

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Striving and Leading in a male-dominated workspace.



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INTRODUCTION

The past decades have seen important progress for women and girls. However, overall change has been uneven and incremental. At the current rate of change, the global gender gap will not close for another 100 years. – United nations.

A lot of us won't live to see gender equality or a world free from disparity. This is why in our little way; we have to start changing our mind-set, and that of those around us. If 100 years will be possible at all, it starts from our current actions.

Gone are the days where women give up their education for men. My aunt forfeited going to school for her younger brother to go and study medicine. The number of women that put their lives on hold for family, men, children etc. is uncountable. It's said that women can endure, but not men.

How about the workplace? In the big industries like entertainment, we have heard tales too many times, that men are paid higher than women but they do the same tasks. What of sports? The biggest names we all know in sports are men, Cristiano Ronaldo, Messi, Mbappe, Usain Bolt, Lukaku, Mike Tyson, Mayweather etc. Whereas, their female counterparts, I am sure it's only Serena Williams we can think about. I can't name three, myself.



The good news is, we know one, this means there is hope. It's time for us to stand up as women and search for our innate power; to realize that we are equal, and just as good as men.

The following chapters of this book will lead us to a process of self-discovery, self-appreciation, and then shine the light on other females that have made it around the globe for us to see that we are unstoppable. Most importantly, this book will teach us how to navigate the workplace, and stay winning at all fronts.

Disclaimer: This book is not to encourage hate on men or disregard their place in society; rather it's to help women see that they can be more, and access greater heights.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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WHY WOMEN MAKE GOOD LEADERS AND HOW TO BRING OUT YOUR INNER LEADER.

This chapter talks about being a leader, not in terms of position alone, but a leader in terms of industry expert (thought leader). How they can learn from women over the years, who gave themselves the chance to strive.

...The Journey Begins

"I'm absolutely confident that for two years, if every nation on earth was run by women, you would see a significant improvement across the board on just about everything... living standards and outcomes." - Barack Obama

Even Obama knows and believes that women are powerful. It's not rocket science why women stand out in the workplace, and climb to leadership positions where there are no biases. This is because women are way more empathetic than men, and empathy is a sure way to get to the top.



Leadership is the act of influencing people to be their best, and bring out their best. Leadership is not a role to command people or boss people around. The male folks just want things to be done but the females will want the work to be done and make sure the doer is happy, while at it.

Women in the workplace are also known to be drivers. They drive you to achieve the goal. When one is empathetic, it's easier to get things done as people will easily love you, and want to go out of their way to please you.

When as a leader you show empathy, your subordinates will respect you and do extra for you.

Another superpower women have is initiating balance; we can be great at work, home and personal lives. We have time to attend to everything and still find a way to be sane in the midst of it all. Men are wired to focus on a particular thing per time.

Knowing our uniqueness helps us to climb the growth ladder, and compete on all fronts.

To be able to do this, you have to first have a relationship with yourself. You can't influence people if you don't know who you are, and what you stand for.



Being self-aware is the first ladder to leading.

Self-awareness is the ability to see one's self clearly and objectively, through reflection and introspection. Being truthful to yourself will help you know what you have to work on, to lead and dominate the workplace.

People are comfortable with sitting down and pointing fingers at everyone but themselves; the government is the reason why you are only a receptionist, your father said you shouldn't be an Engineer, the society frowns at women. All these excuses may be true but we know of notable women who have pushed through these odds, equipped themselves, and are now industry experts.

You have to start by asking yourself these delicate questions:

- What do I want for myself?
- What are my weaknesses?
- What is my career strength?
- What are my fears?
- How do I feel about my performance?
- How am I viewed by my colleagues?
- Am I innovative enough?



- Am I constantly improving myself?
- What career height do I want to attain?
- What do I do to get there?

The answer to the above questions can help you realign, and work towards a particular goal. They give you insights into what you really want, and identify what is holding you back. It also helps to drive decisions and gives clarity. This means you are aware of where you are, how you are perceived and how you perceive yourself, and what you need to get to the next level.

Self-awareness allows us to see things from the perspective of others, practice self-control, work creatively and productively, and experience pride in ourselves and our work as well as general self-esteem (Silvia & O'Brien, 2004).

Self-awareness gives us clarity; when you have clarity of purpose, you can lead and win. Knowing yourself also makes you understand how people see you, and you learn how to relate with them from the information they have about you.

A self-aware person is a great communicator, you know exactly what you want, and your negotiation skills are unmatched as you are very confident in yourself.



This way, it's easy for people to lean on you for guidance. People are naturally drawn to individuals who have their acts together, and seem to know what they are doing.

Self-awareness opens you to other critical skills of leadership like communication, negotiation, empathy and innovation. If you must strive and lead in the workplace, you must be self-aware.

