



# YOUNGER & WISER

HOW NEW SCHOOL  
THINKERS ARE DISRUPTING  
THE OLD SCHOOL  
OF LEADERSHIP

MARK  
MILLER

I have been researching and reporting on the topic of legacy-making as a forward-looking notion—not as something we read about, but as something we continue to write every day—for 10 years and counting. I was inspired, in part, to explore the topic in response to the Great Recession that primarily took place between 2008 and 2009. During that economic event, the world witnessed two very different responses from business. On the one hand, we saw a lot of longstanding institutions, born to maximize shareholder value, act with only their short-term self-interest in mind: every business for itself. Financial institutions, including large banks and investment firms, were the poster children for those who responded this way. On the other hand, we saw an equal and counter approach—often, though not exclusively—from less mature brands—that thrived through those times by maximizing their social and/or cultural impact. These were the brands and leaders that were making better, faster, short-term choices in an uncertain time because they were very certain about the ongoing contributions their businesses would make to the world above any profits they would earn. These are the types of long-term thinkers in a short-term world that I continue to profile in my ongoing study of legacy-making during times of prosperity, recession, and now crisis—including the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the global economy.

“This is not the old school, where the adults speak and the youth listen. It is the new school, where the dynamics are exactly the other way around; where the students are increasingly becoming our teachers.”

Of the many interviews I have conducted over the years, one that seems particularly prescient is the one I did with the legendary founder of Patagonia, Yvon Chouinard. In 2017, I sat down with Chouinard to discuss his brand’s legacy in the making. Like many, I was a fan not only of what Patagonia makes, but also of what it believes, a lot of which is described in Chouinard’s book, *Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a*

*Reluctant Businessman*. At its core, Patagonia is a brand, built by an ambassador for the outdoors, that champions moving through the world without being wasteful—doing no harm—so the next generation can enjoy the planet just like the previous one. At the time I interviewed Chouinard, Patagonia was a 44-year-old brand and he was its 79-year-old leader. While we covered a wide range of topics, what stands out in my memory is his response to a question about the advice he would give to young entrepreneurs, our future leaders, who were hoping to build something to last. His answer: “Grow a garden.” Why? Because, as he explained, he was pessimistic about the fate of the planet, given how too many leaders setting the agenda for business were acting: self-interested and short-sighted. At the time, Chouinard, whose brand remains a global commercial success, warned about the dangers of leaders not being more conscious of public interest and long-term benefits. Capitalism, he felt, was at risk because of the overconsumption it was encouraging and the constant waste it was creating. So, again, his advice to the next generation was not to follow the lead of those adding to the crisis, but instead to set the example by growing something much more sustainable, like a garden.

In 2020, while it is true that the business world—like the rest of the world all around us—is at an inflection point, I believe Chouinard, like me, must be pleased to know that there is indeed a new generation tapping into their dissatisfaction with the status quo to do something about it. At a time when many established leaders and institutions cannot be counted on to guide us to a more positive and sustainable future, when those leaders have become less reliable, some of our nation’s youth have taken up the mantle of responsibility. They’re the ones working to hold their parents’ generation, and their own, accountable for creating the change they want to see in the world. This is not the old school, where the adults speak and the youth listen. It is the new school, where the dynamics are exactly the other way around; where the students are increasingly becoming our teachers. In this modern context, as a source of inspiration, I would like to now introduce you to some of the next-generation leaders—Mikaila Ulmer, Naomi Wadler, Carter Anderson, Ashley Edwards, Alina Liao, Carmen LoBue, and Tiffany Pham—who have made an impression on me with their beliefs and actions. They are a very ambitious group of people participating in a diverse range of fields, who are iconic for this new wave of leaders—leading with qualities like **CREATIVITY**, **COURAGE**, **COMPASSION**, **CURIOSITY**, and the **CONVICTION** to contribute each day with future generations in mind. ■



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# Mikaila Ulmer

## Dream Like A Kid

**FOR ANYONE WHO HAS EVER** had to present brave new thinking to a committee of decision-makers at an established organization, you're likely to recognize responses like these: "It'll cost too much ... take too long ... require too much effort ... necessitate too much risk ... be too disruptive to the way we have always done things around here." Established organizations often become so set in their ways that they can't imagine, or won't allow themselves to look, beyond the moment until a disaster requires it—which is often too late. They lack vision. That is why, in 2016, it was attention-getting to hear the founder and CEO of Me & the Bees Lemonade, Mikaila Ulmer, step up to the podium at a summit convened by the White House to introduce President Barack Obama and pose a challenge to the adults in the room. In her talk, Ulmer, then 11-years-old, began by declaring: "The biggest dreamers are kids. We dream big. We dream about things that don't even exist yet. We believe in our dreams." She continued, "My advice to anyone who is looking to start a business is simple. Bee fearless. Bee-lieve in the impossible. And dream like a kid."

