

THE VOICE OF FEMALE LEADERS

Conversations about Leadership, Resilience and Diversity



Content

Introduction	3
Context	4
The Conversations:	5
Claudia Ferrazzi	5
İpek İpekçioğlu	14
Iris Braun	25
Jennifer Scheydt	33
Kimberly Maucher-Lynch	41
Megha Malagatti	50
Nicola Winter	59
Nike Lorenz	67
Souad Massi	75
Leadership – A Synthesis	82
Resilience and Setbacks	83
Diversity and Inclusion in Practice	84
Conclusion	85
Contributors	86

Introduction

Dear Readers,

I am thrilled to share with you the inspiring journey of our ongoing interview series, "Voices of Female Leaders" by Eric Salmon & Partners. This collection transcends traditional boundaries to showcase exceptional women who have made a profound impact in their respective fields.



"Voices of Female Leaders" is more than a series of interviews; it is a celebration of diverse experiences, ideas, and leadership styles. Each conversation goes beyond the ordinary, offering a glimpse into the unique paths these remarkable women have walked.

In a world where leadership is evolving, these interviews contribute to a rich tapestry of narratives that redefine what it means to lead. It's about embracing different perspectives and recognizing the power of diversity in driving innovation and progress.

This series opens doors to meaningful conversations, fostering connections and understanding. Through these stories, we aim to bridge gaps, initiate dialogues, and inspire others to break barriers in their own journeys.

"Voices of Female Leaders" is a platform for change, amplifying voices that may have gone unheard. It is a collective effort to break stereotypes, challenge norms, and encourage inclusivity in all aspects of leadership.

In closing, "Voices of Female Leaders" is not just about showcasing extraordinary women; it's about recognizing the transformative power of their stories. We invite you to join us on this journey of empowerment, celebration, and inspiration.

Hagen Schweinitz

Global Practice Leader, Board and Governance Advisory Practice

Eric Salmon & Partners

Context



Dear Readers,

"Voices of Female Leaders" stands as a captivating initiative, offering a profound insight into the lives of nine extraordinary women. Each of these leaders, hailing from diverse fields and walks of life, shares a unique and compelling narrative, replete with invaluable insights and experiences. These stories beckon us to contemplate the essence of success, explore avenues to discover our mission, and surmount barriers.

Drenched in tales of determination and unwavering pursuit of goals and dreams, these narratives span the spectrum of sports, politics, art, academia, and business, illustrating that exceptional achievements can sprout from any domain. None of these women has opted for an easy path, often recalibrating their careers and reevaluating their choices. The authenticity of the testimonials struck me profoundly, as they openly share the challenges faced and lessons learned.

One particularly resonant takeaway from the interviews is the set of four keys to success, as articulated by one of the interviewees: courage, curiosity, connection, and conviction. Delving into the interviews further, additional qualities such as commitment, compassion, charisma, communication, and collaboration emerge.

These exceptional women offer us invaluable lessons, navigating new ideas and dreams in a world still entrenched in traditional values, gender stereotypes, and hierarchical thinking. "Voices of Female Leaders" not only provides insights into finding one's mission, stepping out of comfort zones, and making impactful strides but also underscores the importance of paving the way for others.

In the face of a world grappling with traditional values and gender biases, these women inspire us to redefine leadership. They encourage us to reconsider what it truly takes to be a great leader—emphasizing the need to embrace diversity of thought, origin, education, and identity. As our society grapples with unprecedented challenges, the initiative prompts us to reshape our understanding of leadership. Kudos to Eric Salmon & Partners for spearheading this commendable initiative.

Hedwige Nuyens

Chair

European Women on Boards



CLAUDIA FERRAZZI

Introduction

Claudia Ferrazzi's remarkable journey through the realms of culture, leadership, and diplomacy is a testament to her unique blend of talents and experiences. Born as an Italian citizen, she later acquired French citizenship, and her life's narrative unfolds as follows:

From her early professional foray into the Brussels office of Telecom Italia, Claudia embarked on a path that would lead her through some of the most prestigious consulting positions, including roles at industry giants like Cap Gemini and Boston Consulting Group.

Her journey took a significant turn when she entered the French administration, where she made vital contributions to the Ministry of Economy and Finance, with a focus on administrative and budgetary reform during 2006-2007 and subsequently, when she joined the General Inspectorate of Finance.

In 2011, Claudia assumed a pivotal role as Deputy Director General of the Louvre Museum, where she played a crucial part in shaping and executing the museum's scientific and cultural policies. Her responsibilities spanned operational management, financial oversight, human resources leadership, and strategic communications. Notably, she spearheaded the establishment of the Louvre's Lens branch and represented the institution on the global stage.

Claudia's journey continued as she moved to Rome, where she served as the Secretary-General of Villa Medici at the Académie de France à Rome, starting in 2013. In this role, she enacted reforms for art residencies and adeptly managed the institution's complex financial and human resources.

Her dedication to cultural heritage and diplomacy led to her becoming a member of the Superior Council of Cultural and Landscape Heritage in 2014.

Simultaneously, she joined the Board of Directors of the Offices and assumed the prestigious position of vice president of the Governing Council of the Italian National Commission for UNESCO. In 2017, Claudia was entrusted by the city of Milan with the responsibility of directing and enhancing the city's promotion and influence, marking another remarkable chapter in her journey.

Following the French general elections, Claudia returned to France, where she served as a cultural and audiovisual advisor to president Macron from 2017 to 2019. In early 2020, Claudia Ferrazzi founded "Viarte – Art to Lead Differently," an initiative that sought to enrich the business world with the transformative power of art and culture.

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

Claudia Ferrazzi: I would describe my journey as having had a vision from a young age, one that was deeply rooted in Europe. My fascination with Europe was shaped by the fact that my grandparents lived through a time when war was a real possibility in Europe. This historical context made me ponder the importance of European dialogue and cooperation.

Early on, I started traveling because I felt a strong desire to explore and engage with the various programs

available, such as Erasmus and Leonardo. I believed that European dialogue was key for my generation to move forward. I remember discussing with fellow students and colleagues, dreaming of a Europe where many countries would sit around the same table. Perhaps it was an ambitious dream, and we may have made some missteps along the way.

One thing that has become a passionate focus for me now is fostering dialogue between individuals from different countries. This personal connection and exchange of ideas have become profoundly important to me and have influenced many aspects of my journey.

In my quest to find the right educational and professional path, I came to France. I had no prior connection to France, but I was drawn to its well-regarded public service

schools. As I immersed myself in the French public service, I gradually became deeply connected to the country, even though it was foreign to me in the beginning. It felt like home.

Around 20 years ago, the idea of being a public leader in the French administration without being French was virtually unheard of. Nonetheless, I decided to stay in France, and over time, it became my home.

At a certain point, I decided to focus on a specific area where I could make a meaningful impact. I chose culture because I believed it could help countries find common ground and collaborate effectively. I became the Vice General Administrator of the Louvre Museum, effectively the third-in-command, and gained my first taste of cultural administration.

Throughout my journey, one thing became clear to me: culture often feels isolated from everyday life. Therefore, I decided to take matters into my own hands and founded a startup that would integrate culture into daily life. This endeavour has been a significant part of my journey and reflects my commitment to making culture accessible and integral to our everyday experiences.

RN: How do you define leadership, and what qualities do you believe are

“I place great importance on being reliable and having the ability to delegate.”

essential for effective leadership in any industry?

CF: The word that holds immense significance for me in both leadership and my life is "reliable." I take great satisfaction in maintaining strong relationships with my team members throughout my various professional endeavors. They often describe me as reliable, and I believe this touches on a crucial aspect of female leadership.

Being reliable means not only being present but also being willing to delegate and accept the possibility of being replaceable. It's a unique experience that many of us, especially women, go through, such as when taking maternity leaves. Regardless of your position within an organization, even if you're at a place like the Élysée where major decisions are made, you must be prepared for the possibility that you won't be there the next day. This mindset extends to our personal lives as well; I always consider what would happen to others if I were to have an accident within the next hour.

Therefore, I place great importance on being reliable and having the ability to delegate, ensuring that I can be replaced if, for any reason, whether personal or professional, I am unable to fulfill my responsibilities. This perspective might not align with the traditional concept of leadership found in books, as it's a leadership style that acknowledges the potential for being absent at any moment

and places a strong emphasis on preparedness for such situations.

RN: 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?

CF: Well, that's quite a challenging question, but let me try to break it down. First, let's talk about an achievement, and then we can delve into something that didn't go as planned.

In terms of an achievement, I would point to my time at the Louvre Museum. We embarked on a project to establish a museum branch in a challenging area where people traditionally didn't frequent museums. Our aim was to create a different kind of Louvre, one tailored to this unique region in northern France. I took the initiative and became responsible for this project. It was crucial to me that it be a hands-on endeavour, so I would catch a train every Monday and personally oversee every aspect of the project.

The happy ending to this story is that the museum is now open and draws in 800,000 visitors annually in this challenging region of France. It's a significant achievement, and it represents the first time I took on both a leadership and operational role. What I learned from this experience is that when you truly believe in something, you must immerse yourself in it and be prepared to take on any role required. This could mean taking on tasks as small as

fixing a light bulb or as significant as handling high-level meetings with the Ministry of Culture. It taught me that there are no rigid boundaries in a result-driven role. It demands a versatile approach, combining intellectual, collective, and sometimes individual thinking, while playing various roles within an organization.

This lesson was instrumental in what came next – founding my own company. When you start your own business, especially in the early stages, you must be willing to handle every aspect, from the nitty-gritty details to the big-picture vision. This experience demonstrated that when you are outcome-oriented, job boundaries can become fluid.

Now, let's shift to a challenging moment in my career. It was during a period when the President of the Republic had to halt nearly all activities due to widespread protests and strikes in society. It was a tumultuous time, and the public policies we had in place seemed inadequate in understanding and addressing the emotional and irrational aspects of the people's grievances. The key lesson I took from this experience is that we had underestimated the emotional and irrational aspects of collective sentiment. We had also failed to communicate that culture is, and always has been, a progressive force. However, we found ourselves perceived as elitist, disconnected from the general population, and at times, aligned with political ideologies that people found objectionable.

It was a challenging period, but it prompted us to make necessary changes. We learned that the cultural sector needed to be more in touch with the market and the realities of daily life. This realization led me to take a different path, to create a smaller, private institution, and to focus on bridging the gap between culture and people's everyday lives.

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

CF: In 2020, when I decided to dedicate a year to research due to lockdowns, it became clear that our company couldn't immediately enter the market. So, we made the decision to fund a year of scientific research. We invited several teams to participate and provide their insights on what we were trying to build.

One notable team consisted of American sociologists who delved into the topic of fostering creativity. Over an 11-year period, they meticulously analysed major scientific breakthroughs of the 20th century, the kind that led to Nobel prizes or Field medals. They scrutinized these discoveries through a sociological lens, investigating the laboratories where they were made, their functioning, and the individuals involved. They also compared these successful labs to similar ones that had undergone research without funding and didn't yield results. Their extensive study covered approximately 200 significant discoveries

from the 20th century, and they aimed to establish correlations to understand how successful labs operated.

Their findings revealed two significant correlations. First, they discovered that all members of successful labs had a willingness to transcend disciplinary and geographical boundaries. This meant that they were open to

changing their mindset and considering new perspectives, as they applied rules and insights from one field to another. The

second correlation was even more

intriguing and relevant to our context. Every researcher who joined a successful team had a second passion or another significant activity that consumed a considerable amount of their time, passion, investment, and motivation.

This insight challenged the conventional notion that the best person to solve a problem is the one who sticks to it doggedly. Instead, it suggested that individuals with a second set of rules and passions, who could think beyond the immediate problem, were often better equipped to find solutions.

Why do I bring up this research? It's because my approach to resilience is rooted in maintaining an alternative

passion. For me, that is writing. When I encounter a problem, I pick up my pen and start writing about it. Writing provides me with an alternate activity, motivates me, and creates a mental break. It allows me to step aside from the problem at hand. It's worth noting that this second field of passion can be a more demanding activity. For

example, I'm currently working on a writing school project, which may not appear directly linked to my primary work, but it serves as an excellent diversion. When I'm stuck on one project, I can switch to another, drawing from a different well of energy, motivation, and

perspective. This enables me to return to the first project with a fresh outlook.