It's important to know that we don't introspect ourselves just once; from time to time, self-introspection should be carried out. You can also have trusted friends that will tell you how they truly feel about your attitude to work, and if you are exhibiting true leadership qualities.

Let's read the interview of Irene Buhrfeindt, this interview will give more details on how you can move to the top as a female, in a male-dominated industry.

Irene Buhrfeindt, Vice President of Tronox, a US-based producer of titanium dioxide and inorganic chemicals.

From being the only woman working on a lumberyard to mentoring others in work and life, this is Irene's journey as a leading woman.



Q. What lessons and experiences can you share as a female leader?

I was, at one point, living in Canada, and it was my first time going out into the field to resolve an issue as technical service personnel. Not many women were there because it's a lumber yard, and it's a very male-dominated workspace. I also spent a lot of time in Canada when I was much younger. So the most important thing for me is femininity. That's who we are as women and it is one of our strengths.

Q. Throughout your career, who were your biggest inspirations?

There are two sides to the coin when I think about inspirational figures: those that inspire me and those that do not. People who inspire me are the ones who are authentic. They are genuine in who they are, who they want to be, and they help you along the process. On the other hand, it's disappointing to see people who behave in certain ways or adopt certain tendencies just to 'fit in' and 'act like a man', just because they feel that that is how they break into a man's world.

Q. As a leader in your business, how do you set the tone for the team?

I am a very open person. I am very direct. That's my character. So whenever I work with my team, it's not about me being the supervisor – it's about us.



I believe that when it is about us, then we can start to see how things would work as a team. Once everyone believes in the 'we', everything sort of works, like clockwork. That's what I share with the entire team, even though most of mine are men.

Q. Over the years, have you encountered any barriers to your success or growth as a female leader?

There are always going to be barriers, be they intentional or unintentional; and it is not just in my career, but in everyday life as well. Ultimately, after so many years in the working world, the real barrier is actually me, because there's so much emotion about where you want to go, they actually cloud your judgment. I've learnt that, instead of trying so hard to knock down barriers, you could find a better way by walking around it. I've done a lot of that in my life, and I've started to learn.

Q. What are some of the traits that you admire the most amongst the leaders you've worked with?

I've been very fortunate to see an array of leaders. Tronox is a mining organisation, and the leader built a set of core values around taking care of its people. Whether it's from a safety perspective or grooming individuals through their career paths. Ultimately, it is easy to create core values and stick them on walls. But, it does not mean that it's going to be lived throughout the entire organisation. It takes time to build this culture, and I believe that culture has been embedded in Tronox for some time now.



As for specific traits, aside from authenticity, simplicity is often underrated. Sometimes, as women, we overthink, and part of that is because of who we are. I often go back to the facts and the logic behind certain decisions, and I realise that it's actually not that complicated. So simplicity, too, is a characteristic that I do admire very much.

Q. Was it always part of your plan to become a leader?

I've always wondered what it was like to sit on the top of the totem pole. I wanted to see how I could fit, and help others grow into that role; and over the years, I just sort of moved into this position. Partly it has got to do with my character. When I was very young, I lived in Malaysia, where boys were often considered to be more important than girls. So when I entered the workforce, I wanted to be no different from my male counterparts. I wanted to be treated as an equal.

Q. What's helped you build confidence?

I was very shy as a teenager, and I was very uncomfortable because I was taller than most women. Even in my 20s, I was still awkward around people. But I realised that, in order to gain confidence, I needed to practise. Eventually, I became a trained chemist, and I have been in this profession for 30 years. I realised that a lot of people came to me with technical questions, and I started to spend a lot of time presenting at conferences. In the early 90s, there were four or five conferences around the Asia Pacific, and we would then do roadshows.



I started to build confidence by pure repetition, repeating the same presentation and figuring out what I could do better.

Q. What advice would you give to women who want to be a mentor?

'Mentor' is a word that sometimes overwhelms me. It's a big word, and it's a big ask. I've been mentoring individuals, men and women, and I think the most important thing is that we, as mentors, reach out to as many people as we can every day. Here's something interesting: my latest mentor-mentee activity is actually with a man. He has a little girl, and on top of working on his approach to work, he also asks me about how he should manage his child. It's also about bringing up those little ones, right? It's about having that mental change for the father, because he sees me as someone whom he wants his daughter to be like when she grows up, and joins the workforce.

Q. What's the greatest risk you've undertaken?

As a trained chemist, I started off as a technical person, but I knew early on that I will be better off in the commercial world. I wanted to spend time with people rather than being cooped up in laboratories. However, I soon learnt that the transition was not that easy. Moving to a commercial role takes at least 10–15 years, and it is difficult for companies and leaders to hire you, especially when you only have technical skills to show for.