While some skeptics may be quick to dismiss her provocation as the idealistic words of a "kid," it needs to be acknowledged that this kid, at the age of four, launched a lemonade

brand sweetened with honey as her solution for protecting the bee populations that are vital for the global food supply chain. A portion of the money earned through sales goes to help organizations supporting these pollinators.

## [Kids] see possibilities where others just see problems.

It was a fact that the world did not need one more consumer lemonade product when Ulmer began. There were already plenty of choices. Likely, that's why the more established beverage companies looking at conventional short-term metrics didn't see the opportunity. That said, the bees require perennial protection. How did Ulmer know this? Because after being stung by two bees in the same week, she had done research with her parents to overcome her resulting fear of bees, and she had been transformed from being afraid of them to being their advocate. In turn, Ulmer, with the support of her family hive, built a branded beverage solution that was not immediately obvious to anyone but her and her childlike imagination. Just like she said during her summit speech, "[Kids] see possibilities where others just see problems." As a social entrepreneur, Ulmer also had the foresight to measure success differently than others, focusing on measures like community, contribution, and company responsibility, beyond profitability alone.

The results? An investment from ABC's *Shark Tank*, distribution at Whole Foods Market, and distinction for Ulmer as a National Park Service Biodiversity Youth Ambassador representing the Pollinator Conservation Initiative, all on top of a recent recognition by *Time* magazine as one of their 30 Most Influential Teens. Plus Ulmer's first business book, *Bee Fearless: Dream Like a Kid*, was released in summer 2020. Mikaila Ulmer's story serves as an important reminder to the old school that strong imagination plus long-term ambition are essential ingredients required to solve big problems in enduring ways—that when you see the world with a creative mind, and dream into the future like a kid, good things do often follow. ■



# Naomi Wadler & Carter Anderson Ask For Support, Not Permission



**LARGE, ESTABLISHED ORGANIZATIONS** are notorious for placing managers masquerading as leaders at the top—the type who are too often preoccupied with controlling reputations in the short term, at the expense of making real impact, and earning respect, over the long term. For them, it is about doing what is popular over doing what is right. Which is why it was not entirely surprising that in 2018, in the aftermath of the infamous shootings that took place at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, two young students in Virginia were first told not to stage a walkout at their school as a demonstration of support for the victims by their head of organization: their elementary school principal. Likely concerned with the signal a demonstration would send—disrupting order at school, addressing the divisive issue of gun control, and/or even speaking up against government—the principal, initially, deterred them by saying the issue was too much of a grown-up one for them to be tackling. His concession was to, perhaps, allow them to do something at recess, provided they could get some adult supervision. What is more surprising is what happened next. Specifically, the two student activists, Naomi Wadler and Carter Anderson, both 11 years old at the time, spoke up and said, “We wouldn’t need parental supervision to be shot in our classrooms.” They explained, “We weren’t asking for his permission. We were asking for his support.”

It takes courage, in large, established organizations, for adults to speak up against authority. So imagine how much courage it took Wadler and Anderson, at their youthful age, to speak truth to power. They were elementary students confronting an adult, their figurehead, about what is right and what is just. And as a result of doing the hard thing, by standing up for their beliefs, they were rewarded, not punished, by the principal—who gave his full support to their initiative. In turn, Wadler, Anderson, and their classmates held a sanctioned demonstration. They all stood in silence for 18 minutes—17 in support of the Parkland victims, and one extra minute in honor of Courtlin Arrington, a black high school senior planning to study nursing in college, who was shot at her Alabama school just three weeks after the tragedy in Parkland. In remarking on why the demonstration was so important to her, Wadler said, “I know that there’s never going to be a complete end to racism and there’s never going to be a world free of gun violence. But the more that we are able to lower those casualties and lower the amount of people who feel so negatively towards other humans, the better our world becomes.” To which Anderson added, “As the rising generation of leaders, I think we can bring a vision of what the future might look like. And it won’t be that guns were never regulated.” Effectively, the two students took some personal risk—risking detention or suspension— by prioritizing impact over procedure. Why? So they could help make a positive change in the present that might also yield dividends for future generations.