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

CF: First and foremost, I firmly believe in the importance of non-verbal communication. While language is undeniably essential—I work with language, reading, writing, and conversation—I also recognize that it can carry a lot of connotations and can sometimes be a restrictive way to engage in dialogue.

Consequently, I've made it a point to explore alternative forms of communication. Fortunately, I have a significant advantage

“When you truly believe in something, you must immerse yourself in it and be prepared to take on any role required.”

in my work because I collaborate with artists, musicians, and visual arts professionals. For instance, I express gratitude to people by sending them a photo instead of simply saying "thank you." It's a way to convey appreciation without relying solely on words.

I believe that, to foster inclusivity, we must embrace diverse forms of communication. Often, we become overly reliant on verbal language, which can pose challenges when working with individuals from various nationalities, cultures, and educational backgrounds.

Language can sometimes be a barrier to effective communication.

In my line of work, which primarily involves cross-border collaboration, I often find myself in unique situations. For example, right after this conversation with you, I'll be meeting with an artist at a car manufacturing facility. This setting creates a platform for dialogue between two individuals who may not typically have the opportunity to exchange ideas. Facilitating such interactions is, in my opinion, a means of promoting inclusivity. It allows people from diverse backgrounds, including those in major cities with high levels of education,

to break out of their isolation and learn how to communicate effectively with others.

Reflecting on my past political experience, it became evident that we were on the wrong path because of our tendency to isolate ourselves within our natural and familiar environments. As a result, I've actively sought ways to communicate beyond my immediate and everyday surroundings, recognizing that inclusivity often requires venturing beyond our comfort zones and engaging with people from various walks of life.

“I believe that, to foster inclusivity, we must embrace diverse forms of communication. Often, we become overly reliant on verbal language.”

RN: As a successful leader, what advice would you give to aspiring young executives aiming to make a positive impact in their respective fields?

CF: I'd like to provide some context from my perspective within the cultural sector, as it may help you better understand my viewpoint. The cultural sector has been significantly influenced by the media landscape. There's an ongoing debate about TV series versus movies, with concerns raised about younger generations' ability to engage with deep and lengthy content. Some argue that quick communication and constant media switching have eroded attention spans,

making it challenging for young people to delve into books or other extended forms of storytelling. However, I believe this debate is somewhat misplaced. Instead, we should focus on rediscovering the art of storytelling and creating shared narratives that transcend different media platforms and generations.

I firmly believe that leaders should be adept storytellers. The medium through which we convey stories matters less than the essence of the story itself. We need to make sense of our actions and decisions, especially for the benefit of younger leaders who may struggle to understand the rationale behind our choices. In meetings with executives, I've noticed a significant generational gap in comprehension and communication. It's ironic that despite having more communication tools at our disposal, we are dividing society and leadership into two distinct groups.

Therefore, my involvement in a writing school project is tied to this belief. I encourage leaders to contemplate how they can create and share stories with their teams. We should momentarily set aside the tools we use and focus on storytelling, as stories are not bound by tools. A compelling story, whether in a company context or in fiction like "Harry Potter," transcends the medium in which it's told.

“I firmly believe that leaders should be adept storytellers.”

So, the first point I'd like to emphasize is the importance of prioritizing storytelling over tools, fostering the creation of shared narratives. Secondly, I believe we made a crucial error during our earlier years. My generation, for the first time in decision-making positions, sought to protect our private lives by erecting a metaphorical "Chinese wall" between our personal and professional domains. I understand the rationale behind this choice, but it's time to break down that wall. The fact remains that a person is a single entity, whether at work or at home, during travel, or in interactions with others.

Companies should recognize and care for the whole person, acknowledging that executives want to be seen as multidimensional

individuals. In recent years, I've started to openly discuss my family and even involve my children in professional settings. This has helped me realize that my personal life is an integral part of who I am, and people are aware of it. Authentic leadership entails revealing one's true self and what one holds dear.

So, my second piece of advice is to embrace authenticity by being open about your entire self, both personally and professionally. It's a shift I've made over my 20-year career, recognizing that growth and

change are part of life, and only those who refuse to evolve remain stagnant.

making it an enriching and engaging experience.

Reflections

Impressions from Claudia Ferrazzi's discussion were characterized by a sense of enjoyment and the discovery of a different perspective. Claudia emerged as a mature individual with a captivating blend of experiences and insights derived from various countries, all enveloped within her strong personality.

The dialogue presented an intriguing mix of business, culture, and politics, offering a fresh viewpoint that surprised and fascinated. Claudia's ability to articulate her thoughts and share her lessons learned was particularly noteworthy. Her wisdom was seen as insightful not only for the present generation but also for those in the future, encouraging them to listen, compare, and adapt. Claudia's emphasis on the significance of art and culture in addressing everyday business challenges was also appreciated. It was acknowledged that these creative dimensions could effectively stimulate innovative solutions and provide alternative approaches to problem-solving.

Above all, Claudia Ferrazzi's discussion left an impression of high energy and unwavering conviction. Her openness and directness in communication made the conversation a genuine pleasure. Overall, Claudia's unique perspective was revealed,



İPEK İPEKÇİOĞLU

Introduction

Born in 1972, İpek İpekçioğlu is an internationally renowned DJ, music producer, curator, author, and queer activist. She is based between Berlin and Istanbul, and her reputation extends throughout nightlife scenes worldwide. İpek has showcased her music at prestigious events such as Glastonbury, Fusion, Sziget, At.tension, Berlin Festival, and numerous other international electronic and world music festivals. Her unique and hybrid sound mix has garnered international acclaim, captivating audiences from New York City to the Sahara Desert of Mali, Tokyo, and Rio de Janeiro. İpek is widely recognized as one of the Berlin club scene's most prominent DJs.

İpek İpekçioğlu's work delves into social-political issues inherent in everyday life, and she adeptly incorporates them into her musical productions. Her creative endeavors are distinctly intertwined with political perspectives, particularly relating to female, immigrant, and queer topics. Her passion for culturally diverse musical projects, both as a curator and participant, is evident in her body of work. İpek is widely known for her live collaborations with various musicians, as well as her contributions to theatre, opera, films, and documentaries.

Beyond her artistic pursuits, İpek is an event manager and a committed activist. She is a member of the artist network "female:pressure" and has co-founded two

associations dedicated to social causes. Moreover, İpek is a sought-after speaker on topics related to LGBTQI*+ issues and migration. Her multifaceted contributions extend far beyond the realm of music, making her a prominent figure in both the artistic and activist communities.

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

İpek İpekçioğlu: First of all, my bi-cultural upbringing and perpetual movement between countries, languages, cultures, and music have been significant influences on my life. Additionally, my gender identity as a queer person has played a crucial role in keeping me adaptable, mobile, and open to challenges and changes. In all my endeavors, I aim to contribute something meaningful and lasting to society, as I consider myself an integral part of it.

Like many second-generation immigrants of that era, often referred to as "suitcase children," I experienced a childhood marked by frequent moves between Germany and Turkey. I was born in Munich but never truly lived there. My formal education began in Turkey, where I oscillated between the two countries for three years. Eventually, I relocated to Berlin with my single mother. In a working-class neighbourhood, I attended primary school, and we changed residences nine times within the city.

My mother emphasized the importance of being proficient in both German and Turkish, including reading and writing in

both languages. However, I faced initial challenges with the German language. Initially, I considered pursuing a career as a policewoman or psychologist. However, I ultimately opted for a hotel apprenticeship. Yet, despite my aspirations, I encountered difficulties securing a position in that field. Moreover, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, I no longer felt entirely at home in Germany, sensing a lack of belonging. Consequently, I made the decision to relocate to London, where I took on the role of an au pair.

It was during my time in England that I began to grapple with my own attraction to women. This realization was significant, as I had been raised within Turkish culture, which, while familiar with some LGBTQ+ artists, did not provide me with an immediate support network of individuals in similar situations. During my self-imposed exile in England, I engaged in profound introspection and questioned various aspects of my life, including my relationship with Germany, my sexual identity, relationships, coming out, career prospects, and the life-altering decisions that lay ahead.

Recognizing the need to connect with other Turkish lesbians and queer individuals who could assist me in navigating these complex questions, I returned to Germany filled with enthusiasm. There, I embarked on the journey of establishing groups and relationships with German-speaking lesbians, concurrently improving my proficiency in the German language.

Simultaneously, I made the decision to pursue a degree in social pedagogy. My deep-seated interest in psychology, coupled with a growing understanding of the challenges faced by immigrants, motivated me to seek a higher level of education. I understood that my aspirations would be limited without a proper university degree.

During my academic pursuits, I was afforded the opportunity to venture into the world of DJing. My very first performance took place during Christmas in December 1994. It was a time when many German gays and lesbians left Berlin to be with their families for the holidays. However, I couldn't help but think about the migrant LGBTQI+ community—where would they go to celebrate? That's when the idea of hosting the first-ever party for queer immigrants at SO36 was born.

After a Christmas dinner, I transformed into a figure draped in a black chador and armed with a handbag filled with cassettes, as I didn't yet have access to CDs or records. It was with these humble cassettes that I made my debut as a DJ. That experience was transformative. It was a moment of revelation—I realized that this was "my thing." Bringing people together through the power of music and dance, fostering a sense of unity, and creating an environment where individuals could be themselves without the need for concealment—this was akin to an

alternative form of healing. It was pure magic!

From that point forward, I continued to share my music at a variety of events, including LGBTQ+ gatherings, gatherings for migrant women, and political assemblies. My musical interests extended beyond English music; I was particularly drawn to Middle Eastern music, encompassing Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Greek, Klezmer, and other ethnic music genres. My primary focus was not just on the music itself but on creating visibility, unity and promoting acceptance of diversity within both the LGBTQI+ scene and immigrant communities.

Subsequently, I was honoured to assume the role of "Resident DJ" at "Gayhane," a Berlin party with a clever wordplay that combines "gay" and "meyhane," the Turkish term for "tavern." This event was tailored to cater to the queer migrant communities hailing from the Middle Eastern countries. My tenure as the Resident DJ at Gayhane was a pivotal point in my career, significantly elevating my recognition within the scene. The party rapidly gained popularity and found its home in the renowned "SO 36" club in Berlin. Remarkably, it has now been thriving for 25 years, continuing to be cherished within the LGBTQ+ community and garnering substantial coverage in numerous articles.

Through the medium of music and dance, we initiated the creation of safe spaces, free from racism, heterosexism,

homophobia, and sexism. Here, one need not conceal any aspect of their personal identity. Fuelled by my passion for music and my influence, I became a trailblazer in this movement. It all began with a Christmas party, and today, we have evolved into a substantial community with a powerful voice, while I, as an artist, have gained international recognition.

In 1997, I successfully completed my studies and authored my thesis titled "Being a Lesbian and Turkish: Is this a Paradox?" This work was groundbreaking, being one of the world's initial contributions by a person from a queer-immigrant background. It sowed the first seeds for recognizing the counselling needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Simultaneously, alongside my social work studies, I embarked on a journey to study law. Shortly thereafter, I received a compelling offer from the German Red Cross to serve as a director, enabling me to spearhead various projects with my dedicated team. Consequently, I temporarily set aside my legal studies and continued to work as a social worker and DJ for several years.

Ultimately, in the year 2000, I made the life-altering decision to transition into a full-time career as a freelance DJ. This transition required meticulous financial planning. I actively participated in trade shows and events to bolster my presence and began working as an independent contractor. It

was evident that in the world of DJing, if nobody knows you, nobody will book you.

At the outset of my DJ career, the genre of music I specialized in was virtually absent from mainstream and LGBTQ+ clubs. Consequently, I ventured into producing niche music, often categorized as "World" or "Oriental," with limited acknowledgment within the broader club scene. However, my persistent efforts led other clubs and venues to embrace this unique music, giving rise to new scenes. It is essential to note that during this period, few women were active DJs. From the very start, I openly identified as a lesbian and actively engaged in feminist and anti-racist movements, successfully amalgamating my political convictions with my fervor for music.

