

THE VOICE OF FEMALE LEADERS

A CONVERSATION WITH KIMBERLY MAUCHER-LYNCH



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Introduction

Kimberly Maucher-Lynch's multifaceted nature extends beyond her professional accomplishments, revealing a rich tapestry of passions and principles that define her. Growing up in a bi-racial family, she navigated the complexities of identity, shaping her into an intentional individual who stands firmly for her beliefs.

Hailing from coastal New England, USA, Kimberly's life journey wound its way through Finland, Germany, Kyoto, Dubai, and mountainous terrain, capturing the essence of adaptability and seizing opportunities interwoven with grit and serendipity. Her expat life was an unexpected yet rewarding outcome of her curiosity for diverse cultures and personal growth.

Reflecting on her journey, Kimberly highlights her penchant for taking "impossible leaps" and venturing beyond her comfort zone. She vividly recalls situations in which unforeseen challenges demanded innovative solutions, igniting her determination to conquer adversity and persevere. This experience crystallized valuable life lessons: maintaining focus, remaining solution-oriented, and channelling emotions constructively.

While Kimberly's career is a testament to her personal achievements, it embodies a larger promise she upholds—a promise to honour the legacy of those who paved the way and to champion a brighter future for all. Her success is woven into a larger narrative, one where empowerment and progress transcend individual aspirations.

Can you share some insights into your journey and the key factors that have contributed to your success?

I would like to begin by saying that this journey could not have been planned. If you had told me 23 years ago that I would be in the role I am today, I wouldn't have believed it. Living as a global expat for 23 years, I now reflect back and marvel at how things developed. It seems so far from my original path and my experiences prior. However, it became possible because I remained open to new opportunities and was ready for serendipity. That was a crucial part of my journey.

I arrived in Germany 23 years ago, purely by chance. Originally, I had intended to go to Kyoto, a place I've never been to, by the way. This might be an interesting side note. I had taken six semesters of Japanese during my bachelor's degree and had wanted to go abroad for that semester. So, I went to the office to sign up. Unfortunately, they had no available spaces left, and it seemed like my dream was over. However, I was open to going anywhere they had an open space. So, I signed up for an opportunity at the

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Albert Ludwigs University in Freiburg, which is in the Black Forest. Conventional wisdom would have advised against it, as it was considered risky for my grades and academic reputation due to the language barrier.

But, I was open to the experience, and that decision marked the beginning of my journey as an expat. I continued to

embrace new opportunities, which led me to Paris, the UK, and back to Germany. I spent 11 years with a German global software company. During that time they sent me to Dubai to help build their talent ecosystem, and this assignment was offered to me with very short notice. I asked when they wanted me to go, and they said the project would start in three weeks, on-site in Dubai. Once again, I seized the opportunity, and it turned out to be a significant learning experience.

What contributed to my success throughout this journey was maintaining a curious mindset and embracing a growth mindset. I put myself out there, even when it meant moving to Germany long-term and learning a complex language as an adult in a corporate environment. I committed to using and developing my language skills even in spaces where English was an option, and accepted the possibility of making mistakes and learned from them. Another key factor was having mentors over the years who challenged me, helped me clarify my thinking, and frame my thoughts.

One pivotal mentor had a very different style from mine, and I knew I could learn a lot from him. I asked him to be a sparring partner on specific topics. He agreed, but our meetings had to be at 7:30 AM, and making the trip to his office required a 90-minute train ride for me. I remember once being a minute late, and he firmly reminded me that the door was closed, teaching me a valuable lesson about punctuality.

To sum it up, the key factors in my success have been nurturing and maintaining a network, which includes having mentors with different perspectives. Engaging in inspiring conversations and exchanges with them has allowed me to identify new opportunities for growth and to challenge my own thinking.

How do you define leadership, and what qualities do you believe are essential for effective leadership in any industry?

Leadership, in my view, is not about issuing directives or forging ahead without involving others. It fundamentally revolves around inclusivity. Leadership, at its core, entails coaching, mentoring, and cultivating an environment where people can foster and develop ideas, as well as their own growth.

It's about cultivating a culture of psychological safety where innovation can thrive. Innovation flourishes when individuals feel secure enough to make mistakes and bring novel ideas to the forefront. I firmly believe that everyone has the potential to be a leader. It's not about being the most vocal person in the room or conforming a fixed image of what a leader 'should' embody.

True leadership is the ability to bring individuals together, harness their collective energy and motivation, and collaboratively create something that transcends individual capabilities, all for the greater good of the larger organization.