“A lot of young people think they have no power, they can’t control what’s going on. We can choose who we want to elect and we can be the ones running for office.”



More than just making waves close to home, the activism of Wadler and Anderson was recognized and amplified on a global level. Wadler famously gave a speech, on behalf of her and Anderson and in support of shooting victims, at the March For Our Lives rally in Washington, D.C., in 2018. The two were next distinguished for their disruptive thinking and doing at the Tribeca Disruptive Innovation Awards. And at the start of 2020, Wadler, now 13, was the youngest participant at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, continuing to speak about taking action: “A lot of young people think they have no power, they can’t control what’s going on. We can choose who we want to elect and we can be the ones running for office.” The words and actions of Wadler and Anderson have been part of a worldwide wake-up call from the new school to the old school, showing that when the adults don’t act responsibly, the youth have the confidence and courage to take action—to create enduring change—with or without their permission. ■



# Ashley Edwards & Alina Liao

## Bring Your Values To Work

**CONVENTIONAL WISDOM** used to say that leaders only had one responsibility: to maximize shareholder value. Their own values mattered less, or not at all. Accordingly, they were recognized and rewarded almost exclusively for their ability to deliver on predetermined financial goals. This corporate philosophy helped give rise to the “company man/woman”—who fell in line whether the actions required fit with their moral compass or not. And while this was typical for how large, established organizations practiced business—encouraging separation between a person’s work self and real self—a new paradigm for leadership has emerged that embraces the dichotomy: where the whole of a person, their talents plus their beliefs, helps to shape the work agenda. In 2016, Ashley Edwards and Alina Liao, cofounders of MindRight Foundation—an enterprise to help empower youth to heal from trauma—launched their tech-based brand with this new-school approach in mind. Instead of creating a service aimed at a ubiquitous universe of “everyone,” which might have offered the fastest way to have helped raise working capital, Edwards and Liao focused more specifically on the underserved youth that most needed support. In their twenties when they began, they pursued career-focused work like they pursued all facets of their lives—by putting caring first. MindRight persists to make a difference beyond a buck. Remarking on why their approach to leadership was successful, Edwards and Liao advised that it is because “we bring our values to our work.”



**“I had no training on how to support people who have experienced trauma. But I knew how to provide emotional support, so that’s what I did.”**

In a world where too many leaders and brands realize the importance of having guiding values only when it is too late—during or after a crisis—the MindRight story is a good example of having clarity right at the start. From the outset, Edwards and Liao had a common passion, and not dissimilar inspiration, for supporting mental health advocacy and serving underserved youth. Upon graduating from Yale, Edwards worked as the director of operations at a charter high school in downtown Newark, New Jersey. Her father had grown up in a high-poverty neighborhood in Newark and fought for educational opportunities to make a better life for Edwards and her brother. Edwards’s job gave her the opportunity to give back to the Newark community. In her role at the school, students would often turn to her to share the traumatic experiences they had in their lives outside of



school. “There wasn’t an outlet where they could find emotional or psychological support, so my office became a safe space,” said Edwards. She also noted, “I had no training on how to support people who have experienced trauma. But I knew how to provide emotional support, so that’s what I did.” Like Edwards, Liao’s father—and family values—influenced her work. Liao’s dad immigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan, and education was his way out of poverty—a way to make sure he could provide for his family. Said Liao, “I never took it for granted. Once I went off to start my own life, I wanted to do what I could to help create educational opportunities for others, so I began to volunteer.” While working with students, she observed that they didn’t otherwise have a place to talk about what was going on emotionally in their lives. And she knew they needed support: “When you’re affected by experiences but can’t talk about them, you feel like your feelings do not matter.” Inspired by their time working with students, Edwards and Liao were moved to explore the intersection of mental health and education. Serendipitously, the two would meet at Stanford while studying in a joint MBA and MA program in education. There, these social advocates laid the groundwork for MindRight Foundation as a values-based nonprofit that would tackle the issue of unaddressed trauma for underserved youth. This was not going to be a hobby they would pursue separately from a main career. It was their career. It was not a side hustle. It was all they were hustling to realize at the time. They were not going to leave their values at the door to start, and they’d pursue work with a passion and purpose—always.