Throughout my career as a DJ and my extensive travels, I was fortunate to receive invitations to major festivals that were not traditionally associated with the genre of music I championed. Notably, I performed at renowned events such as the Glastonbury Festival, Fusion Festival, and Garbicz Festival. My music journey also took me on tours across diverse destinations, including the United States, China, Armenia, Japan, Brazil, and Pakistan, where I chose to present my music in a more understated manner.

My contributions to the music scene did not go unnoticed. In 2005, I secured victory in the "World Beat DJ Competition" held in London, and I was hailed as the "hippest

DJ in Europe" by the Swedish magazine QX. Furthermore, Zitty Magazin honoured me by recognizing me as one of the most influential cultural figures in Germany. In 2018, I was bestowed with the "Lesbian Visibility" award by the German Senate in recognition of my significant contributions to the LGBTQI+ Movement.

In a unique accolade, one of my musical compositions found its place at the Pergamon Museum. Remarkably, I stand as one of the rare producers and musicians who have been featured as a persona in museum exhibitions. This recognition stems from my enduring dedication to fostering communities through the transformative power of music and dance.

In addition to my career as a DJ and music producer, I have established extensive collaborations with the German Foreign Office and the Goethe Institute. Through these partnerships, I have had the honour of representing Germany's cultural diversity on an international stage. Notably, I had the unique opportunity to perform at Schloss Bellevue, the official residence of the President of Germany, where I held the distinction of being the first and only DJ to do so.

A significant facet of my work has revolved around the endeavour to showcase that the artistic and musical contributions made by migrants in Germany are intrinsic to the broader German identity. This mission has been a cornerstone of my career, harmoniously bridging my passion for

music and my profound interest in diverse cultures.

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

II: Unity, inclusivity, and the celebration of authentic expression stand as the primary driving forces in all of my endeavours, including my musical pursuits. My perspective on leadership is somewhat distinctive and leans towards a holistic approach. I am perpetually committed to finding ways to fuse individuals, audiences, and artists from a spectrum of communities, backgrounds, and age groups into my creative concepts, projects, events, and DJ performances. In my view, "leadership" embodies the embodiment of these values. I firmly believe that each of us should, at the very least, endeavour to craft our own distinctive definition of "success" before contemplating the essence of effective leadership.

On a more focused note, my professional portfolio encompasses the curation of interdisciplinary festivals, event organization, music production, facilitation of DJ workshops, and writing. Consequently, I find myself shouldering the responsibility of self-management within my career. I operate independently, opting to forgo the involvement of an agency, and personally oversee all management duties, which include the booking of the bands I am set to perform with.

Interestingly, I have come to realize my inherent reluctance to embrace a conventional employer role. In my perspective, leadership within a collective implies the delegation of responsibilities and the active engagement of others, granting them the freedom and opportunities to contribute their unique ideas. My consistent aim is to foster an environment where every team member experiences a genuine sense of belonging to a collaborative unit, all the while providing them with the means to independently cultivate their skills and expertise. Empowering individuals to strengthen their abilities on an individual basis is a fundamental aspect of my leadership philosophy.

Within the teams I collaborate with, I place significant emphasis on acknowledging various perspectives and addressing contemporary issues such as social and political matters, economics, identity, empowerment, and the importance of using suitable language. It is crucial to actively engage with these topics and deliberate on how I intend to incorporate them into my work. Given my role as an activist, there are occasions when I must make the difficult decision to decline certain requests in order to stay aligned with my core beliefs and principles.

An additional dimension of effective leadership, in my view, is the positive rapport I maintain with artists, regardless of fluctuations in their compensation. They

appreciate the value of our collaborations because they recognize my consistent infusion of fresh ideas and my ability to secure valuable opportunities on noteworthy stages, which often catalyze new avenues for their careers.

In my role as a curator, I actively seek out unexplored territory, identifying gaps within the artistic landscape, and discerning how we can meet those unmet needs. This process entails close collaboration with various stakeholders, including venues, artists, and technicians.

Within my team, I foster a climate of open and constructive dialogue. Effective communication, as is the case in all aspects of life, occupies a central position within my profession. Regular team meetings, supervision, and occasional workshops all serve to enhance our collective collaboration.

IR: 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?

II: I have frequently encountered challenges stemming from preconceived notions about me as a female DJ of Turkish-German heritage. These preconceptions often lead to me being narrowly defined by my cultural background or gender, overshadowing my skills as a musician. This has, at times, hindered my ability to be taken seriously within the music industry.

Furthermore, I have observed the existence of numerous male-dominated DJ collectives that exclude women, and they sometimes exhibit apprehension in the presence of strong female and queer personalities. This poses a significant barrier to achieving gender diversity and inclusivity in the field.

When it comes to financial matters, I've noticed pronounced differences in how men and women handle money, as well as the differing treatment they receive during financial negotiations. Notably, male DJs with no exceptional skills often succeed in demanding higher fees than their female counterparts. This discrepancy in the perception of monetizing one's own value remains a critical issue.

I wish there were specialized workshops designed exclusively for women, aimed at empowering them to harness their strengths and gain a better understanding of the economic value within their professional domain. This encompasses the pivotal issue of how to evaluate one's worth in negotiations with others, particularly in the context of the electronic music scene.

In the club scene, it is evident that men frequently assert their demands for considerably higher fees as a matter of course, such as requesting one hundred thousand euros for a single gig, while women, even if they possess higher levels of recognition, tend to ask for less. Consequently, it becomes imperative to address pertinent questions surrounding

how one negotiates their work, what constitutes fair compensation, and how to gauge one's intrinsic value. This endeavour is by no means straightforward, given that art defies quantification based on sales figures and demands a nuanced, subjective appraisal.

In summary, confronting these challenges is an inherent part of our journey. I firmly believe that sustaining our resilience and unwavering commitment to our beliefs are paramount in navigating this terrain.

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

II: I've encountered periods in my career when I received fewer bookings due to my association with what's often labelled as "ethnic music." My non-mainstream approach was sometimes perceived as not justifying the admission fee, leading to fewer opportunities. Moreover, my advocacy for the queer community and my distinctive style as a woman, queer individual, and Turkish-origin DJ have, at times, resulted in devaluation and reduced bookings.

Throughout my journey, there were instances where my music choices were met with negative reactions, particularly when they introduced unfamiliar rhythms that challenged the dance norms. Some individuals critiqued my DJing skills at the booth and undermined the value of my music.

The onset of the pandemic brought forth new challenges in my life. I ventured into organizing events such as QueerPingPong with a friend, creating opportunities for safe distancing while still enjoying music and dance. However, this period introduced moments when I no longer felt like an artist, primarily because I couldn't perform in front of a live audience, and I deeply missed that interaction.

This shift also cast a shadow of financial uncertainty, as the income from fees came to a halt, necessitating a dip into my savings. I found myself pondering my future and contemplating whether I should explore an alternative profession.

During this trying time, music production became a source of solace and a means to stay creatively engaged. I conducted live streams and prioritized physical activity to maintain my inner strength. When faced with issues that perturbed me, I turned to music production as a form of self-expression and addressing these concerns.

Some of my work is available on Spotify, while the majority can be accessed on Soundcloud. Additionally, maintaining contact with friends and family, even if only through phone calls, provided invaluable support.

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

ii: The stage serves as my platform, and music is the tool I employ to convey my thoughts and ideas. I don't just view myself as an artist; I also consider myself an activist who leverages this platform to address issues like racism, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism. In my music production and festival curation, I consistently prioritize diversity in my artist selection. I take into account the often greater number of "cisgender" males, those individuals who were biologically born as males and identify with their birth sex, referred to as "cis male" or "cis female." There are also those who identify as "non-binary." Personally, I tend more towards

“In the club scene, men often demand higher fees, while women, even if they may be more well-known, ask for less. Therefore, it is essential to address questions about how one negotiates their work.”

identifying as "non-binary," but I retain my identity as a woman and engage with it in a political context. This demonstrates that categorizing things neatly isn't always straightforward. I'm pleased that we now have a broader range of terms at our disposal. In my work, I consider the gender composition of those I collaborate with.

I actively seek ways to enhance the visibility of "cis women," queers, and other individuals to ensure

equitable and just representation. However, it is not always straightforward. For instance, if I come across an exceptional group online that predominantly comprises men, I encounter difficulties in booking them. In such cases, I inquire if they can include women in the group, or I book an additional women's band. It troubles me when I observe only cisgender men on stage, as this does not accurately mirror the diversity of our society. On the contrary, I aspire to foster diversity in both club and concert cultures. While promoting women is a key focus for me, it's not the sole objective. When examining festivals, it is often evident that approximately 80% of the artists are male, and only 20% or even as low as 10% are female, with even fewer queers represented, if at all. To counteract this, I advocate for the implementation of

quota regulations at festivals. Some festivals must adhere to these quotas if they wish to obtain government funding.

Furthermore, I actively participate in various networks, including the "female:pressure network," a community of producers, curators, activists, musicians, and visual artists. Within this network, we engage in discussions on various topics and work towards advancing the rights of transgender and female identities within the music scene. I have also served as an extended board member of the Berliner Clubcommission, where I focused on issues related to awareness and diversity within club culture.

IR: As a successful artist and leader, what advice would you give to aspiring musicians and young leaders aiming to make a positive impact in their respective fields?

II: Keep nurturing your curiosity and have the courage to acknowledge your own mistakes. It's akin to taking a plunge into cold water. Just like we all learned to ride a bike by falling down and trying again, continue to explore, adapt, and evolve. Stay informed about the current developments in the music industry or any field you're passionate about, and be prepared to embark on new journeys and explore uncharted territories. I firmly believe that when one door closes, another one opens, possibly leading you in a new and unexpected direction. Always strive to broaden your horizons.

I've come to understand that being open to new ideas and embracing diverse approaches is of utmost significance.

Reflections

One cannot help but acknowledge the impressive nature of her achievements. Her professional background is notably outstanding. Her life journey, however, has been far from uncomplicated. As the offspring of an immigrant and a single mother, of Turkish descent, her arrival in Germany was marked by a resolute determination to succeed. The realization of her lesbian identity did not deter her, but instead, served as a catalyst for pursuing higher education. She recognized that, as a migrant, she needed to aim higher than merely obtaining a minimalistic qualification.

Her unwavering resolve and unwavering commitment during her formative years are commendable. At her current stage, she continues to be an inspiring figure, consistently defying challenges and confronting various forms of resistance.

Particularly striking is her contemporary perspective and the courage with which she lives openly as her true self. Her advice to leaders is noteworthy, advocating a shift away from conventional paradigms, urging the consideration of local residents, women, and immigrants, irrespective of their origins. She emphasizes that evaluations should be based on qualities and impressions, rather than superficial

considerations, with a focus on a person's character or likability as the ultimate determinant.

In summary, her journey serves as an inspirational narrative.



IRIS BRAUN

Introduction

Iris Braun, a visionary entrepreneur and the Co-Founder and Chief Product Officer at share GmbH in Berlin, epitomizes the intersection of social entrepreneurship, business acumen, and sustainability. Born in 1988, Iris brings a wealth of experience and academic excellence to her role. Her professional journey includes serving as the Technical Lead at IFMR Lead and Harvard University in Chennai, India, where she conducted empirical research on financial development in emerging economies, with a particular emphasis on India. Prior to her foray into social entrepreneurship, Iris contributed her expertise as a consultant to The World Bank and the German Ministry of Economics.

Educationally, Iris holds a Master's in Public Administration/International Development from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, complemented by an honours degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics from Oxford University. Her diverse academic background is a testament to her multifaceted approach to addressing global challenges.

At the helm of share GmbH since its inception in 2017, Iris has been instrumental in shaping the company's unique mission. Share's innovative model involves donating a product to someone in need for every share product sold, resulting in a significant global impact every three seconds. Iris has positioned share GmbH as a European benchmark for social

entrepreneurship, emphasizing transparency and individual impact.

Iris Braun's expertise spans various domains, including social entrepreneurship, economic development in South Asia, international cooperation, and sustainability. Notably, share GmbH, under her leadership, made a mark in ecological sustainability by introducing the first 100% recycled mineral water bottle in Germany in 2018.

In essence, Iris Braun stands as a beacon of inspiration in the world of business and social impact, seamlessly integrating her passion for social entrepreneurship with a commitment to sustainable practices. Her journey underscores the transformative potential of businesses that prioritize social and environmental responsibility.