What changed for me was an unexpected opportunity. In the early 2000s, I was approached by a big multinational Dutch company based in China, where they were operating a polymer plant. It was a curious job offer because, at the time, the company was in the middle of a divestment. Obviously, not many people wanted to go into a situation like that, but I took up the role anyway, because it allowed me to move into a more commercial role. So I packed up, moved to China, showed up at the plant in Suzhou, and spent the next four years there. It completely uprooted me from a technical role to a commercial one overnight. So I guess it's about taking the opportunity when it presents itself. - Jonathan Goldstein (Pageexecutive.com)

<https://www.pageexecutive.com/asia-pacific/leading-women/maintaining-femininity-and-grace-in-a-male-dominated-world>

This interview was done by Jonathan, and it mirrors a lot about being a woman in the workplace. What stood out to me in the interview is - **“it's about taking the opportunity when it presents itself.”**

Leaders are not born overnight, they don't wake up and see themselves at the top. It's borne out of conscious efforts and taking “uncomfortable opportunities”. I have read many stories of women who were pushed to uncomfortable positions to demean their abilities, and they turned those positions into Gold.



To lead a male-dominated industry, you most times have to do above average, and bring your best self to work. She also mentioned that simplicity is a key factor to being a leader. We often have the tendency as women to want to overthink and analyse things.

We shouldn't always aim for perfection because it's an illusion. Do the best you know, ask questions, look for help, fail fast, and succeed. I say fail fast because before you climb the leadership ladder, you must have a few notable failures in the bag. But, don't be too calculative that you miss out on the experience of failure, at times failure is a great push to higher success.

Remember, the competition is not against men, the competition is against the false limits projected on women, it's against the low expectations, it's against the disparity. A man can be your tutor, a man can help you get to the top with his advisory and business support. The most important thing is getting to the top, and leading against all odds.

When you get to the top, you will be equipped to lead everyone, regardless of gender. We will read a few more stories as we move on.

In the last chapter, we just read how Irene climbed to the top as a female, in a male-dominated space.



HOW CAN WE RECOGNIZE A FEMALE-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE?

This chapter teaches women how they can study potential employment to discover if the environment encourages the growth of female professionals.

Very few women are CEOs of the world's largest corporations. As of the May 2019 Fortune list, only 33 women (6.6%) were CEOs of Fortune 500 companies (source)

There are multiple reasons why women do not get to leadership positions; the predominant ones being gender inequality and non-flexible work cultures. While maternity leave is a must in the law, some firms give only 1 month and ask you to resume office either from home or report on sight. Others just lay you off and find a replacement. Some companies don't hire married women or women without kids to avoid having to give maternity leave.



These are a few ways to identify a female-friendly workplace

Before you get the offer:

- From the job advert, look at the description and expectations, what're the working hours like? Are they flexible, do you have to work 7 days in the week etc?

During the interview:

- If it's a physical interview, please look around, gauge the ages of people present, look at their demeanour, observe the environment. Finally, don't just answer the employee's questions, also pose yours.

Here are questions you can ask:

- Ask them, what does career growth look like in the office?
- What are their leave terms?
- Do they offer child care support?
- How many paid leave days do they have?
- Can you opt to work from home?
- Are there any female support perks?
- Do they have a non-discrimination policy?
- Ask if they have anti-harassment policies and how to escalate issues should you face harassment.



All these questions are key, and please feel free to ask. Do not pay attention to just the answers but also the how, how they are answered, monitor their demeanour. Ask about the pay too, if there is a salary increase based on merit or award for hard work. These questions can be asked all in one, and very politely. It could be just- what is the experience like working here as a female, and what are the policies that enable job satisfaction and flexibility.

Finally, ensure to do personal research and ask people around about the new offer- if it's not friendly, you would know to take a walk, or, join the company and try to change the wheel, depending on the position you are applying for. If it's a management role or HR, you can try this.



WHAT WOMEN NEED TO SUCCEED AT WORK.

This chapter teaches women platforms, policies, actions, that will help women reach their full career potentials. Top work needs of women; useful advice from career experts can be referenced.

I mentioned earlier, what's needed as a woman, to lead and strive in the workplace. I will list some more.

- *Self-awareness*

As mentioned earlier, self-awareness is a must. Being self-aware makes you stand out; accept flaws, because you know where you need to grow. Be assertive, as this helps you know when you need a raise, or a promotion, and what particular career path you need to choose. Being self-aware is an attribute that changes the whole game. Leading in the workplace stems from knowing one's self.

- *Decision making*

Women are generally known to be indecisive, but being a leader means you must know how to make critical decisions for the team, and for the growth of the company.

A great way to be decisive and make decisions easily, is to always be professional.



Remove emotions from work. At times, because of your likening to someone or something, you might be coerced to make decisions that will favour a particular set of persons, and not the general interest.

You should be kind at work but you must not be nice. Being kind is important for everyone, but being nice to people should be earned by people who have proved themselves worth it.