Today, MindRight has evolved to include both nonprofit and for-profit divisions. MindRight Foundation functions as a nonprofit advocacy organization serving the unique needs of youth. This year, MindRight Health was additionally launched, by Edwards, as a for profit mental health startup offering personalized coaching to underserved communities. This new tech-based venture partners participants with coaches, who are supervised by licensed mental health professionals, and gives daily emotional and psychological support. Over time, Edwards and Liao have together, and individually, received a number of meaningful distinctions for their leadership and values-based contributions. Collectively, they were recognized for contributions to MindRight Foundation with the top prize given by the AT&T Aspire Accelerator program—an initiative which invests in businesses and leaders helping students to realize a brighter future. Edwards was additionally named to *Forbes’s* 30 x 100 list of 30 leaders contributing innovation and change that will positively influence culture for the next 100 years, and she was selected as an Impact Chair of the *Forbes* 30 Under 30 Global Community. Proof for the old school that there is business in putting compassion and caring first, and that bringing your values to work is also valuable if your aim is to make a difference that might have an impact for at least the next century. ■



# Carmen LoBue Keep Asking

**LARGE ORGANIZATIONS LOVE** to establish best practices—rules that leaders should abide by and enforce—for maintaining success. After having learned how to do something better or differently at a particular point in time, these organizations then default to that one same mode of operation for all time. They start repeating. They stop learning. Their business falls behind culture, consumers, and categories that are always changing. In turn, their market becomes smaller as they become more insular. This runs deeper than just lacking vision. It's about lacking the knowledge and insight, as well as empathy, to stay relevant in an ever-evolving world. That is why Carmen LoBue—writer, director, producer, actor, teacher, and activist—makes continuous query a core part of her work. While LoBue is establishing her talent in the film industry—at 20-something, she is already making waves as an award-nominated director—she makes sure to keep her work relevant by staying curious: “When you ask a question, you open your world; you make it larger. When you don’t ask, your world stays small. That is why it is so important to always keep asking questions.”

While it may seem a little unorthodox to cite a young filmmaker as the source of inspiration for leaders of established and future businesses, the film industry is a constantly changing one where the shifts in technology, as well as audience dynamics, require continual adaptation in order to achieve longevity. In this context, LoBue serves as a strong example of someone who is telling timeless stories in a timely way, to maintain a vital voice. Currently,

one of the projects she is working on is a docuseries that investigates harassment from the perspective of marginalized people from all walks of life. The project, *HERassment*, is partly a piece she has been inspired to make for her younger sister: “[She’s] going to grow up and the world is not going to be ready for her—and she’s not ready for the world—and I know my mom isn’t talking to her about it.” One of LoBue’s biggest challenges has been to explore the subject and tell the story in a way that does not get ignored. More experienced filmmakers have tackled this topic before, but have often told it from the point of view of adults speaking at youth. LoBue has been aiming to achieve something different: have a conversation with her audience, not lecture them. So, like always, she began by asking a fresh set of questions to advance the dialogue. She asked what style of communication had sway or influence with her sister and her friends. The query moved her to film something that behaved more like a music video than a typical documentary. She asked where, and how, they were consuming content. The queries moved her to think about making 15-minute snackable shorts that could be easily accessed online. She even wondered how, or if, she could get her younger brother to pay attention, because education would be important for him too. And, through examination, she found that showing many different types of harassed people, including men, had the potential to get a more diverse audience to stay tuned in. In total, LoBue’s interpretation of the familiar topic seeks to have a different style, distribution, and representation than other documentary film attempts. She has not been boxed in by the conventions of the genre. She asked the right questions to push beyond them. And as a result, she has helped to light a path for others, across industries, to follow suit.

“In order to continue learning and continue writing my legacy, right now I’m simply asking myself to keep asking.”