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

Iris Braun: My path has not been straightforward, I would say, and it always reminds me of the well-known Steve Jobs quote that you can only connect the dots looking backward. It's true because, for me, figuring out how to create the most impact, how to make the best contribution, was about discovering different paths and contexts. After completing my studies, I initially worked in consulting. However, I realized there was still a missing piece of what I wanted to achieve, especially in terms of content. So, I ventured through

various stages in the public sector, from the Ministry of Economics to small research think tanks in Rwanda and two years of research work in India. This journey eventually led me to what I am doing now – building a social enterprise in Berlin. The underlying question has always been in what mode of operation I can contribute most effectively, and it took me a while to figure that out.

The fascinating aspect for me has always been the journey itself. It wasn't a clear goal for me, and then I'll just work towards it; I actually started relatively early in my youth. Through my then-boyfriend, who was a social worker, I came into contact with refugees, especially unaccompanied minors – children who came to Germany without parents. They had incredible stories to tell, and that experience influenced what I later studied and specialized in, focusing on developing countries and their path to a sustainable life.

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

IB: For me personally, when it comes to leadership, I've always had two fundamental principles. Firstly, I believe that leadership is about providing direction. This involves coordinating groups of people, finding common ground, and offering them a bit of guidance or suggestions. One can always make a proposal; otherwise, it becomes a

dictatorship, and that, I believe, has nothing to do with leadership. So, direction is crucial. Secondly, from my perspective, safety, particularly psychological safety, is equally important. One of the critical qualities, especially in psychological safety, is trust. Over the years, I've learned more and more to actively think about how to build trust and how one's actions or intentions can potentially destroy it. Trust is vital because, ultimately, without trust, nothing works. The more trust there is, the faster, more efficiently, and better one can reach their goals. In the end, it also makes the entire journey more enjoyable! One should probably never forget that people live not only to achieve a goal, not just to generate quarterly profits for a corporation or to achieve the highest possible turnover, perhaps in a startup context. People live because they want to enjoy the time they are in. Good leadership keeps this in mind, as direction and trust provide a frame but leave room for individual contribution, a vital source of personal fulfilment.

Therefore, these two points, in my view, are crucial for effective leadership.

AJ: 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?

IB: Two challenges come to mind, and we, as a team and leadership, handled them differently. These experiences provided me with a perspective on how one should not react uniformly to every challenge. One instance was when our company secured a significant listing with a major retailer and a drugstore. It was a tremendous and hard-earned achievement, but the timeline they gave us was

completely unrealistic.

We simply did not have enough time to account for production lead times. For instance, a bottle we wanted to produce had a 40-week lead time, and we were just 15 weeks away from the launch date.

Realizing this impossibility, we gathered, laid out the facts, and recognized this as a unique opportunity to make a difference. We rallied everyone involved, inspiring them to achieve the seemingly impossible, knowing that failure was the most likely outcome. Coming together, we created a surge of energy, explored creative solutions, persuaded partners, and embarked on this extraordinary journey. It turned out to be a challenge that led to success, demonstrating that there are moments of challenges where pushing through and

persevering is possible, especially when it unleashes extraordinary forces.

In contrast, we faced a prolonged challenge within my company, repeatedly getting stuck on our brand design. We kept attempting to make it different, better, and perfect. I realized this was a failure because we invested so much time,

resources, goodwill, and lost customers by persistently pushing forward without recognizing that it wasn't about just ploughing through. We were not aligned as a team, each pushing their version of the truth, unclear what the actual goal was. This lack of consensus drained energy, leading to disagreements and

conflicts, essentially going in circles. Taking the courage to step back, we ultimately outsourced the process, gave up control and only then moved forward. It was a failure that cost us nearly two years. It's remarkable how much time and energy can be burned when one is not conscious of the motives behind their actions and whether they are unleashing the right energy for the challenge.

“A small routine that brings a pause to the stress of everyday life, even if it's just for 10 minutes, is incredibly important and helps me maintain my composure.”

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

IB: I approach this question from two different perspectives. Firstly, I often try, which may be easier in my role than in others, to shift perspectives. By this, I consciously do not mean the classic perspective of putting oneself in the customer's shoes. Here, I am talking about personal resilience, and it helps me to consider entirely different life perspectives. It's about realizing that what I am fighting for, no matter how important it may seem at the moment, is not the most crucial thing in the world. This is quite effective in my work, given our involvement with essential life situations, from development projects in Somalia to Colombia, from Asia to Berlin, where we collaborate with food banks and distribute food. It's relatively easy for us, if desired, to take a day to switch the point of view like this. For example, we always schedule a few days each year for every "Sharie" (Share employee) to spend on charitable activities. Personally, I have found that, whenever possible, taking a day off and reorienting myself helps gain a broader perspective, realizing that other people are dealing with much more significant issues. This brings a certain level of composure.

Secondly, there are the daily small struggles where taking a day off to work with food banks is not feasible. In these

cases, I believe there are several relaxation techniques that can help get back on track. For me, I've incorporated regular deep breathing meditation as a routine, which helps quickly calm the nervous system. I think one can experiment with various relaxation techniques, finding what suits them best. A small routine that brings a pause to the stress of everyday life, even if it's just for 10 minutes, is incredibly important and helps me maintain my composure. I use these techniques almost daily when things get stressful.

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

IB: In this regard, we are fortunate at Share as our company mission attracts individuals for whom these issues are significant. Therefore, we can largely rely on movements within the group of our employees. One initiative that has emerged and that we have been supporting is the Diversiteam. It consists of volunteers who thoroughly examine the state of diversity in our company and propose concrete initiatives.

The Diversiteam also serves as a point of contact for Share employees who wish to engage in discussions, may feel unsure about whom to approach regarding diversity topics, and it functions as an active group that consistently introduces positive initiatives. It has a designated place in our company calendar, where we regularly report on the state of diversity in

the company, discuss potential goals, and provide education on why diversity is important and relevant topics.

Diversity is also about different personality and working styles. Many individuals face barriers to expressing themselves, so it is crucial to think about how to structure participation to make it as inclusive as possible. For instance, one might question whether an anonymous survey is the best method for addressing critical issues within the company or whether it is better to have team leaders initiate discussions within their trusted relationships.

It is primarily about consciously approaching the fact that diversity and different personality styles should be considered. This goes beyond deliberately including individuals with diverse backgrounds; it is also about recognizing that people work differently, function differently, and face various challenges.

This consciousness is fostered significantly through the approach to the feedback process. Asking how to seek feedback and the method through which it is obtained from the company should be done with awareness. It is essential to understand that it is easy to ask a question to get the desired answer, but more challenging to ask a question that

“I realized far too late that we never accomplish things alone, that the best ideas emerge within a group with diverse perspectives.”

allows for honest responses. Thus, it is crucial to consciously address the mechanisms involved.

AJ: What advice would you give to aspiring young leaders aiming to make a positive impact in their respective fields?

IB: One thing that I definitely did too late and neglected is the whole aspect of networking and building a network. I had a very technical academic background—I'm an economist and focused on statistics and econometrics. In comparison, I believed that it's crucial to do the right things technically, and the right outcomes would naturally follow. I thought that one would be rewarded for having technical expertise. However, I realized far too late that we never accomplish things alone, that the best ideas emerge within a group with diverse perspectives. Personally, I derive the most energy from exchanging ideas

with others. While this may vary for each individual based on their personality type, I firmly believe in the importance of networking and collaboration.

Another crucial point is to invest more time in

actively seeking help instead of trying to find the best solution alone. It works

exceptionally well when you're passionate about a particular topic because that passion can be highly contagious. I've found that when you have that passion and enthusiasm, people are generally willing to share their insights, and by asking for help or opinions, you show appreciation for their expertise. It's almost like an unspoken pact of mutual support. Of course, not everyone will appreciate the changes you're trying to make, but that's expected. Real change often happens when a few people disagree, yet, overall, I've had overwhelmingly positive experiences. Success often comes when you challenge the status quo.

For many people, especially women, there's a tendency to develop what I call the "hard work complex," thinking that one must work extremely hard and excel in their field without consciously taking the time and resources to build networks and seek help. Discovering this aspect of networking made a significant difference for me personally, providing a great deal of satisfaction and proving crucial for my professional development. If I had realized this in my early twenties rather than my early thirties, my life trajectory might have been different. Therefore, my recommendation is to be aware that success is not just about the facts but primarily about engaging with others,

“Real change often happens when a few people disagree.”

supporting collaboration, and actively seeking help when needed.

Reflections

In the perspective of an observer, Iris Braun has navigated a remarkable journey.

Transitioning from a background in economics, she ventured into the realm of

socio-economic issues abroad, ultimately founding Share - a company with a unique commitment to sustainability, product sales, and

philanthropy. What sets her apart is the consistent integration of charitable initiatives throughout the year, surpassing the occasional seasonal charity events seen in the industry. Beyond the numbers associated with her economics background, Iris's extraordinary energy is evident, especially as she continues to lead despite the challenges of becoming a first-time parent this year. Her adept time management and candid acknowledgment of past mistakes highlight her thoughtful self-reflection. Notably, she emphasizes diversity not solely based on factors like skin colour, language, or religion but on the diversity of personalities. Iris actively fosters an inclusive environment within her company, employing various levels to consistently reflect on and embrace diversity. Her commitment extends beyond mere rhetoric, as evidenced by the inclusion of volunteer weeks, systematically

planned with established companies, ensuring meaningful contributions to causes like the “TafelIn”. Iris's multifaceted personality, coupled with her boundless energy and ongoing personal development, exemplify a commendable woman excelling in balancing various aspects of life and work.



JENNIFER SCHEYDT

Introduction

Dr. Jennifer Scheydt's professional journey has been marked by a remarkable commitment to innovation and sustainability in the construction and building materials industry.

Jennifer's academic journey saw her achieving a Ph.D. as a research associate at the Institute of Structural Engineering and Building Materials Technology at the University of Karlsruhe. Her passion for concrete became the driving force behind her research endeavours.

In April 2018, Jennifer took up a pivotal role at HeidelbergCement AG as the Head of the Engineering & Innovation department. Here, she oversaw the department's personnel and budget, leading a team in the development of customer-centric, innovative products and solutions. Her leadership prioritized sustainability and resource efficiency, reflecting her commitment to reducing the carbon footprint of construction materials. Under her guidance, the department achieved several groundbreaking innovations, including the printing of Germany's first concrete house, recognized with the German Innovation Award in 2021.

Jennifer's influence extended beyond her role at HeidelbergCement. In June 2021, she joined the board of the Institute for Construction and Environment (IBU), the world's largest consortium of building material manufacturers dedicated to

promoting sustainable construction practices. Furthermore, she has become an expert in the field of economics at AiF e.V., where she promotes entrepreneurial innovation for the benefit of Germany's small and medium-sized businesses.

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

Jennifer Scheydt: My educational journey began with an unconventional mix of subjects in school – English, math, and arts. It might not have seemed like an obvious combination, but it marked the start of my exploration into various disciplines. As I contemplated my future, architecture briefly crossed my mind. The idea of combining my passion for design, mathematics, and creativity to create buildings was appealing. However, I soon realized that civil engineering was a better-suited path for me.

I embarked on my academic journey at a local university in Saarbrücken, Germany, where I pursued civil engineering. However, my fascination with building materials and their properties soon pushed me to explore further. This led me to the renowned Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, where I specialized in building materials technology. Among all the materials, concrete held a special place in my heart. The distinct aroma of fresh concrete on construction sites always drew me in, resonating deep within me.

As my studies continued, I began to delve deeper into the world of concrete, eventually deciding to pursue a Ph.D. My doctoral research focused on the durability of ultra-high-performance concrete, a field that allowed me to combine my passion for concrete with my academic pursuits.

After completing my Ph.D., I was eager to transition from academia to the industry. I found an exciting opportunity at HeidelbergCement, one of the world's leading construction material companies. Starting as a trainee, I quickly rose through the ranks, eventually leading a department. During my tenure, we undertook significant modernization efforts, embracing innovation and pioneering projects. One notable achievement was the construction of Germany's first 3D-printed house in collaboration with various partners.