In all, always dissociate your feelings from work, this will aid in making decisions fast. Feel free to consult team leads and experts, on issues above you. Ask questions and seek knowledge, so you can make informed decisions.

When you make decisions carrying people along, they respect you more, and the decision you make, because they feel their opinion matters. Having said that, please keep in mind that there are critical decisions you will make alone as a leader, and stand by them. Be firm in your decisions.

- Proper communication

This fosters good working relationships, and good relationships take you far. Remember that communication is not always about what you say or write; body language is communication, silence is too. You have to make sure that all communication you transmit in every situation is professional, and not offensive to the receiver.

Also, communication is about what you do when the other person is speaking, it's a two-way street.



Communication etiquettes you have to practice:

- Listen before speaking: Do not speak over people, it's rude and disrespectful. Allow people to finish what they want to say before you speak. If you must interject, kindly excuse yourself before you speak: for example, excuse me please, may I interject? If you receive a no, which happens rarely, please do not push. Patiently wait for your turn.
- Watch your tone when speaking: Always ensure that you maintain your calm, and speak professionally at all times. You can express displeasure without raising your voice. Also, be selective of the words you use when expressing anger, never forget you are in a professional setting.
- Be clear on expectations: When communicating tasks, try not to rush them or send shabby emails. This is one problem people suffer in the workplace; not getting clear directions or expectations from their bosses. Always communicate clearly what you want, and ask if the receiver is on the same page with you, to require further clarification. If they do not, please be kind enough to take it again.
- Don't copy the whole team: This is done mostly when you are not happy about a work done, but it's disrespectful to copy the whole team to humiliate the recipient.



The best practice is to copy only persons directly involved or direct managers, but please, don't copy the whole team. It mustn't be only for expressing displeasure, but generally, in communication, it's best to send emails to only persons directly involved.

- **Do not gossip in the workplace:** If you have an issue that needs to be resolved with a fellow employee, talk to the person directly or involve the HR, but don't be found talking about people in circles.

Using these etiquettes will make you unique, and also help you have peace at work. Your colleagues will also find it easy to speak to you.

- **Confidence:** I always say, "the last thing I put on before leaving my room is my confidence and a smile". The world is a battlefield, and half the battle goes on in our minds. You will have to wear your confidence to win. People respect confident people, and admire them.

Also, add positivity to your confidence, believe that things will work well, and even if they don't, you should remain confident in your next try. Confidence looks good on you, lady.

Courage: Courage, like confidence, helps you to access heights you didn't think possible.

Courage is very important for women who desire to lead in life, generally.



I will tell you a short story, I am a very smart lady who excels in virtually everything, until I got my current job. A week into the job, I was already tired. I felt worthless, I felt like all my education wasn't enough and I am good for nothing.

My boss always spoke to me condescendingly, and I wasn't just happy with myself or the way I was being treated. I didn't speak up. I decided to keep managing, believing that one-day things will be better, but that never happened. No matter how hard I tried, my boss never saw good in any work I delivered; it made me have low self-esteem, and I started churning out bad works.

During team meetings, virtually everyone will be called and applauded, but they always never fail to exempt me. A notable experience was when my boss asked the team to give suggestions for a new project; no one was speaking, so I decided to go first, and when I finished, she didn't leave any comments, she proceeded to ask others to give a comment. The third lady to speak gave the exact comment I gave, and my boss responded to her, saying she feels this is a great idea and we should try it.

I felt so bad, but that was when I realised, it's not that I was particularly dunce, I was just not liked. Well, after 3 months I took the bold step to resign, peace is vital in life. I did resign, and the person that was meant to assume my role till a new hire, resigned the day after.

I was summoned, and accused falsely of being the person that instigated the resignation of my colleague.



I truly had no hand in that; at this point I was fed up, and for the first time, I spoke up to my boss and the two other colleagues I was meant to be bashed before, and told them everything they did to me and in the company that wasn't professional. I didn't have to shout or get angry because I was leaving already, and had nothing to lose.

I told them the truth without mincing words, and also added tips they can use to improve work culture and communication, like an anonymous feedback form, team appraisals and self appraise. I also mentioned how they can do better, to make people happy with work.

My boss called me that same day alone, and we spoke for over an hour settling our differences and handling miscommunication issues. I helped them to set up the systems I said will change the work culture, as I wasn't the only unhappy person on the job. I was offered a promotion which I declined.

After 3 months, I was offered another promotion and a raise. I returned to the company and I am there currently. Things are way better now, and we have a larger team. My courage helped not just me but the whole company, and took me to a managerial position. I have been promoted thrice since then, and I have also learnt the useful lesson of being courageous to do the right thing, and at the right time.