Can you share a specific challenge or setback you encountered in your career? How did you navigate through it, and what lessons did you learn that can be applicable to other leaders?

One particular experience that stands out to me goes back to the early stages of my career, right after graduating from university. I had just arrived in Germany, full of enthusiasm, and took on a role as a search consultant at a boutique executive search firm specializing in the telecommunications and IT sector.

At that time, my proficiency in the German language, to put it diplomatically, was far from fluent. This was also before the era of LinkedIn and other technological advancements that make it easier to identify and connect with professionals. It required

a lot of detective work, including making phone calls, trying to navigate past potential gatekeepers using various alibis or stories, all in the hope of reaching the right department and the right person who had the desired role we were searching for.

One routine aspect of our workweek was the Friday stand-up meeting. In this meeting, every team member had to stand in front of a large whiteboard and report how much pipeline they had brought into the company. This weekly ritual was critical, and the pressure mounted with each passing week.

I had taken on a project that started well but soon encountered issues. Candidates I brought into the pipeline weren't progressing, and it was challenging to understand why. This led to frustration on the client's side, and they requested an on-site meeting to discuss the project's status.

Such unplanned meetings were never a good sign, and as my manager and I drove to the customer's location, the silence in the car spoke volumes. It was clear that I

needed to turn things around. I requested an opportunity from my manager to do just that, and he agreed but wanted to see a plan.

I went back to basics, reevaluated why the search had gone awry, and identified a fundamental misalignment between the client's expectations and mine regarding the required skills. We were essentially talking about two different profiles. Realizing this, I adjusted expectations, the sourcing and search profile, and created a stakeholder plan to manage the client's expectations more effectively.

In short, the turnaround was successful. I managed to fill all the roles. In fact, the outcome allowed me to finance my MBA, which I pursued after that role. It's remarkable how close one can come to a potential disaster due to simple issues like miscommunication, failure to understand expectations, or neglecting to set clear expectations.

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This experience taught me a crucial lesson that continues to serve me well: pay close attention to what the client or the person you are working with is saying, and ensure alignment in what you aim to achieve together.

How do you maintain resilience and drive during challenging times, and what strategies have helped you overcome obstacles?

Absolutely. When we talk about resilience, it's not just about challenges; it's about having the courage to face the possibility of failure and finding a way to recover. There are two key factors that have consistently supported me throughout my journey.

Firstly, having a clear vision of where I want to go is essential. Without a clear destination in mind, it's easy to lose momentum when facing difficulties. During tough times, it's crucial to remind myself of what I'm striving for. What's the higher purpose behind my efforts? It's not just about personal goals but also about what I want for my environment, my family, my career, and my company. This clarity of purpose fuels real resilience.

Secondly, self-care is vital. This includes the basics such as getting enough sleep, eating nourishing food, and nurturing relationships. While these may seem fundamental, they often get neglected when life becomes hectic or external pressures mount. Maintaining inner balance provides the resilience to take care of ourselves and contribute positively to our surroundings. Think about the safety instructions on a plane – they advise you to put on your own mask before helping others. This principle applies here too. Sometimes, we get so caught up in serving others and their causes that we forget we need sufficient energy to continue delivering effectively for them. These are the two fundamental aspects of maintaining resilience.

What initiatives or strategies do you implement to promote diversity and inclusion within your work?

This is a topic that holds great significance for me. Driving diversity and inclusion is not just an overarching strategy; it's also about our day-to-day actions and maintaining consistency in conveying why diversity and inclusion are so crucial. I've accumulated over 23 years of experience in the talent and human resources field, including HR

transformation, recruiting, business partnering, succession, and compensation.

Throughout my career, one central theme has remained constant: the connection between inclusion and access to opportunities, information and jobs.

When I reflect on the early days of my career and what has continued to drive me, it's been always my aspiration to be at the forefront of where opportunities exist. This isn't something I want to enable just for my own gain, I want it for anyone seeking to improve their life, family, environment, and is willing to put in the effort to achieve it. That's why I'm in HR – to make a difference. I always promised myself that as I grew in my career in terms of networking, influence, contacts, and opportunities, I'd open doors for those who might not have that chance yet.

In terms of specific initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion, a significant part of my efforts involves everyday activities that connect people and brokering conversations. In the hiring process, it's about bringing candidates into the pipeline and introducing them to individuals who can change their career trajectory by offering them a job. We know that there are various ways to do this, and sometimes, exceptional candidates are overlooked because they don't fit the traditional profile that a hiring manager is accustomed to. For me, it's about advocating for these exceptional candidates and providing them with an opportunity for an initial interview.