However, my career took another exciting turn when I was presented with the opportunity to join BMI as the global head for R&D for concrete tiles. This new role allowed me to focus on innovation and international collaboration within the industry, a challenge I eagerly embraced. I also serve as a board member at the Institute for Construction and Environment ("IBU"). This role enables me to contribute my knowledge and expertise to further the industry's development and sustainability efforts.

In essence, my journey has been a continuous exploration of various facets of engineering, materials science, and

construction. From my early school days to my current leadership role at BMI, I've found immense fulfillment in both academic research and industry innovation, contributing to the ever-evolving field of construction and building materials.

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

JS: I believe it's crucial to lead with confidence, but in an authentic manner. It's not about saying, "I'm the boss here." Rather, I see confidence in someone who stands on a strong foundation of expertise and knowledge. This trust in one's own knowledge and abilities allows a leader to exude confidence.

In my view, this confidence is essential to steer the course, especially in challenging situations, similar to a captain on a ship. A captain needs the knowledge and assurance to navigate the ship safely through stormy waters. That's what I mean by confidence. It ensures that the ship, even when facing crosswinds or unexpected obstacles, like an iceberg, remains steady.

Furthermore, I believe confidence is closely connected to resilience. Resilience is an extremely important topic for me. I recently conducted a resilience workshop with my team. It's about maintaining composure, even when unexpected challenges arise. As a leader, I remain unruffled and maintain trust in my team and my own abilities.

Trust plays a crucial role, not only in my own work and abilities but also within the team. In my previous teams, I've always observed a high level of competence. It's important to communicate this trust within the team. My message is, "I know how competent you are. We can rely and count on each other."

Empathy is another important aspect. As a leader, it's crucial to put oneself in each team member's shoes. Everyone in the team brings their own competencies. Often, these potentials aren't fully tapped. As a leader, it's my responsibility to identify the talents in each team member and how to nurture them.

My aspiration as a leader is to ignite these potentials. I seek out the passions and strengths of each individual and provide them with the opportunity to flourish. This creates a dynamic within the team where each member realizes they are seen and supported. This fosters a motivating atmosphere where each person's performance is significantly enhanced.

SE: 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?

“Trust in one's own knowledge and abilities allows a leader to exude confidence.”

JS: There was a real challenge that profoundly influenced my entire professional life. I mentioned my dissertation, which I pursued alongside my job at the university. This means I had a full-time position, and I spent over two years working on my dissertation in my spare time. It was truly demanding, to the extent that during this period, my family saw me only on Christmas Eve and perhaps on Easter Sunday. My vacation was completely invested in the dissertation.

At that time, my partner and I had wished for a child, but it did not happen. This was a personal challenge that I couldn't easily set aside. I didn't know how to deal with it. I used to think that everything I set my mind to would somehow work out. Now, however, I was facing a personal challenge where I wasn't sure how to proceed. I also had only fixed-term employment contracts, and I wasn't sure if my dissertation would be completed or if my contract would be extended. It was a difficult period, both professionally and privately.

Then, the book "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living" by Dale Carnegie fell into my hands, and changed my life. Although it doesn't directly address resilience, it covers many aspects of it. It helped me realize that it's often not sensible to worry excessively

since most of our fears never materialize. For example, I pondered what would happen if I didn't complete my Ph.D. Then I thought about how I could handle it. This perspective helped me look at the situation more calmly.

I began to reach out to various contacts in the industry with whom I had worked during my industrial projects. I told them that I might be available if they were interested in collaborating. This created a sense of security and reduced my anxieties.

The book and these experiences helped me overcome fears and become more confident. I learned that solutions can always be found, even if things don't go as planned. This contributed to my confidence as a leader and strengthened my resilience. This period had a lasting impact on me, and everything that followed felt much easier in comparison. I learned that sometimes it's necessary to deviate from predetermined paths to find the right way forward. And, by the way, my pregnancy also worked out in the end – my son is now 11 years old!

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

JS: Okay, this is now a really important point because it's a continuous effort. In

everyday life, it can be quite challenging, especially when you have a demanding job. The key is to ensure that despite all this, your energy remains intact and your battery doesn't run empty. It's not enough to have read a book on resilience once; you need to keep working on it constantly. This is

closely tied to mindfulness. You need to be sensitive to moments when a lot of your energy is being drained. Often, this happens in a professional context, but it can also be connected to other things like family,

especially for women. So, you have various responsibilities that you need to handle, and you want to excel in all of them. There's a real danger that your energy reserves get depleted.

I always advise creating islands of relaxation in your daily routine. For instance, I recently went for stand-up paddling on the River Main during the summer, even though – or perhaps because – we were experiencing very challenging times in the business. The experience of paddling on the Main River at sunset with the Frankfurt skyline in the background really gave me power to cope with it.

It's essential to find these islands of recuperation that rejuvenate you. Everyone

“You need to be sensitive to moments when a lot of your energy is being drained.”

has their preferences - for some, it might be a walk in the woods, or something entirely different. The important thing is to consciously set aside time for it and say, "Now, I'm going to recharge my batteries." This is especially significant during challenging times when things get hectic.

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

JS: I mentioned earlier that I work internationally, and this strongly addresses diversity. Generally, it's an incredible enrichment to have all these different cultures contributing various aspects to our work. Inclusion is something we've recently implemented in a specific case. We reintegrated a young woman who came from an external background. She had suffered a severe workplace accident and was seeking a way to reintegrate into the workforce. We decided to support her explicitly. Our goal was to empower her, and I'm pleased to say that after a year of this reintegration, which she has now completed, she has regained her confidence, learned new skills, and can leave our organization with a sense of accomplishment. This is a very recent case we implemented in the context of inclusion. We are always open to such topics, however, regarding the topic of inclusion, we don't go out seeking to include disabled individuals just to showcase how inclusive we are. However, when a situation authentically arises, such as with the young

woman who needed support to re-enter the workforce, we are more than willing to help because it benefits everyone involved and enriches us all.

I am the patron of the Women's Leadership Network for BMI in the DACH region, which I'm helping to establish. This network focuses on empowering women, which is particularly important for the construction industry, where we have too few women. We all know that a diverse team is essential to cover all possible perspectives.

For example, someone recently told me that cities were often planned with a male perspective, focused on getting from point A to point B quickly. Women, on the other hand, may take more indirect routes. It's interesting to note that city planning didn't always consider these differences because it was primarily dominated by men. So, when we empower women in the construction industry, I believe we all benefit from diverse viewpoints and approaches.

SE: As a successful leader, what advice would you give to aspiring young executives aiming to make a positive impact in their respective fields?

JS: I believe it's crucial to define for oneself in which area one can truly make an impact. It has always been this way for me. I know precisely what I want to achieve. Yes, I want to contribute to transformations in the construction industry, to the modernization and innovation of this sector.

I can do this because I know what I want to achieve.

Therefore, I think the most important thing is to explore within oneself: What am I passionate about? What makes my heart beat faster? Then, one should consider and actively seek opportunities in that area where their heart lies. It can vary greatly from person to person; it's highly individual.

“In a very male-dominated environment, the presence of women can offer different perspectives.”

Becoming effective in that area is where one can achieve positive outcomes. To proactively drive positive change, it's crucial to have a clear understanding of what one stands for. I believe that this is something that, especially, women often don't do enough of – asking themselves, "What do I actually stand for?". If you were to ask the majority of people, what they stand for, they would probably struggle to provide a clear answer.

Reflections

Jennifer is truly an exceptional individual within the construction industry, specifically in the realm of concrete and cement technology. What sets her apart is her

unwavering passion and enthusiasm, which are like a breath of fresh air in an industry often perceived as dry and technical.

Jennifer has an extraordinary ability to inject life and vibrancy into what is conventionally considered a mundane subject matter.

What's truly remarkable about Jennifer is her ability to radiate this passion and enthusiasm to those around her. She doesn't just inspire change through her actions; she creates a ripple effect of positivity and motivation. Her presence alone can uplift and empower her colleagues, making her an invaluable asset in any team or organization.

In an industry that can often be set in its ways, Jennifer brings a refreshing disruption. She doesn't just accept the status quo; she challenges it with a resounding "Can do" attitude. This determination to break barriers and push boundaries is truly admirable. Jennifer is a beacon of inspiration not only within her field but also in the broader context of leadership and innovation. She embodies the essence of transformational leadership, where her vision and energy inspire those around her to embrace change and strive for excellence.

In conclusion, Jennifer's contribution to the construction industry and her unwavering commitment to innovation and transformation make her a remarkable and highly admired figure. Her passion, enthusiasm, and leadership qualities are

qualities that not only benefit her industry but also serve as an inspiration to anyone striving to make a positive impact in their field.



KIMBERLY MAUCHER-LYNCH

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.

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

Kimberly Maucher-Lynch: 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 University in Freiburg, Southern Germany, near 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.

“The key factors in my success have been nurturing and maintaining a network, which includes having mentors with different perspectives.”

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.

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

KML: 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.

LS: 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?

KML: 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.

“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.”

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.

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.

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

KML: 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.

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

KML: 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 those topics. 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.

LS: 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?

KML: 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.

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

“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.”

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.



MEGHA MALAGATTI

Introduction

Megha Malagatti's remarkable journey from India to the executive committee of a French luxury brand is deeply intertwined with her background in India. Specifically her upbringing within the Indian context of diversity including social caste system and her dream which became her passion to be part of the luxury world.

In India, the social hierarchy has existed for centuries. Formerly known as “The Untouchables”, and now as “Dalits”, represent the lowest rung of this complex social structure. Historically marginalized and discriminated against, Dalits have endured immense hardships, often relegated to performing menial and degrading tasks such as manual scavenging and cleaning, which were considered impure or “polluting” by higher castes. Megha's parents played a pivotal role in shaping her life trajectory. Unlike many Dalits of their generation, they recognized the importance of education and were determined to provide their daughter with opportunities they themselves had to fight for.

After completing her degree in engineering, Megha initially embarked on a career in the tech industry. Yet, there was a deeper calling she couldn't ignore. Her passion for fashion had always burned brightly. This duality sparked the idea of pursuing an MBA in Paris—a gateway to the world of business and fashion. Transitioning to a new country at age 29, especially under

challenging circumstances, was no small feat. She had quit her engineering career, separated from her husband; and options are limited for divorced women in India. Megha's pursuit of her dreams demanded courage, resilience, and determination. Her family's initial emotional and financial support was limited, compelling her to sell her assets in India and sustain herself on a diet of butter pasta for months.

Never imagining herself to be in Paris one day, life in France was profoundly different from her upbringing in India. It was in Paris that Megha truly discovered herself. International experiences have a unique way of reshaping one's identity, exposing individuals to diverse cultures, work methodologies, and culinary traditions. They peel away layers, revealing hidden facets of one's personality and enhancing teamwork abilities.

In India, societal pressures often lead individuals to play predefined roles in pleasing family, friends, and even distant acquaintances. Authentic self-expression can be stifled. Paris liberated Megha to rediscover her true self, fostering confidence, resilience, and a profound sense of responsibility.

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

Megha Malagatti: Success is highly subjective and personal; it varies from person to person. For some, it's a tranquil

life on a beach, doing minimal work and catching fish daily. For others, it's owning a luxury or sports car and a multi-million-dollar villa. My definition of success has evolved over the years, starting when I was just ten years old.

Back then, success for me meant entering the fashion industry. However, that dream was limited by factors beyond my control, like financial dependence on parents for education. So, my focus shifted to completing my engineering degree and excelling in my career. Success, for me, has taken different forms at various stages of life and continues to evolve.

I believe I haven't reached my full potential yet. Looking back, I cherish multiple successes and want to celebrate them with loved ones. My most recent success was transitioning into a corporate giant like L'Oréal. It allowed me to understand the inner workings of large corporations, the intricacies, and what makes them efficient and profitable. At S.T. Dupont, my success was about working with artisans, creative minds, creative directors, decoding luxury brands and creating objects of desire. Each stage of my career presented unique challenges and achievements.

I've built my life around four "C"s: Courage, Curiosity, Connection, and Conviction. Courage is vital to voice your opinions, as silence keeps others in the dark. Curiosity drives me to learn something new every day, even if it's a tiny piece of knowledge. Connection allows me to expand my

network, exchange information and nourish thought processes. And Conviction is deeply personal. Once I take on a project, I give my best to its completion, whether in my professional or personal life, regardless of how long it takes. I've had my share of setbacks, but I never lose conviction, even in the face of adversity. I have also failed and this is one of the best way to learn; to dust yourself and get back on your feet.