Your case must not be the same as mine, it must not be resignation or an unfair situation, but I just told the story for you to see what courage can do. At times, all you need to move from your current position to the top, is the **COURAGE TO ASK FOR IT**. Life doesn't always give us what we deserve, but what we pursue.

Perks and policies—how employers can help women at work.

If you own a firm or you are an employer of labour, these few tips will help you create a women-friendly workplace.

- Have flexible working hours
- Have a work culture that enables feedback.
- Have a fair grading system for all employees, this way, the best can be promoted on merit.
- Have paid sick leave days.
- Provide childcare facilities.
- Encourage remote work, and set up systems that permit people to work effectively from home.
- Have a non-harassment policy.
- Maternity leave should be fully paid for.



- Encourage team bonding and building in the workplace.
- Create stress relief programs for the employees.

The great thing about these tips is, they are both useful for men and women. It creates a great working environment for all, and improves productivity.



WORK-LIFE BALANCE

This chapter talks about work-family balance both for married and unmarried women.

For married women, it goes further to explain the impact of family responsibilities on their career, and how they can re-enter the corporate world after childcare.

It's not easy to maintain a work-life balance. At times, life gets in the way; but the way to keep things in check, is to make sure you have actual structures that allow you to balance things up. It's important to accept that there's no perfect work-life balance, but you can make sure you are not doing too much of one thing.

The following tips will guide you in creating a balance.

- **Prioritize your time:** You must not be everywhere at all times, you have to decide what's important to you, and focus on that. You must not be in all conversations, meetings, or pleasing every family member or friend. You must not be in all functions, you need time for yourself; prioritize your time to only what truly matters. If you have time for other "not so important things", by all means, have fun.
- **Find a job you love:** If you love what you do, you experience less stress, and you don't feel easily drained.



It could be challenging but the love you have for your work will lessen the burden.

- **Take your leave:** People decide not to take their leave to prove they are hardworking. Please do not do that. Plan your leave and take all of it, regardless of how the management feels about your leave, please take them. Also, plan fun activities, and some alone moments during your leave: where you can stay alone without family or friends, to catch and treat yourself nice. Again, take all your off days, leave none!
- **Unplug:** Know when to unplug from work, turn off notifications and rest. If it's not working hours, try not to passively react to work messages, as this induces stress; like, getting email notifications or Slack messages that make you start thinking of the task beforehand or jump on the task, hoping to quickly finish, but instead, you find out that you are there the whole day, distracted.
- **Unwind with family:** You can do activities like exercises and diets with your family, to build family time. Go for walks together, make smoothies, salads, snacks, and see movies together. Try to do fun things that also boosts mental health, with your family. This way, you use a stone to kill two birds.
- **Go for medical check-ups:** Ensure to visit the hospital for random check-ups at least twice a year; this way, you are in charge of your health, and managing every aspect of your life.



How to manage stress after work:

- Have a to-do list: this helps you to be very organised, and gives you a sense of fulfilment when you have them all ticked. You can use sticky notes or jot them down. Project management tools like Trello, can be useful too. Having an organised day equals less stress after work.
- Take multivitamins: They are very essential, and help boost your immune system, vitamin C is a must-have.
- Take a shower and warm milk after work.
- Eat good food, and do what makes you happy, to distract yourself.
- Sleep early and ensure to rest for at least 8 hours.



SETTING CAREER TARGETS/ HAVING CAREER PLANS

This chapter talks Why women should have a career plan, and set targets at different points of their careers, to meet their career goals. This chapter also talks about the importance of professional mentorship, and how to get mentors.

There is a saying that “people who have a plan get to their destination faster”. It’s a general problem to see people just work because they need money or want to be relevant. When they are tired, they resign and look for the next offer.

People seldom choose jobs due to their career plan, the most used phrase during an interview to the question- Why do you want to leave your current employment? People mostly say, because they want to explore other positions, and be faced with new challenges. Being an HR, I have hired a lot of people like these, and they didn’t do any better. The truth remains, a greater percentage just wanted better pay.

The great thing is, I have also seen people stay in jobs or move from a high paying job to a lower paying one, because of career growth prospects.



Nevertheless, setting career targets does not often mean a salary cut, you can grow higher while making plans, but the goal here is to emphasise the importance of drawing a career map.

Don't find yourself working for 10 years without growing, or working for 1 year in a field, you know you actually don't find fulfilment in.

Have a plan for how you want to grow, and work towards it's achievement. The great thing is, you must not leave your current organisation to grow, career-wise.

Let me tell you a short story...

I have always admired HRs, because of their problem-solving skills and people management, but I didn't find entry HR jobs because I had no expertise in that, or even an internship position. I however took a course in HR and content writing, which were the 2 positions I liked. I know it's easier to get an entry content writer or social media job but not for HR. HR requires more expertise.

