into the world and cultivating this robust body of work-- which is what thought leadership is-- is we need a method. Often when we're in our mastery, we cannot articulate it.

Barrier #5: Lack of Codification

Mastery feels automatic and intuitive, which makes us think we don't have a method. But you DO have a theory and a process, so Surface Your Methodology. Formalizing your model makes it easier to explain and teach to other people.

Malcolm Gladwell, in the book Blink, talks [00:09:00] about this. And he talks about the famous tennis coach, Vic Braden. Vic Braden could look at a player he'd never seen before, and before the racket hit the ball when they were serving, tell if someone was going to fault or not.

And he could not tell you how he did that.

And he could do that over and over again. Relentlessly. He could not tell you how he did that. He's in his mastery.

That is the problem with experts and with people in our mastery, it feels intuitive because we know it so well, it's automatic. And when we know it so well that it's automatic and feels intuitive-- which is what mastery feels like-- it's very hard to break it down and explain it to other people and walk them through that same process so they can achieve spectacular results.

So, if we can't explain our mastery to ourselves, we can't teach it to other people. That is one of the problems. We have not articulated our method. So we need to take our mastery apart and surface the method that's underneath that [00:10:00] mastery.

And I promise you it's there. Lots of people I work with think that they only operate in response and based on intuition. When they're with someone, they can do the work automatically. And so they think they're doing it intuitively they're not, there is always a method there. So we need to surface that.

So you need a method, you need to codify your own brilliance to yourself so that you can then try it out and to walk people through it. That's your credibility. That's the way that you get people results. You have to have a method. And often your method is an amalgamation of tools and modalities and scholarship that you have learned throughout your life that you have synthesized into this rare and unique thing.

We need to document it. We need to codify it. That is the DNA for all of your body of work and thought leadership means you have a robust body of work that you have externalized. You got it out of your brain and into the world.

So those are the problems with thought leadership.

One we're learning that thought leadership is all about [00:11:00] posturing and status and externals and positioning and manufacturing.

And it's not. The essence of thought. Leadership is robust bodies of work, which is based on what thoughts.

And then the challenge is how do we get our thoughts out into the world in a coherent form that other people can learn from?

So we have to stop speaking, nerds stopped speaking practitioners, stop speaking expert. Stop being so in love with our subject matter that we cannot speak people.

We need to learn how to speak people. We have to remember how to speak people. And we also have to solve the problem of hypo cognition. We have to invent and create language. That is comprehensible to people that speaks to the new concepts that we're bringing into the world and names, the experiences that other people are having so they can get out of shame, get out of stuckness and into power and into action. And we need to

document and codify our method. There is a method underneath our mastery.

And finally five, we need to stop [00:12:00] focusing on productivity, which will not help us because it's not designed for the kind of creative thought work that we bring into the world and start focusing on float activity. And epic workflows, which we can learn, which can be taught, that actually support the kind of creative, innovative work that we're doing when we're bringing new things into the world.

FROM Thought Leader	TO Culture Maker
1. Fake Thought Leadership	1. Develop Your Robust Body of Work
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3. We Speak Nerd	3. Learn to Speak People
4. Hypocognition	4. Name Concepts, Invent Language
5. Lack of Codification	5. Surface Your Methodology

Solving all of that, together, is how we get our thoughts out of our head into the world, start building robust bodies of work and putting the thoughts back in thought leadership.

RECAP:

Barrier #1: Fake Thought Leadership

Mainstream "Thought Leadership" is about how to position & posture rather than what it takes to develop robust bodies of work

Barrier #2: Conventional "Productivity"

Hacks for doing low level of tasks at higher volume do not facilitate knowledge work.
Instead, we need to learn how to do "flowductivity" rather than productivity

Barrier #3: We Speak Nerd

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