

Good morning and thank you for having me, I appreciate your time very much. My name is Nels Leader. My family and I own and operate Bread Alone Bakery, a Certified Organic bakery in Kingston, NY. We have about 200 employees, and everyday ship about 15,000 loaves of bread to our customers around the Northeast.

I'm here today to share with you the story of Bread Alone and some observations from running our business.

There wasn't an exact plan when my father started the bakery, in 1983. He was a philosophy major guided by his soul, who went on to cooking school with Anthony Bourdain. In reflecting on the decision to start a bakery, he said "Sometimes you have to lose your mind, to come to your senses."

Growing up, I remember my Dad showing me the newspaper, pointing out the challenges that people faced around the world. Though we were never a political family, there was a civic ingredient to our breads. By baking simple, honest food, my father contributed to our community. By living a simple, moral life, my father aspired to touch more people than he could feed.

We use a quote from Nelson Mandela to capture this spirit of the business, "Let There Be Work, Bread, Water, and Salt for All."

I joined the business 7 years ago, following a career in consulting, and then a few years at business school. I've found my passion in building a thriving, viable business that also sustains our people and planet. In this way I strive to honor the history of Bread Alone, while proving that we can be successful by any textbook benchmark, too.

First a few words about our people.

Unemployment in our area is as low as 3.6%, but the poverty rate is as high as 20%.

The fact of the matter is that the economics of hourly work are untenable for too many of our employees and community members. Though Bread Alone's average hourly wage is 50% above NY minimum wage and more than double the federal minimum wage, support services are insufficient.

Too many of our employees lack affordable childcare. Healthcare is too expensive. Employees don't have access to transportation to and from work. What would be a basic life interruption to many -- a car breakdown, a sick child -- becomes an obstacle to economic freedom and well-being.

Some of our employees have been spent time in the criminal justice system, often from a young age. These employees sometimes know little else. Adaptation to the workplace is a struggle.

I see our employees striving to do well, build a career and a family. But the deck is stacked against them.

We live a contradiction. Building and maintaining a quality team is the biggest challenge for our businesses continued success, yet we are surrounded by underemployed individuals.

This is where government can step-in. Provide the support that our hourly employees need to overcome the bumps and bruises of life. A health emergency, job retraining, even a brush with the law. these

services are the building blocks of a thriving small business economy. When you invest more in your working class constituents, you build-up the small business workforce, and in turn your small businesses.

And now some words about our planet.

This generation, right now, is the first to know both the science of climate change, and to experience its dramatic effects.

In NY, winter temperatures are 4.5 degrees higher than just 50 years ago. Very heavy precipitation events are up 70%. I lived on East 7th street in New York City when Hurricane Sandy brought flood waters to within a few blocks. Did the Capital feel warm last month? It was! April was 6 degrees warmer in DC than the historic average.

Globally, climate change is fueling natural disasters of unprecedented frequency and consequence. It is causing human conflict and mass migrations. Climate change is compromising opportunity for, and affecting most, the least fortunate among us.

We feel these effects at our bakery in upstate NY. Historic flooding in the midwest this past April flooded over a million acres of farmland. Farmers are struggling to get crops in the ground for the harvest, and prices will likely increase this fall.

I hope that for us and for all the hardworking farmers across the world, these dramatic conditions subside. But hope is not a plan. To the contrary, scientists predict with certainty that extreme weather will accelerate.

One of the farmers, Marshall Kargall, that my father visited in the early days said, "If we don't take care of our land, and take care of it now, who will?"

To this end, our business has rolled up our sleeves and gotten to work. On Earth Day 2017 we announced our intention to build a solar array on the roof of our bakery. On Earth Day 2018 we officially commissioned our 196kW solar array, which now provides up to 30% of our energy needs. We have committed to getting to 100% renewable energy by 2030, and we plan to get there much faster than that. This means more solar energy, adoption of battery-electric delivery vehicles, energy-efficiency retrofits, and more.

At home and around the world we must de-carbonize our economy to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

The good news is that consumers want to see changes like never before. A record high 72% of Americans indicate that global warming is personally important to them. 83% of millennials indicate that they want companies to implement sustainability programs.

This means that small business and government has an incredible opportunity to take care of customers, constituents, and the natural world. The hurdle is that while the societal need for change is immense and immediate, business payoffs happen later and over time. There is a fundamental mismatch in timelines.

This is a market failure that the government can fix. The cost of business as usual must go up across the board, or the cost of change must go down. Bridge this gap, and small businesses will thrive by delivering what our customers want and what our world needs.

Decision-making is one of the constant challenges of running a business. Decisions never feel perfect. They are often scary. Almost all require adjustments and change over time.

We always remind the team at the bakery: Progress -- not perfection. The only bad decision is not making one at all. The world will pass you by.

I'm not a policy-maker, but I imagine that your work is extremely difficult. So many competing interests and constituents to address, not to mention different views of the world within yourselves.

I feel confident saying that your decisions will never be perfect, either. Many are probably scary, too. But supporting the best work of small business requires constant progress.

During your time of public service, I urge you to embrace the moment, each other, and the opportunity to serve. Like the small businesses in front of you, seek progress every day. Thank you.