I got the content writing job and started working. I kept proffering solutions on how to improve work culture and internal communications. I helped colleagues with time management and communication issues. I created a feedback policy for my organisation, and kept pulling weight where I loved, but I was just a content writer.



I also made sure I did my job too. Five months after, my boss said she thinks an HR role will work better for me, as I easily communicate with the team, and know how to bring things together. She suggested I start joining the HR team for recruitments, so that I could learn.

My first interview was great, the HR gave feedback that I did so well. Well, since then, I have been recruiting in my office. HR left and I was told to assume the position. When I did, I started noticing that I loved the office of HR, but I still wanted more. I started pulling in my weight on general operations, and I was then promoted to be the operations manager, while we have a new HR. Currently, I plan to specialize as a brand strategist and corporate communications officer. I have plans to start taking courses in these new fields.

My end goal is to be a top brand strategist and communications consultant. I may need more years to get there. It may be 3, 5 or 7, but I know what I want. I won't take on a new HR role, I won't take up digital marketing or IT role. These are fields I can easily fit into, but I won't do them as it doesn't take me closer to where I want to be in the long run.

I will consider positions in marketing, product management, PR, corporate communications, business development, brand analyst, brand strategist etc. because they are all a means to the end.



With my story above, I am sure you now know the importance of having a career plan; it gives you clarity and helps you climb the ladder. It keeps you focused on the goal too, and makes your way to the top easy.

Now, it's not exactly easy to map a career plan, you will need clarity of purpose, and sometimes, a mentor to help you decide where fits you best, adding your skills and likes together.

I didn't know a role like corporate communications existed. I was having a conversation with a potential boyfriend about what I wanted for myself. He said; without me saying it, "it's obvious from my strengths that I will do great in Corporate communications". He sent me links to read up on, and it was exactly what I wanted.

You may not have that "potential boyfriend", lol, but there are professional career transition mentors you can speak to, that will help you gain clarity, and know exactly where you should aim to be, and how to get there. You can use LinkedIn for a start, to find these people, and choose one that suits your budget, and you admire the work they do. In all, I wish that you discover your true abilities, and go for them.



LAST WORDS

This chapter gives take away and lessons for readers. It could include lessons from women who have strived in a male-dominated workplace, or lessons from women who have retired, or some form of case study that involves real-life stories.

- **Evolve:** If you remain stagnant, life will happen and you will be a spectator. You must monitor trends and evolve in life. Self-introspection becomes very important in our daily lives. As women, we are always caught up doing everything but looking out for ourselves. We seldom have time to think about what we want, and who we want to become. I will tell you another short story. I have a friend, I will call her Kimberly; a very very smart and vibrant lady. Everyone knew she will make it in life, it was too clear, she was very driven. This made her very confident till it became a default. She waxed old, she didn't think of growing with the times, as she believed she already had a room at the top. The good news is, it wasn't too late. Last I checked, she's decided to go back to the drawing board, and monitor what keeps people at the top. She's been at the top too many times to count, but she didn't stay up for long, because she refused to evolve with time, and update to a newer version of her.



We always see tech innovations, apps being updated, marriage vows renewed, company policies updated; I mean, this is an age where work from home is now a thing. 10 years prior, we didn't see this happening.

Some people can't see themselves working remotely, they have not updated to the latest version of themselves. I can't imagine me going to an office every day, I can pop in, but not working from the office every day. I am also trying to make everything I do, work smoothly digitally, without me being present. Updating my skills, my persona, and everything around me, with all the new professional courses I take. I now enrol in online institutions. The world is now digital, I must evolve too. Look at the winning ladies around you, read documentaries and their life stories. Then, EVOLVE. Your best version awaits you!

Change the wheel...

Over the years, women have been put into a box; narratives have been created for us, and we have been made to conform to ridiculing standards. But, women before us have chosen to start changing the wheel, and we must follow these goods trails. The theme for International Women's Day this year was, #Choose to challenge. We must choose to challenge all beliefs that demean our abilities.

I want us to take a sneak peek into the lives of notable women that have not only changed the wheel



Tabitha Karanja is the CEO of Keroche breweries, and it's the second-largest brewery in Kenya. How many women venture into winemaking? She not only ventured into winemaking but she's standing out as the second-best. Challenging the odds and narratives. She is a woman to read about.

Chief Operating Officer of Facebook; 10th Most Powerful Woman in the World (Forbes); age 42

"I've cried at work. I've told people I've cried at work; and it's been reported in the press that 'Sheryl Sandberg cried on Mark Zuckerberg's shoulder,' which is not exactly what happened. I talk about my hopes and fears and ask people about theirs. I try to be myself - honest about my strengths and weaknesses, and I encourage others to do the same. It is all professional and it is all personal, all at the very same time."