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

MM: In today's rapidly evolving world, leadership has undergone significant changes compared to the past. Traditional leadership concepts found in MBA textbooks from just five years ago no longer fully apply. With new generations, new ways of thinking, and innovative work approaches emerging, leadership has become a more dynamic and adaptable concept.

Effective leadership today is about collective collaboration towards a shared goal, often defined by visionary leaders who have a deep understanding of emerging trends and opportunities. For example, Steve Jobs's vision of Personal computers revolutionized the industry. Currently, for example, artificial intelligence (AI) is one of the next frontiers. Defining AI's role and potential requires a leader who can grasp its complexities and the best form of usage.

A crucial shift in leadership dynamics is that today's leaders focus on pulling their team toward a common goal rather than pushing their own ideas. This helps the team to have the required focus. One of the major change we have seen in the modern workplace is it emphasizes on collaboration yet remote work. Employees, especially from the younger generation, value flexibility and often work from various locations, not just traditional offices. The question is how do we keep these young nomads focused?

One of the key elements is to bridge the gap between the generations. Understanding and adapting to the work preferences of Generation Z, who are born with technology as an integral part of their lives, is essential. They can work from anywhere because technology is second nature to them, unlike previous generations.

An effective leader in this context must embrace the paradox of individual contribution within a collaborative framework. Every team member should feel they are making a meaningful contribution, whether they work individually or collectively. Leadership today is about recognizing the diverse strengths and work styles of team members and fostering an environment where everyone feels valued

“I've had my share of setbacks, but I never lose conviction, even in the face of adversity.”

and connected to the shared goals. It is like building a puzzle with small pieces as every person like every piece has a role to play and contribute. For me, leadership is not merely about authority or power over others. Instead, it is the ability to earn respect, inspire, and empower so there is the main element of trust built in our modern times.

RN: 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?

MM: Certainly, I've encountered two significant challenges in my career that have taught me valuable lessons. The first challenge involved dealing with long-standing employees in the company, whom I affectionately refer to as "dinosaurs"

because they resist change. As Albert Einstein aptly said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and hoping for different results."

These individuals were resistant to embracing

new ways of working, which posed a significant obstacle to progress.

One notable instance was during my time at S.T. Dupont when I proposed a new business model for the United States. While my plan involved a short-term revenue cut, it aimed to triple revenue in the long run

through strategic partnerships. Unfortunately, my commercial director, who had been comfortable with the traditional approach for years, was hesitant due to various reasons. Convincing him was a tremendous challenge, and it eventually required evaluation by the executive committee. Thankfully, the data-supported plan prevailed, and the transition to the new business model succeeded.

The second challenge, which is pervasive in various industries, is the complex dynamic that women often face in the workplace. In the various industries I worked, I have seen high power men mostly supporting high potential women and helping them grow. While high power women often do not support high potential women and try to put them down. Another aspect is, while men may openly disagree in professional settings and reconcile afterward, I've observed that women tend to let emotions play a significant role, leading to more complexity. There can be jealousy and competition among women, often hindering their career growth. This is a significant challenge for female professionals, and it's a topic that is not often discussed openly.

I believe that supporting each other, regardless of gender, is crucial for success in a workplace. While some women may seek to undermine others, there are rare individuals who genuinely support fellow women. To address this challenge, it's essential to remain flexible and patient

when working with different personalities. Sometimes, you can win over a colleague or your boss, while other times, a change in working arrangements may be necessary.

In summary, these challenges have reinforced the importance of adaptability, data-driven decision-making, and the need for a supportive and collaborative workplace culture.

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

MM: Maintaining resilience and determination during challenging times is essential. I'm particularly fond of Winston Churchill's wise counsel: "If you're going through hell, keep going." It's a simple yet profound reminder that resilience often involves facing difficult moments, whether in personal or professional life.

As human beings, we all experience moments of feeling alone or down. While external support from family, mentors, and loyal colleagues can be valuable, true resilience is an internal journey. One of the most demanding periods in my life was when I moved from India to France. I faced financial constraints, minimal family support, and limited assistance from friends. Adapting to a new country, language, and environment required stepping out of my comfort zone.

To maintain resilience, I focused on envisioning my future. I asked myself

critical questions about the person I wanted to become. Would I succumb to complaints and adversity, or would I strive for a better version of myself? This introspective process helped me find the inner courage and resilience needed to face the unknown.

Every time I encounter complexity or adversity, I revisit this process. It's like holding up a mirror to ask who I aspire to be. Henry Ford once advised that "When everything seems to be going against you, remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it" and I also think in some contexts it is also wise to fly with it until you find that one right turn. Similarly, resilience is a choice, whether you choose to face challenges head-on or adapt to the circumstances.

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

MM: This question is significant to me because I often encounter it in many regions outside India due to my skin colour, nationality, and origin. I continually question why I'm considered diverse or inclusive when, in India, I'm not viewed this way because of the vast population there. So,

I've started to explore this topic more deeply.

In my perspective, diversity and inclusivity have been somewhat oversold. Brands and companies often use them as marketing tools to showcase their diverse workforce, which can feel superficial. True diversity and inclusivity, to me, goes beyond skin

colour and ethnicity.

Instead, I focus on the diverse background, expertise, skills and experiences that a particular individual can bring to the table.

For instance, if someone has extensive experience in mass market commercial work and understands end-to-end retail for both

online and offline channels in the FMCG sector, they can add value to a project, regardless of their nationality or ethnicity in other sectors. It's about filling gaps with diverse skills and experiences, not just having a diverse range of skin colours.

People often confuse business diversity and inclusion with cultural diversity and inclusion. While cultural diversity is essential, it's not the only factor that defines business success. Businesses should seek individuals with the right expertise and backgrounds to drive their projects forward.

“Every team member possesses unique talents, and a leader's role is to place them in positions where they can shine the brightest.”

In essence, the model for achieving diversity and inclusion needs to be rethought. It's about tapping into a diverse pool of skills and experiences to strengthen a brand or project, irrespective of a person's physical characteristics like ethnicity or colour.

RN: As a successful leader, what advice would you give to aspiring young executives aiming to make a positive impact in their respective fields?

MM: Certainly, let's delve further into the essential leadership qualities and strategies I believe are crucial for emerging leaders. I can use my five finger rule here:

1. Composure and Clarity of Mind:

Maintaining composure is foundational for effective leadership. It means "Centering yourself" whenever needed to not lose focus. Drawing inspiration from my Buddhist upbringing, I've learned that leadership is as much about the journey as it is about reaching the destination. In turbulent times or challenging situations, the ability to remain calm and composed is invaluable. When a leader maintains their composure, it sets the tone for the entire team. It fosters an atmosphere of stability and trust, enabling team members to focus on their tasks without unnecessary distractions.

2. The Art of Active Listening and Communication:

One of the most underrated yet vital leadership skills is active listening. Effective

leaders prioritize listening to their team members over being the sole voice in the room. Listening to your team and other colleagues/experts always helps you figure out more than one approach to solving a problem and focusing on the goal. It also helps you as a leader to be agile and take right decisions.

Listening not only involves hearing words but also understanding the underlying emotions and perspectives. This quality is particularly crucial in today's world, where empathy and understanding are highly valued. Additionally, being sympathetic, beyond just empathetic, can make a significant difference. It shows genuine care for team members and helps build stronger connections. Additionally, communicating to the team is very important as it can be irreversible.

One of my mentors told me and helped teach me the art of "Iron fist in a velvet glove". Being firm and clear yet gentle and open at the same time.

3. Unleashing Team Potential:

A hallmark of successful leadership is the ability to recognize and nurture the untapped potential within your team. Instead of rushing to dismiss underperforming team members, a good leader takes the time to identify their strengths and areas where they excel. Every team member possesses unique talents, and a leader's role is to place them in positions where they can shine the brightest. This strategic placement not only

brings out the best in individual team members but also contributes to the overall strength and cohesiveness of the team.

4. Harness Sharing and Leaving Ego Out of the Door:

It is very important to bring a culture of sharing information amongst the team members when needed. People can be egoistic or think that sharing what they do would devalue their work and they can feel insecure. A leader should be able to replace these negative factors into a positive mindset as every team member must be aware that they are doing what is best for the brand or the company.

The more you contribute to the success of the brand, the more you grow. Many people have said “Don’t run behind money, run behind excellence and the money will follow”.

5. Building Future Leaders and a Supportive Network:

Effective leadership goes beyond personal accomplishments; it involves creating an environment where future leaders can thrive. By mentoring and guiding team members, emerging leaders can foster the

growth of their colleagues, preparing them for leadership roles in the future.

Additionally, a successful leader cultivates a network of dedicated and capable individuals who support the entire organization. This network acts as a crucial

backbone for the leader and the organization as a whole, ensuring its resilience and adaptability in a rapidly changing world.

In conclusion, the journey of leadership is filled with learning experiences and continuous growth. Emerging leaders should remember that success is not solely defined by individual achievements but by their ability to maintain composure, listen actively, unlock the potential of their team,

harness sharing and nurture future leaders. These qualities, when practiced with dedication and authenticity, lay the foundation for impactful and enduring leadership.

Reflections

Our interview with Megha Malagatti was an exceptionally memorable experience, marked by several remarkable aspects. To begin, Megha's astonishing energy and

“While cultural diversity is essential, it's not the only factor that defines business success. Businesses should seek individuals with the right expertise and backgrounds to drive their projects forward.”

unshakable conviction were truly impressive. Not everyone will find it easy to keep up with her pace. Nevertheless, we found it incredibly inspiring and invigorating.

Megha stands as a role model for various groups of people, including female leaders, individuals of colour, and Asians living in Europe. Her life story is nothing short of fascinating, characterized by her ability to surmount hurdles on her journey that many of us can scarcely imagine. I distinctly recall her recounting her childhood in India, where she shared the experience of being treated as if she were a boy by her parents, a unique perspective that has shaped her outlook.

She occupies a unique position between generations and serves as an active bridge builder, dedicated to integrating Generation Z into the evolving landscape of the business world. This quality is particularly

valuable, given the realization that many current senior leaders lack the skillset required for this integration.

Simultaneously, Megha approaches the next generation with a firm but nurturing hand, avoiding the temptation to overwhelm them with unnecessary perks and superficial benefits. This delicate balance, which emphasizes both listening and demanding performance, was a profound takeaway from our interview.

What makes this insight even more compelling is that it is imparted by a female leader like Megha, who embodies a rich tapestry of experiences and backgrounds. Her multifaceted personality and diverse background contribute to the credibility of her perspective, making her a truly remarkable figure in the business world.



NICOLA WINTER

Introduction

Nicola Winter is a remarkable German pilot and reserve astronaut, known for her exceptional contributions to both military aviation and space exploration. Her journey unfolds as a story of determination, resilience, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

Distinguished as the second female combat pilot in the Bundeswehr, following Ulrike Fitzer, Winter piloted the Panavia Tornado and later became a flight instructor at the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training in the USA. Her achievements reached new heights when she received the Flight Commander of the Year award in 2013 at the Sheppard Air Force Base.

In her pursuit of excellence, Winter transitioned to the Eurofighter in 2015, marking a significant step in her military career. Notably, in 2017, she became one of the few women in the German Air Force authorized to fly this advanced fighter jet. Her responsibilities included participating in Air Policing Baltikum and achieving the rank of Major at the Tactical Air Force Wing 31 "Boelcke" in Nörvenich.

However, Winter's journey extends beyond the realms of Earth's atmosphere. In 2017, she entered the selection process for "Die Astronautin", a privately funded initiative aiming to send the first German woman to the International Space Station. Despite being initially chosen as a finalist, Winter withdrew from the program in December

2017, citing a mismatch between her and the initiative. This mismatch is now known to be a simple lack of funding of the initiative.

Undeterred by this, Winter continued to pursue her passion for space. In recognition of her groundbreaking achievements, the Boston Consulting Group and WirtschaftsWoche named her "Vordenkerin des Jahres" (Thought Leader of the Year) in 2017.