Recently, LoBue has been gaining attention for a variety of her creative and cultural contributions. Her work on the queer comedy-drama series *Koi* made her a semifinalist for the Sundance New Voices Lab—an initiative of Robert Redford’s Sundance Institute. Her

work on season one of the series *Cheer Up, Charlie* earned her a Best Director nomination at Toronto’s WebFest. *Paper* magazine recognized her as someone to watch by naming her to its predictions list of 100 People Taking Over. Her long-term ambition to use film as a means to spark important conversations and drive social change earned her distinction at the New Legacy Maker’s Showcase, sponsored by the Disruptor Foundation. LoBue now also participates on the TIME’S UP Global Leadership Board, alongside Oprah Winfrey and Gloria Steinem. In reflecting upon her contributions, LoBue said: “The onus is always on young people to ask questions. You have to be willing to do the work of investigating. In order to continue learning and continue writing my legacy, right now I’m simply asking myself to keep asking.” Her story is a call to action to the old school to stay curious, widen the aperture, and never stop questioning in pursuit of creating meaningful and lasting change. ■





# Tiffany Pham

## Just Get Started

**IF THE OLD BELIEF** was that big corporations would consume smaller ones—that the big eat the small—the world has now evolved to where speed is a more crucial factor and the fast eat the slow. This is a challenge for those larger established companies, seeking to protect their success, who move too slowly, with too much caution. It is an opportunity for their younger counterparts, seeking to create something more substantial, who embrace experimenting, learning through trying, and moving fast—with conviction. A member of the new school, Tiffany Pham is one of the leaders now setting the pace. Pham is the creator of Mogul, a media platform for multigenerational women around the world to connect and share information. Her long-term ambition: to inspire women to achieve their full potential and, in so doing, to bridge the leadership gender gap. Given the magnitude of her ambition, it could have taken years to make the dream of Mogul a reality. But since this was also Pham's personal calling, it did not. In 2014, at age 27, while working at three jobs—one at CBS corporate, one with the government of Beijing, and one producing films on social issues—Pham taught herself to code late at night and developed the first version of Mogul. By 2015, a year after launching Mogul from her bedroom in New York, her business reported 18 million users accessing the platform in 196 countries and 30,470 cities. Pham's advice to leaders who want to make a lasting impact: "Don't worry about it being perfect at the beginning. Start building. Start creating. Just get started."

## “We are redefining the word for the next generation of girls to know they can be moguls too.”

There are, of course, a lot of entrepreneurs who are enthusiastic about making their ideas come to life. In addition to work ethic, what distinguishes Pham is that, in launching Mogul, she didn't just lead with blind enthusiasm. She found the intersection between something she loved (media and access to information), something she was good at (media relations and network building), something the world needed more of (education to close the leadership gender gap), and something she could be paid for (creating a global community of empowered women through knowledge sharing). In essence, she put a concept called *ikigai* into action; governed by purpose and guided by conviction, she built a sustainable business around her reason for being. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of Pham's story is how she found available space to start a new, relevant conversation in a media landscape that was overcrowded with platforms struggling to stay afloat. At the start of 2014, before Mogul and two years after graduating from Harvard Business School, Pham earned a position on *Forbes's* 30 Under 30 list for her work in the media industry. The recognition had personal significance, since working in media was one way to continue the legacy of her grandmother—whom Pham calls a maverick of her time. The recognition also had cultural significance for *Forbes* readers inspired by her story: “I was inundated with messages from young women all over the world. They wanted insights, advice, encouragement.” Pham explained that as she responded to them all, she received thank-you letters for helping with job interviews, promotions, and other career-related support—for helping create a real impact on their lives. This inspired her to wonder, “What if there was a platform where millions of us could share our challenges and struggles and get stronger together?” As a result, she tapped into her passion and skills to tackle the unmet need and created a new business model: Mogul. Affirmation that Mogul was a compelling idea came quickly in the form of another message, from a young Mogul user in Pakistan. Pham recalled: “She wrote that Mogul helped her to realize she could be more than what her society told her. Her life was going to be all about marriage, but Mogul helped her to see new perspectives.” Pham's success story with Mogul could have easily wound up as another “someday when I have time

I will build it” tale in the wake of her already having started on a successful career. Instead, it serves as a real-life example of what happens when you answer your calling—and start working on it immediately.