This is a statement Sheryl made, and I thought it helpful to put it here. Climbing to the top won't change us from being women, or our emotional selves. We are still unique, we can still be the best, and be in touch with our roots and what makes us women. The fight is not to be like men but to be ourselves, and still win. Yes, you can also cry on a man's shoulders. It's perfectly okay. Being at the top shouldn't take your humanity away. Sheryl is another lady you should read about. As a plus to setting a career plan, you should also map out companies you would love to work with, in the nearest future. I would love to work in Deloitte, Google or General Electric someday.



Alexandra Lebanthal

President and CEO of Lebanthal & Company; age 48

"Ask and she shall receive! Women often find it hard to ask for things, whether it's a business opportunity or a salary raise. We simply expect others to recognize our value and hard work. Asking for what you want in a gracious, thoughtful way, often results in getting what you want, so put your fears aside and ask for what you want. You might just get it!"

.As mentioned earlier in one of the chapters, we spoke about being courageous, if you think you deserve it, you might as well go for it.

Stories were culled here.

The stories below were culled from LHH. You can click [here](#) to read more.

Mary-Clare Race

Chief Innovation and Product Officer

United States

"Early in my career, I worked in fairly male-dominant environments and didn't have many strong female role models. Many of the women senior to me, seemed to lead in a way that wasn't very authentic, and adopted behaviors that they felt were needed to succeed in a man's world. I didn't want to approach leadership with that mindset, so I have always strived to be true to who I am.



“Fortunately, I had a few women outside of work who influenced me in a big way, including my mum. She was a super smart lady, and raised me to understand that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to. I also had some wonderful female teachers and professors, who nurtured this sense that I could pursue my passions in life and that I wasn’t limited because I was a woman. I’ve tried to channel that mindset by being a leader who provides a springboard for others in their career—especially younger women. I’m trying to be the kind of role model that my mum and my teachers were for me.

“There’s been a real theme in my career around creating teams and environments where psychological safety is present, and I definitely see that as something that all leaders should promote. I have been in situations in the past where it didn’t feel okay to be myself or to have a voice, and I always found it more difficult to excel in those situations. I have seen situations where other people were held back or missed out on opportunities because of their gender, education, background or even the way they spoke. In these types of situations, I try to challenge that behavior and feel we all have a responsibility to call those things out. I’ve always felt that if you are able to be fully yourself, and you’re able to put your whole self into your work, you have the best chance of thriving and being successful.”



Carolyn Hafner
SVP, Global Product Manager
Switzerland

“Like many women, I didn’t have many great female role models early in my career. I worked in financial services and consulting, and these were very male-dominated industries. However, I did have my mother as a role model. She headed up our family business, and led finance, marketing, and sales. Watching her and getting involved early on, influenced my wish to become a business leader and to drive change in strategic roles.

“Overall, I learned that, as a woman, the more knowledge you have about your business—especially financial KPIs that drive the P&L—the more people will recognize you as someone who not only can talk your organization’s language but who actually understands the key levers. People will see you as someone with business acumen and financial savviness, which is important to work at the right level.

“Over my career and as a leader, I have learned about the power of reciprocity. That it’s just as important to give to people as it is to receive. I really do believe that if I give something to someone, they will eventually give something back—be it to myself or someone else. I think this lends itself to the theme for International Women’s Day this year: #EachforEqual. This speaks to the fact that if we are a more gender equal world, we can be a more enabled world. We can do that through things like reciprocity.”



Carmel Batticciotto
Practice Lead, Talent Development
Australia

"I have had many role models throughout my career, including leaders who showed me what good leadership should look like and the positive impact it can have on others.

"I have also been inspired by individuals who have suffered from great adversity and have managed to bounce back and thrive. Turia Pitt is an Australian woman who was the victim of a bushfire, and fought an extensive battle to overcome her injuries. She is now a public figure who openly shares her story, and helps inspire others in the community. She reminds me that, although we can't always control the events in our life, we can control our reaction to them. Her fighting spirit and never-give-up attitude is a huge inspiration to me.

"Never stop learning and seeking feedback. In order to develop and grow, we need to continuously learn and improve while still believing in our own ability. That has been an important lesson for me, to not let an awareness of your own development areas impact your confidence levels or self-belief. So, no matter what stage you are at in your career, you can continue to learn, evolve, and grow."



Katrina Villarreal
Country Manager
Germany

"I am most fortunate to have an incredible role model in my grandmother, Lorene VanLeeuwen. A child of the Great Depression, she knew that education and hard work were the keystones to success. At a time when most women stayed home, she worked as a teacher, secretary, and postmaster for her small town. At 89, she decided to learn computers and went back to take college classes. Today, at 105 years old, she has an iPad, is on Facebook, and regularly communicates with her great-great grandchildren. She is still learning new things every day.

"The key lesson I learned from her was to never stop learning. If you learn, you grow—and as you grow, you can teach others by your example. I would also echo my grandmother's advice to never stop embracing challenges. When we embrace a challenge, we think beyond the everyday and do more than we thought was possible."