Fast forward to 2022, Nicola Winter achieved another milestone as she was introduced as a reserve astronaut of the European Astronaut Corps. This appointment marked her as one of twelve selected from the 2022 astronaut class. Alongside her space endeavors, Winter has contributed to the field of crisis and emergency management in space missions. She worked as a consultant at McKinsey & Company from 2018 to 2019 and currently serves as a project manager for Responsive Space Technology at the German Aerospace Center (DLR e. V.).

Winter's multidimensional career also encompasses her role as a keynote speaker on topics such as leadership, empowerment, and crisis management. As a lecturer at the Carl Remigius Medical School, she imparts her expertise in crisis and emergency management.

In a moment of diversity beyond her professional achievements, Nicola Winter showcased her knowledge and resilience in a special episode of "Who Wants to Be a

Millionaire?" in 2021, winning €125,000. She invested her winnings in her helicopter pilot training for rescue missions, a feat that is nearing completion

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

Nicola Winter: Certainly. My journey has been marked by pivotal moments, and one of the most significant occurred around the age of 18. As a young aspiring pilot, my dream of joining Lufthansa was hindered by height restrictions. This challenge prompted me to reevaluate my path, leading me to the realization that the Bundeswehr also had a pilot program. The prospect of flying more advanced and diverse aircraft, coupled with the societal relevance of military service, became compelling reasons for my decision.

A noteworthy aspect of this period was overcoming the challenge of entering a field where I had no connections. Attending career events, reaching out to professionals, and submitting applications required considerable energy and determination. However, the positive feedback received from these endeavours made the effort worthwhile. Joining the Bundeswehr, I had the opportunity to pilot

Tornado and Eurofighter jets and later contribute to the training of aspiring pilots.

Another defining moment occurred during my training in Texas, where the Hall of Fame showcased accomplished jet pilots, including astronauts. This exposure ignited my interest in space exploration and the prospect of becoming an astronaut myself.

The path to becoming an astronaut presented a new set of challenges. A prerequisite for consideration was a scientific degree significantly above average. This led me to embark on a ten-

“Being empathetic doesn't make you soft; it means understanding what drives each team member and using that understanding for the benefit of the team.”

year educational journey, pursuing mechanical engineering for my bachelor's and aerospace technology for my master's, both through distance learning. The

process, although demanding, deepened my passion for space sciences, eventually driving me to pursue a doctorate.

The decision to study was not without its challenges, but the experience has been immensely rewarding. Now, as a candidate in astronaut selection, I reflect on the twists and turns of my unique journey with a profound sense of appreciation.

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

NW: Yes, I don't find leadership difficult to define. In a team, it's the person who takes responsibility for both the team and its outcomes. There's no need for magic in this; you need some expertise in the subject matter. You don't have to be the smartest in the team, but having a solid understanding of the topic is crucial. Additionally, you need a sense for people – a good dose of empathy. Empathy here doesn't just mean compassion; it means being able to cleverly put yourself in others' shoes, motivating and supporting each individual to deliver their best performance. Being empathetic doesn't make you soft; it means understanding what drives each team member and using that understanding for the benefit of the team.

LT: 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?

NW: I've faced numerous setbacks and challenges throughout my career. One particularly significant experience occurred early in my leadership journey at the age of 24. I was stationed at a prominent NATO flight school in Texas, serving as a flight instructor and Flight Commander. In this role, akin to being a class teacher, I held the responsibility for training 12 students and leading a team of six flight instructors. Despite being the youngest and not the most experienced pilot, I found myself managing a diverse team that included a

seasoned Dutch pilot in his mid-50s, who possessed far more experience than I did at the time.

Convincing someone with decades of experience to align with my approach, especially in a foreign setting like the United States, where adherence to training rules was crucial, presented a unique challenge. I faced resistance from this seasoned Dutch pilot who was set in his ways, having followed his own methods for the past 30 years. Instead of succumbing to stereotypes about military leadership, which often emphasize immediate dominance, I opted for a different approach.

I recognized the importance of acknowledging and leveraging the diverse competencies and skills within the team. I actively sought to transform potential adversaries into allies. For instance, with the older Dutch pilot, I approached him collaboratively, acknowledging his expertise and inviting him to contribute his insights. This involved navigating the delicate balance between his wealth of experience and the prescribed training rules.

The fascinating aspect of this experience was the need to break free from traditional military stereotypes. Instead of asserting dominance, I had to perceive each team member as an individual with unique abilities. It required creating alliances, seeking input, and ensuring that every team member felt heard and valued.

This inclusive approach paid off during challenging moments. When mistakes occurred, as they inevitably do in any professional setting, I took responsibility as the leader. Even when the top executive confronted me about a mistake, despite being significantly younger, I stood before my team, shielding an older, experienced colleague from blame. This showcased that age and experience were secondary; what truly mattered was the leader's commitment to standing by their team, taking responsibility, and ensuring a sense of security. In essence, when the team perceives that their leader supports them, irrespective of age or experience, a foundation of trust and security is established – a victory regardless of one's age.

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

NW: Fundamentally, there are three key principles that guide me: gratitude, perspective, and a somewhat stoic mindset. Gratitude, in my view, is essential for resilience and perseverance and is directly connected to perspective.

When I talk about perspective, I mean focusing on what I already have. There are individuals in the company, three levels

below the board in upper-middle management of a DAX corporation, who might consider not getting a promotion to be the end of the world. However, I have a warm, well-heated home with electricity and internet, a stocked refrigerator, hot water in my shower – these are all aspects of life that I should view as a privilege and be grateful for. Regardless of my background, status, or being a woman, I have the freedom to choose where and for whom I work, when I get married, and when I choose to move on. It's a privilege that we shouldn't take for granted, and building gratitude and perspective around these aspects helps put everything else in my professional context into perspective.

When it comes to more money, promotions, or a higher position, I can strive for these, but if they don't materialize, I can stay relaxed and consider alternative companies, positions, or approaches. It's not always about external factors; as a woman as well, I've faced challenges, but I've always taken it personally and didn't assign the "blame" to my gender, not as a disadvantage but as an opportunity to personally control and change my situation.

The third principle is adopting a somewhat stoic mindset, recognizing that not every fluctuation in life should dictate my overall well-being. Life has its ups and downs, but the key is ensuring that the overall trend,

“Gratitude, in my view, is essential for resilience.”

much like the stock market, is positive. I can appreciate the highs and endure the lows briefly, knowing that, in the grand scheme, life is generally okay and will continue to be.

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

NW: When discussing diversity and inclusion, the main aspect I emphasize is empathy. It's crucial to genuinely understand why I want to engage in these efforts. Embarking on diversity and inclusion initiatives just because others tell me to, while not necessarily destined for failure, will likely not achieve maximum success. Finding intrinsic motivation is key.

I often struggle to comprehend why some companies don't see the inherent smartness in fostering diversity. Take the example of women in Germany—they wield significant economic influence, influencing family purchases, children's needs, automotive choices, and even vacation destinations. Therefore, it's wise business to consider the perspectives of diverse groups.

If I aim to create advertising, marketing, or develop products that resonate with women, it's only logical to consult women for their insights. Whether it's a financial product or any other, understanding customer expectations is vital. Similar to my engineering education, where product quality is not a goal in itself but a measure of meeting customer expectations, a

diverse customer base necessitates engaging with diverse perspectives.

Empathy, in this context, isn't about sympathy but the ability to understand and relate to different situations. For instance, if I have young mothers as employees facing challenges due to inadequate childcare support, a high-pressure approach won't yield optimal results. Instead, I should focus on empowering them to deliver peak performance despite their challenging circumstances.

Being a nice person is not a prerequisite for this understanding; it's about recognizing that enabling my team, irrespective of their background or situation, to perform at their best ultimately maximizes overall gains. This principle applies universally, whether dealing with people of different races, religions, or abilities. In essence, the approach is not about being nice; it's about smart business and acknowledging that diverse perspectives contribute to optimal team performance.

LT: What advice would you give to aspiring young leaders aiming to make a positive impact in their respective fields?

NW: Self-awareness is a key factor in becoming an effective leader. Paying close attention and honing a keen observational skill is crucial in every situation, even before taking on a leadership role. I observe not only those in leadership positions but also individuals who are not yet in leadership roles. I carefully assess situations, asking myself what has been said or done that makes me feel better about my job or boosts my overall well-being.

“Paying close attention and honing a keen observational skill is crucial in every situation.”

The best teachers are often poor leaders. I meticulously observe their actions, deciphering why a particular statement from a manager might leave me feeling frustrated or irritated. What exactly did they do or say that led to this reaction, and how can I avoid replicating those behaviors when in a leadership position? This level of self-awareness extends to keenly observing my own employees. Even in seemingly flat hierarchies, where open criticism might not be the norm, subtle signals abound.

As a line manager with the authority to determine compensation and promotions, it's essential to recognize that employees won't always express their critiques openly. The illusion of 99% of “flat” hierarchies, as I see it, can be shattered. One person still employs the other, controls their salary and

the career advancement – that's never flat. If my team chuckles at my jokes, it doesn't necessarily mean I'm a funny boss; I must remain aware of this. In meetings, if I present what I believe to be a fantastic idea and receive subtle signs of skepticism – a furrowed brow or a brief expression that is quickly masked – I cannot let my ego take the lead. Instead, I should inquire openly, “I sense some hesitation. Can you share your thoughts?” This creates a space for honest communication and allows my team to

provide valuable, albeit subtle, feedback. Recognizing and embracing these subtle signals often serves as the most genuine form of feedback available.

Reflections

As one of the coveted few, a “One of One Hundred” female combat pilots, Winter not only commands the cockpit but also possesses an incredible positive composure that remains steadfast.

In the face of challenges, she radiates an unparalleled optimism, embracing the mindset that there are no difficulties, only challenges to conquer. Her distinct personality, marked by assertiveness and a willingness to show her edges, potentially contributing to her recipe for success, adds a layer of intrigue. Despite encountering adversity, she carries an air of lightness.

She navigated these intense circumstances with a certain grace and positive composure, showcasing a remarkable blend of skill and resilience. Winter's capacity to handle the weight of live ammunition and the responsibility that comes with it, especially in the complex geopolitical landscape, further underscores her exceptional composure and resilience.

Moreover, Winter exudes a sense of humility, surprising us with her understated acknowledgment of being one of the three women among a hundred male pilots in the German Air Force. She refrains from emphasizing gender differences, instead opting for a more inclusive perspective. Winter doesn't claim entitlement based on her gender but rather aligns herself with the broader pilot community, acknowledging the challenges they collectively face.

This humility, coupled with her positive and composed demeanour, adds another layer of fascination to Winter's character. The absence of a gender-centric narrative and her ability to integrate seamlessly into the larger community showcase not only her exceptional skills as a pilot but also her inclusive and collaborative approach to her profession. Nicola Winter emerges not just as a groundbreaking female pilot but as a skilled professional who navigates challenges with grace, optimism, and a commendable sense of community.

Nicola Winter's unique journey reflects not only her groundbreaking accomplishments

in aviation and space but also her commitment to leadership, continuous learning, and contributing to the advancement of space exploration and crisis management. Her story serves as an inspiration for aspiring aviators and space enthusiasts globally.



NIKE LORENZ

Introduction

Nike Lorenz, a prominent young German field hockey player, proudly represented her nation at the 2016 Summer Olympics. However, it was her subtle yet powerful statement at the Tokyo Olympics on July 25, 2020, that garnered international attention. While her teammates sported knee-high white socks with the German flag's colours, Lorenz added a rainbow-colored band to her attire, making a profound statement in support of LGBTQ+ rights. This seemingly innocuous act was the result of extensive deliberations and debates within the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the governing body of the Games, which eventually led to a revision of their contentious Rule 50. As a result, athletes like Lorenz were allowed limited forms of political expression during competition, and her rainbow-accented socks became a symbol of that change.

In addition to her achievements on the field, Nike Lorenz serves as an ambassador for two significant climate initiatives: the "Sports for Future" movement and the Sports4Trees campaign. Notably, she has emerged as one of Germany's leading climate activists within the realm of sports. The catalyst for her environmental activism was a shift in the international hockey calendar, which necessitated more international travel and subsequently increased carbon emissions. In response, Lorenz and her teammates took it upon themselves to initiate a reforestation project

in South Africa with the ambitious goal of planting an entire forest.

