



## AWAKENING | Elsie Maio's Audacious Vision for Maker Growth and Success in These Challenging Times

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When Elsie Maio graduated with honors in Classics from the City University of New York, she went to Wall Street to earn a living, content with Homer on her night table. There, and later at McKinsey & Company, the logic, discipline, and communication skills she garnered studying ancient Greek helped her translate complex analyses into winning strategies for investment and corporate strategy.

She enjoyed her stimulating colleagues and career immensely, but knew that the business world could do more, be more. Twenty five years ago, Maio went out on her own to build a framework designed for corporate executives and other leaders committed to business brilliance for social good. That cadre has grown exponentially, the leaders who want a more human and humane approach to achieving excellence themselves, and a way to help members of their teams to do the same.

Now, she's using her years guiding businesses to breakthrough results to help CEOs, impact investors, and creative entrepreneurs find their way through the unprecedented time of individual and world disruption we find ourselves in because of the coronavirus pandemic.

She has her work cut out for her. Between July of 2009 and February of 2020, 22 million jobs were created by the U.S. economy. In April, 17 million lost their jobs. That's correct: a decade-plus of job growth practically eradicated [in one month](#), with economists predicting more job losses in the coming weeks. But Maio is undaunted. For insight into her paradigm, read highlights from a recent conversation we had below. And join in the Virtual Masterclass Maio is conducting here at New York Makers. "Unearthing Makers' Hidden Value in a Hurry" will kick off via Zoom, free of charge, on Tuesday, April 21 at 4 pm EST. Sign up for it [here](#).

**NEW YORK MAKERS: What made you realize work could be more than it so often is, and what made you create [Humanity, Inc](#)?**

**ELSIE MAIO:** The whole idea for Humanity, Inc came from the essential impulse to contribute which I inherited from my mother. That, and my curiosity about how things work, has guided my entire career. I asked myself: 'Where does what I have match what is needed?' For example, when I was working at McKinsey & Company I sensed an unmet need. Data analysis and creative problem solving in complexity is essential to operating excellence. But I was intrigued by how CEOs were answering other questions like, 'Who is my company?', 'How does it reflect my vision of the world?', and 'What impact do we wish to have on whom?' So I went in search of a way to help leaders at those global companies answer those questions about corporate vision and authentic motivation. They're people who start with The Golden Rule of mutual enhancement, who want to make a legacy contribution while performing at a level of excellence -- those are the leaders who interest me.

**NYM: How does being better at a job or guiding a company translate into day-to-day decisions?**

**EM:** It varies person by person and company by company of course. But it starts with trust. Trust is what is required to truly serve people. That comes through empathizing with the person or market you're trying to serve, putting yourself in their place and really feeling what they want and need. As humans, not consumers. If you can come to a place where you have a deep appreciation of what that person or market is really looking for, you will be better at delivering it. And then both parties will be more fulfilled, and more "successful".

**NYM: Do you think some people are naturally better at running their own creative businesses, especially in challenging environments like the one we have found ourselves in?**

**EM:** There are certain skills that will make any creator or small -- or large, for that matter -- business owner more successful. It's a blend of heart, creativity, inclusiveness, and discernment. It's a rare person who has all four. That's why collaboration is so important. And that's why a platform like New

York Makers is so valuable for people who are creatives. It takes some marketing and distribution off of their plate, so they can focus more on creating things. There are so many complementary resources out there. I'm actually building a list of free or low-cost resources that makers and entrepreneurs will find helpful, and I'll talk about the most relevant ones in [my webinar on Tuesday](#).

**NYM: What advice would you give to makers right now who are concerned about the future, and about their finances, in such an uncertain world?**

**EM:** The best thing anyone can do right now is reach out to peers, share your experiences and listen. Reach out to your customers, suppliers, your ecosystem partners. Prize the trust between you. Ask them what they need. What they want. Everyone is scared right now. If there is a silver lining in anything involving this pandemic, it's the knowledge that we humans need each other to survive. This is pushing us out of our comfort zone. That's where we all find our hidden assets, those gems we didn't realize mean so much to others. That vulnerability is a step toward creating a shared destiny for a world we want to live in.

I'll give you an example of this in my own life. I usually hold seminars in-person or training sessions in person, and that is all out the window obviously. I've been doing Zoom meetings instead, and I quickly discovered that the lighting in my office is less than ideal. I reached out to my neighbor's brother, who is a videographer, and asked him for advice. When he gave me pointers on low-cost ways to quickly fix my set-up, I asked him what I could do for him. He told me that his business was dead in the water because it depends on in-person photography sessions, so I suggested he put himself in his client's shoes. Step out of his professional role, and think like they might about where their hurt is right now.

From there, he conjured up five ways he could contribute to them. They could turn into new business ideas, but they certainly are ways he can let that client know he cares deeply about what they shared. That's where opportunity lies for us as humans and as entrepreneurs in this crisis. To step outside our 'professional' armor and into the raw intimacy of empathy with each other. You just have to make yourself vulnerable enough to step into the other's shoes and explore what mutual value you can create together.

**NYM: Have you seen savvy entrepreneurs do what you advise during this crisis? Reach out and, in the process, help themselves and others?**

**EM:** Absolutely. At a recent meeting of the sustainable fashion group esa New York, one of my fellow board members shared a [story](#) about a California goat and llama farmer whose business evaporated because of the pandemic. Her entire model was based on people visiting her farm. But then she put herself in the place of her clients, who are stuck at home, often homeschooling kids and having one Zoom meeting after another. She decided to offer a service called Goat 2 Meeting, where for \$100 companies or individuals can request a cameo appearance of a llama or goat. It's brilliant, and it has been wildly successful because for a company to shell out \$100 to surprise their clients with a cute farm tour in the middle of a boring pitch meeting on Zoom, sure it's a cost of sales, but it really delivers joy during a dark time. More of us need to start thinking like that llama farmer.

**NYM: How are you pushing yourself out of your comfort zone?**

**EM:** I'm doing meditation on Facebook Live on Monday mornings. That took a lot for me, and it's a little embarrassing meditating realtime, eyes closed and live, rather than presenting 'professionally'. But I just don't have the emotional room to pose or posture in any way these days. Besides, we need to give each other permission to be authentic and vulnerable, and my clients are leaders committed to get their companies and teams through this crisis. They are learning to be powerful in their vulnerability, in their humanity. They need to drink from their inner strength. I am doing what I can to get them in touch with the calm and confidence to do that.

Not everyone can sell virtual llama visits or help their clients breathe through their anxiety to their creative core. But we can all reach out to our co-workers, our peers, our clients and ask them how they're doing, what they need, and how we can be of service. Often, listening without offering solutions is the best gift. In the space between, you may be surprised by what gem reveals itself — for both of you.