Monica Ramos
Consulting Director
Brazil

"Deciding to become a leader is a challenge that will affect your whole life. It's not just your job; becoming a



leader affects your role as a mother, a spouse or partner, and your position in the family.

leader affects your role as a mother, a spouse or partner, and your position in the family. It's a daily challenge that you need to accept to become a better person, and better leader. Like the decision you make to be a mother, the decision to take on leadership affects everything.

"There were a lot of people who inspired me, including my mother and father. In different phases of my life, I have gotten inspiration and advice from different people. Like Jose Augusto Figueiredo, my direct leader. We have worked together for almost 20 years. In the beginning of my career, whenever we had a very challenging project, I didn't know if I was the right person for the job. He helped me see that I could be the right person, and supported me to build a successful team. He always talked about how I needed to connect the best people for the right moment.

"Later, when I became a leader myself, he inspired me as a leader coach, asking questions and showing me different points of view.

"The first lesson I learned is that, as a woman, you don't need to be afraid of being a leader; and you should not expect people to treat you differently, simply because you are a woman. As a woman, you are no different than any leader, male or female. We may have specific attributes



that are inherent in us as women, and that can help us lead in a better, more effective way in certain situations. We are more organized, flexible, and can make adjustments more easily than men. That is a great benefit for any leader.

"I also learned that you do not have to avoid having a family to be an executive leader. A lot of younger women think that if they want to become an executive, they cannot have a family. I try to explain that you can do both things. You don't need to separate these roles—leader and mother. Instead, you need to integrate them, and you will become a better leader. There are always ways you can do both things in your life."

Kim Spurgeon
SVP, Sales
Canada

"My first role model was my mother. The part that really influenced me as a youngster was her belief around women and girls being able to take on any challenge without fear. This was a lesson that helped me quite a bit in my first career in criminology, working in halfway houses and with people with addictions who had been in the justice system. It was a very male-dominated profession, and my mother helped me see that I could still succeed, even in a place where there were not a lot of people who looked like me.



My second role model was my first boss in the consulting world. For him, gender was not a factor. He was only concerned about hiring and promoting people who were capable of doing great things, regardless of whether they were men or women. He also really helped me change my beliefs around getting involved in sales, and how to engage with our clients. I was very skeptical about a career in sales, but he showed me how rewarding it could be and how it could be pivotal in moving to a leadership role.

"I think women let assumptions and mindset get in their own way a lot of the time. One of the things that I learned when I first started in the consulting world, was that I could master new things. I never thought I'd be involved in sales, and had this negative vision of the stereotypical used car salesman. My mindset changed as I spent more time with customers. I realized sales is about building relationships, helping the customer solve problems, and finding solutions that lead to making strong long-term connections.

"The irony was that I had been shown the ropes in sales by many older men, and I thank them for encouraging me. But pretty quickly, I realized a lot of my customers were women like me. Ultimately, I saw that I had an advantage because customers expressed a preference for dealing with me. I wouldn't have been able to do this if I had not been able to change my mindset around what I could and could not do. As women, we need to share our aspirational goals, keep an open mind about the things we can achieve, and realize our differences can become our strengths."



EXTRAS

Dealing with a personal crisis

Life will always happen but it's important to know how to prepare and handle crises. The most effective way to handle a crisis is to have a strong support system. Humans are the most important gifts God has given to us, you should build strong relationships, and have people you can run to when life heads south.

Secondly, you should have a "this too shall pass attitude"; no matter what you are going through, it will be solved soon. The knowledge of that makes you maintain a positive view to your situation, it also opens your mind to look for solutions.

Seek help, life is easier with people. Talk to someone about your challenges, could be a friend, mentor, professional, therapist etc.

Take a break, you can decide to take a break from everything happening around you, and seek help from within. If you are a spiritual person, you can have spiritual retreats, and read books that will help you, or podcasts that shares insights on the current challenge you are facing.



Do something that makes you happy: at times, self-neglect can escalate to a crisis in life. Pay attention to yourself and your feelings, and do something that will make you feel better about yourself.



RESOURCES

Book recommendations for further reading:

1. Girl Code: Unlocking the Secrets to Success, Sanity, and Happiness for the Female Entrepreneur
2. Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office.
3. Option B.
4. The Confidence Code.
5. Emotional Intelligence.
6. Big Magic Creative Living Beyond.
7. The 48 Laws of Power.
8. Drop the Ball.
9. #GIRLBOSS.
10. Good to Great.
11. A Woman's Guide To Getting Through Tough Times.
12. Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead – Sheryl Sandberg
13. Hardball for Women: Winning at the Game of Business – Pat Heim, Tammy Hughes, Susan K. Golant
14. Women Who Don't Wait in L