Before Pham's brand launched, if you Googled the term “mogul,” the top search results yielded links to powerful men such as Warren Buffett and Rupert Murdoch. Today, the brand is among the top search results. In Pham's words: “We are redefining the word for the next generation of girls to know they can be moguls too.” Now, Mogul reaches more than 30 million users. The platform is supported by Hearst Corporation. The board of directors includes Warner Bros. Chair and CEO Ann Sarnoff, along with personal finance icon Suze Orman. Madeleine Albright, Katie Couric, Rebecca Minkoff, Margaret Cho and Nina Garcia are brand ambassadors. In 2019, *Entrepreneur* magazine named Pham to their list of 100 Most Powerful Women. And Pham recently wrote two books, including the *Wall Street Journal* bestseller *You Are a Mogul*. As COVID-19 has grown to a global pandemic, Mogul has tapped into their global network, partnering with over 400 of the Fortune 1000 and some of the world's fastest-growing companies to connect users who need jobs with the companies that are hiring. Pham's story, and her Mogul brand, stand as shining examples from the new school to the old school about what can happen when you lead with conviction, versus yielding to caution, and start working on building the future now. ■



Years ago, when I first began profiling brands and leaders for my work on legacy-making, I imagined that I would disproportionately learn the most from those with the longest tenures. At the time, this seemed like common sense wisdom: those who had endured the longest could speak, with the benefit of experience, about why longevity mattered, and what it took to build today with tomorrow in mind. But what I imagined was wrong. Via the process of interviewing leaders of varying generations, I learned there was, in fact, more of an inverse relationship. Qualitatively, it seemed, younger brands and leaders often have a higher regard for building more sustainable solutions. So, whether it is Mikaila Ulmer working to protect our pollinators, Naomi Wadler and Carter Anderson campaigning for tougher gun laws, Ashley Edwards and Alina Liao serving the mental health needs of underserved youth, Carmen LoBue educating youth about harassment, or Tiffany Pham seeking to close the leadership gender gap—all of them are contributing in the spirit of making a lasting, positive impact on the world. It is not that they eschew the idea of making a profit. It's instead that these advocates, ambassadors, and activists have focused first on making a larger social, cultural, or business impact: making a durable difference that ensure their relevance.

As we live through a crisis period right now, during which well-established brands and leaders—including longstanding institutions such as branches of government—are not living up to our highest ideals, these young leaders exemplify some of the contemporary role models we can turn to for inspiration. Whereas many grown-ups have revealed themselves to be short-sighted, self-interested, finance-driven, close-minded, and slow-moving, the young leaders I've highlighted are driven by a different universe of qualities: creativity, courage, compassion, curiosity, and conviction. They are creative enough to imagine a better future than what currently exists, courageous enough to stand up for what is right, compassionate enough to always put people and caring before commerce, curious enough to never stop learning, and have conviction enough to make a lasting contribution starting now. Despite their youth, or maybe because of it, the students have become our teachers. Idealists? Yes. Though prioritizing high ideals to live up to every day—growing gardens so future generations can enjoy the planet just like previous ones, like Chouinard has aimed for with Patagonia—feels like a more sustainable plan

than leveraging our future at every turn. It shouldn't have taken the novel coronavirus to remind us, but seemingly one consequence of being so short-term-focused as a species is a swift kick in the ass for us all to rethink our shared global priorities.

In closing, and upon reflection, I would like to note that when I started writing this paper, my intent was to share it, primarily, with established brands and leaders—hoping it might impact the way they practiced business today, tomorrow, and always. While I still aspire to reach those readers, through the process of committing thoughts to paper, I have become equally enthusiastic about passing this forward to future leaders—the next Ulmers, Wadlers, Andersons, Edwardses, Liaos, LoBues, and Phams. Now more than ever, it is imperative that rather than being quelled by the accepted rules for doing business, there persists a vital group of young people willing to push back when the old ways are not working: to challenge and change the way we do business not just for the moment, but for a lifetime. Not so secretly, I hope that someday my seven-year-old daughter, Hailey Maya, will come across this paper too—so she can hear her dad say, based on research, that the grown-ups do not always know better. At times like now, it may take youth, the new school, to stand up and lead the old school in the right direction for a more sustainable future. ■



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