Another critical issue is equal pay, which is a topic which needs all our attention. Equal pay often depends on a candidate's ability and willingness to negotiate. Research shows that certain groups face more scrutiny and judgement when negotiating for a market-level salary. As individuals, HR practitioners, and thought leaders, we can raise awareness among our stakeholders, hiring managers, and hiring committees about the importance of offering fair compensation, even if candidates haven't explicitly requested it or have shared salary expectations below the market rate. This ensures that all candidates with similar experience receive equal opportunities.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion managers have a critical part to play in championing DE&I. There are a few aspects that are crucial to ensuring success in that position. First, they should be placed in a position within the organization where they can make an impact and have visibility. Ideally, they should have access to top leadership and be part of the leadership team to implement DEI strategies effectively. Secondly, funding

is crucial. Adequate resources are needed to support DEI initiatives, and it's not a one-time investment but an ongoing commitment.

Lastly, data plays a significant role. DEI practitioners need data to demonstrate the success of their strategies and identify areas that need improvement. Data also helps make the case for additional resources and visibility for DEI initiatives. All of these resources and elements are essential to ensure that DEI practitioners can be successful in their roles.

As a board member of an orchestra, what advice would you give to aspiring musicians and young leaders aiming to make a positive impact in their respective fields?

In order to have impact, one needs not only an intrinsic drive but also an ecosystem of partners and an environment which makes it possible to deliver on what one wants to achieve. Seek out those kinds of spaces actively, make connections with people who support your vision and also potential mentors, coaches and sparring partners who can provide valuable perspective.

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We spoke previously about mentoring and what it has meant to me in my career. If I could give one piece of advice to a young talent considering working with a mentor, I would encourage them to communicate openly about their goals in that exchange, and what they hope to gain (and give!) in that tandem. Effective mentoring is very much about an exchange that should benefit both sides. And the learnings out of such a tandem can give valuable insights that support both participants in their professional journey.

Sometimes moments in our daily life give us valuable lessons about courage under pressure and moving past the fear into action. I'd like to share a story about how this played out for me in an unexpected place. Those who know me know that I'm

passionate about the outdoors, and some years back, I was on a mountain trek that I'd planned for some time. Hours into the journey, I encountered an unexpected challenge: the waterfall which has usually there had frozen into an icy sheet, blocking the path and pointing down into a deep abyss. I might add that I'd prepared for the hike but had not anticipated this coming, and didn't have the adequate equipment to get across. Also, at that time I did not have the needed skills to navigate this and could feel the stress building in me quickly. In the end, I realized that I needed to stay focused and deliberate about my steps if I wanted to come out safely-and I did. Later on, I made it a point to get more training in dealing with such situations in the mountains. It gave me what I needed to get back out there and not let the experience scare me off of something I was passionate about. This story serves as a metaphor for facing unexpected challenges in life and the importance of learning from them to prepare for future hurdles.

Reflections

The interview with Kimberly Maucher-Lynch, a multifaceted individual with a diverse background, provided insights into her remarkable journey and the qualities that contributed to her success.

Kimberly emphasized the importance of embracing serendipity and being open to unexpected turns in one's journey. Her story included moments of taking "impossible leaps" and venturing beyond comfort zones, where she learned valuable life lessons such as maintaining focus, staying solution-oriented, and managing emotions constructively.

Her career success was not only a testament to her personal achievements but also her commitment to a larger promise—to honour those who paved the way and advocate for a brighter future for all. Her leadership approach centred around inclusivity, fostering an environment where people could develop ideas and grow. She believed that true leadership involved collaboration and harnessing collective energy for the greater good. She also stressed the significance of self-care and maintaining inner balance during challenging times.

In terms of promoting diversity and inclusion, Kimberly emphasized the role of individuals in opening doors for exceptional candidates and advocating for fair compensation. She also discussed the importance of data, visibility, and resources in successful Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

As a board member of an orchestra, Kimberly encouraged aspiring musicians and young leaders to pursue their passions while maintaining balance and adaptability. She emphasized the value of effective mentorship, mutual benefit, and communication. She shared a personal story of facing unexpected challenges during a mountain hike, highlighting the importance of learning from such experiences to prepare for future hurdles.

In summary, Kimberly Maucher-Lynch's journey and insights underscored the significance of adaptability, openness, inclusivity, and a clear sense of purpose in achieving personal and professional success. Her interview serves as an inspirational guide for individuals striving to make a positive impact in their respective fields.

Kimberly Maucher-Lynch was interviewed by Loudie Sylvain, Associate, and Hagen Schweinitz, Global Board and Governance Advisory Practice Leader.



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