She firmly believes that her status as a world-class athlete provides her with a unique platform to convey her message to a wider audience, further fueling her commitment to making a positive impact on climate change and environmental conservation.

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

Nike Lorenz: I've always tried to intertwine my life with hockey. My early childhood was filled with sports and fun. My mom coached me, and I didn't dream of becoming a national hockey player back then. Things got more serious when I was around 14 or 15, and at 19, I left home and played in my first Olympics. What has fascinated me the most over the years as hockey evolved from a mere hobby and fun into something else is that I still find great joy and fun in it. Most of the time, I just have fun with it. But all the logistics, making sure everything works, being able to study and complete my Abitur (high school diploma) required a lot of organization on my part. Time management and organization were my best friends. They guided me through it all. And also, the fact that I always had at least two things on my agenda keeps driving me all the time. I pursued my Master's degree in England, and now I'm here in Cologne as a professional national player, working on

the side, and being partially involved in activism. That's my full identity, and I draw a lot of strength from it. Passion and organization must always go hand in hand.

These are definitely the factors that personally drove me. However, I believe that many external factors played a crucial role in my success as well. For example, the support I received from my parents. The fact that they had the opportunity to drive me to Mannheim three to five times a week was a tremendous help. Their time and dedication were crucial. These were factors that contributed to the formula of success.

In general, I would say that I had a stable foundation. I always had friends outside of hockey. I pursued various hobbies away from the hockey field and always had my family's support.

Additionally, I could keep myself occupied easily. I always had a place to return to. I could sit down and engage in activities like crafting, reading, or other hobbies for hours. I believe this was also of great significance, as it helped me maintain a sense of origin, even when the path was often challenging.

In sports, there's a lot of talk and evaluation about you, especially when you participate in the Olympics at the age of 19. The question of what's next often arises. But I always had this inner feeling that I knew

where I came from, and that helped me overcome these uncertainties.

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

NL: The question is complex. I definitely find the definition of leadership to be challenging. Initially, I tried to define it for myself as providing direction. For me, leadership means guiding a group in a particular direction. This can involve being actively present within the group, motivating from within, or it can mean charting an entirely new path and having others follow.

Leadership, to me, also means being visible and present within the group, without necessarily being loud. People should know you're there, especially in challenging times, such as on the hockey

field. Presence and involvement are crucial in such moments to improve the situation.

Another important aspect of leadership for me is nurturing and ensuring that the group develops a certain dynamism to achieve its goals. As a leader, it's crucial to set an example and not only want to make others better but also improve oneself. It always starts with self-improvement.

To understand what makes a group better and how to achieve common goals, it's important to be well-connected, listen,

“As a leader, it's crucial to set an example and not only want to make others better.”

observe, and reflect on both yourself and the group. Leadership can often seem lonely, but in my opinion, it should never be entirely isolated. You can't theoretically lead a group on your own because there are always people nearby who can provide feedback. It's important to engage with these individuals and ensure that leadership doesn't become isolated.

SE: 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?

NL: Certainly, I've faced some challenges. For instance, I've lost important games in my life, which was undoubtedly difficult and came with rough patches. It wasn't entirely unexpected, but I learned a lot during those times.

One of these challenges was the switch from one club to another. I made the decision spontaneously. The reason was how the club dealt with my then-coach, with whom I disagreed and wanted nothing to do with. This spontaneous decision was uncharacteristic for me because I usually like to plan and anticipate, especially regarding hockey

decisions, studies, and other aspects. However, this decision brought a lot of pushback, and many people commented on it without knowing the full picture. This left me feeling quite insecure, and when I arrived at my new club, I was also uncertain.

Furthermore, in my new club, there was already a strong leader whom I personally respected. This was an unusual situation for me since I typically played in teams where I took on a leading role. This led to me trying to adapt and stay in the background in this new situation. It was

“I allow myself periods where I do less and have lower expectations of myself. During these phases, I train less intensely and allow myself to take a step back. This enables me to get back into full swing when it matters.”

emotionally challenging because many factors were beyond our control. As a result, two versions of myself collided, and it appeared inauthentic to outsiders. However, authenticity, in my opinion, is crucial for leadership. You should be flexible and responsive to the group's needs,

but this flexibility should not compromise authenticity. In this situation, I tried to adapt too much while still being the loud and responsible person I naturally am. These

two sides didn't align, and it took me a while to realize this and receive feedback from others.

An important insight into leadership for me was that one must be authentic, know their strengths and weaknesses, and be willing to express them regardless of others' opinions. Another challenge was around the time of the Tokyo Olympics when there was unrest within our team, especially regarding the coach. I found myself caught in the middle, trying to appease both the coach and the team. In doing so, I lost my own authenticity and values. I hoped to please everyone by solely reacting to what the group needed, but that didn't work. I had to bring my own leadership style, my own opinions, and perspectives to be authentic in leading. It didn't work if I just conformed and wasn't myself.

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

NL: Certainly, for me, these are definitely two different things: resilience and motivation. I think it has a lot to do with what I described earlier: self-awareness and reflection. To be resilient, I've learned that I need to do a lot of work with myself. I need to engage in discussions and reflect. It's important to strike a good balance between what others say and what I think about myself. Especially when feeling uncertain, one tends to lean towards one of these extremes. I believe balance is crucial.

And even though I might wish for it to be different at times, I think resilience often means occasionally failing, getting up, and moving forward. Unfortunately, that's inevitable. Otherwise, maybe one hasn't tried hard enough. However, I draw a lot of strength from it. During training camps, I always take some time for myself, maybe write in my journal, or go for a walk. In any case, I engage in deep self-reflection and don't simply assume that there are always people around me to engage with.

As for motivation, that's a very important point for me. I try to view my year in phases. There are always highs and lows, and I consciously manage it that way. For me as an athlete, and I think this applies to other athletes as well, it's best if I consistently perform at a high level over many years. To achieve that and have peaks where my motivation and dedication are at the highest level, I allow myself periods where I do less and have lower expectations of myself. During these phases, I train less intensely and allow myself to take a step back. This enables me to get back into full swing when it matters.

Right now, I've had a summer with a packed schedule. I had the German Championship in May and the European Championship in August. That means I've been in full throttle mode every day for the last 6 months, pushing my limits. Now, I'm

in a phase where I'm doing my job in the Bundesliga and trying to maintain my standards. I'm the second oldest player on the team at 26, and I have a certain role model function. As the only national team player, people pay attention to what I do. I try to maintain my standards, but I also

accept that there are days when I might not be the best in training or play worse. That's okay. I strive to do my best on the weekends but don't expect perfection every day. I think that's very important. I only understood this later on, also due to injuries and so on. Sometimes you have to release the gas pedal a bit to be able to step on it fully later on.

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

NL: My social environment is relatively predetermined in many aspects because hockey is the sport I engage in, which means I interact with people from similar backgrounds and privileges. I began to delve beyond hockey-related issues when I had a lot of exchanges with people from South Africa through an initiative. We discussed their perspectives on topics like climate change and environmental issues, for instance. When I launched the anti-racism campaign, I naturally started reading

books about racism by Black authors.

Typically, I've engaged in conversations

with Black athletes who were interested. It's not my role to say, "Explain the world to me." Regarding the rainbow armband, I took the time to discuss it with my lesbian teammates before deciding to

wear it, valuing their perspectives and insights.

I still need to understand who I am. I am a white, very privileged woman. That means the perspectives I represent are not particularly diverse. However, if I want to engage with diversity, it's the perspectives of other people around me that I need to embrace. I constantly try to respect that. If I wanted to get involved in these issues because I felt the need to use my privileges to contribute positively, I always reached out strongly to the people most affected by these issues. I asked for their perspective and how I could assist, rather than thinking I could solve the problem of racism or similar issues from my own perspective. This can only be achieved through dialogue, expanding networks, and engaging with people from various walks of life.

“If I want to engage with diversity, it's the perspectives of other people around me that I need to embrace.”

This definitely developed during my studies. It began with my interaction with climate and sustainability. It started simply with reading books on the subject and delving deeper into it. At 19, I moved out of my parents' home, so I quickly began making my own consumption decisions and noticing their impacts. Over the years, I increasingly engaged with topics like racism. It was always small building blocks that built upon each other. When I started delving into climate activism, I was asked if

I wanted to join "Sports for Future", a German climate initiative. There, I met a female rower, who is very active in that field and

who gave me some tips on who I could talk to when I wanted to start a campaign against racism in sports. Through that campaign, I became involved with "Athleten Deutschland" and joined the Anti-Racism Working Group. Things continued to evolve, and it became evident that there was a significant demand for people who wanted to engage with such topics beyond their privileges. That's why I'm very glad I started, and now I'm part of a network of people willing to help..

SE: As a successful leader, what advice would you give to aspiring young executives aiming to make a positive impact in their respective fields?

"A big part of my leadership style is to show that I'm human and that there are no perfect solutions."

NL: I believe that understanding, as I mentioned earlier, especially the understanding that being in a leadership role or being a leader is not always easy and sometimes it feels like you're alone or dealing with certain issues by yourself, is very important. It's easy to fall into this perspective, but one must not forget that in a leadership role, you cannot be alone. If you feel alone for too long, you can't effectively be a leader because you need a group to lead. This is an important

realization that I need to continually reaffirm. You have to constantly remind yourself that you are not alone and consider different perspectives.

To be successful in a leadership role and to be a leadership personality, you

also need to know quite a bit about yourself, recognize your strengths and weaknesses, and be able to reflect on yourself and listen. For me, it's important to emphasize that I never expect everything I do to be perfect or complete. I have no absolute demand for perfection because the world is too complex to always find the perfect solution. Nevertheless, I never expect something to be entirely or perfectly complete. This also applies to how I deal with myself and others. A big part of my leadership style is to show that I'm human and that there are no perfect solutions. Emotions are a part of it, and I openly express my own emotions.

I believe this contributes to staying mentally healthy, which is very important for a leader. During the Olympic Games, I realized that I couldn't take on a leadership role if I wasn't mentally well. Often, leadership gives you the feeling that you have to be stronger than everyone else and flawless, but that doesn't lead to maintaining mental health. It's hard to stay strong, and I try to break that image. In my team, we have many team members who think similarly. We are a reflective and open group that allows for showing weaknesses. When team members see that even leaders make mistakes, we can still move forward as a group, and in my opinion, that's a good sign of effective leadership.

Reflections

At the age of 26, she exhibits remarkable self-reflection and a strong awareness of herself and her impact on others. It's evident that she deeply engages with her thoughts. One could say she's sometimes a bit too much in her own head, but that doesn't make her any less impressive. She is highly present and conscious in her being and in the way she expresses herself in her environment. I find this astonishing, especially at her young age.

Although she may not have accumulated as much life experience yet and doesn't always find the perfect words to articulate her thoughts precisely, you can tell that she thinks as she speaks. Her way of speaking mirrors her thinking, indicating that she's still in the process of developing her communication skills. This is likely because her focus was on the hockey field and not necessarily on verbal communication. Therefore, self-reflection holds significant importance for her.

She is not at the end of her development, and that is a great thing. It's impressive to notice how she is perceived as "senior", relative to her peer group, and this comes from within, not from external expectations. In my opinion, this is the most impressive aspect of her personality, and I certainly wouldn't have said the same at her age. It's truly admirable.



SOUAD MASSI

Introduction

Souad Massi is a highly acclaimed artist with an impressive career spanning over 20 years. Born in the 1970s into a modest family in Algiers, she had to leave the country more than 20 years ago when her outspokenness and her singing with a heavy-metal band attracted death threats. Now based in France, she has captivated audiences worldwide with her enchanting voice and unique fusion of musical genres. Souad Massi's songs, driven by a strong belief in freedom and justice, convey messages of love, altruism, and bravery, while also advocating for tolerance and understanding.

With her Algerian roots and international influence, Souad Massi serves as a bridge between cultures, inspiring audiences with her talent and dedication to artistic expression. Her contributions to the music industry have garnered her numerous accolades, including gold discs and prestigious awards. In 2005, she became a United Nations Ambassador for micro-credits, to help women in Africa. In 2017 she was elevated to the rank of "Officier des Arts et des Lettres" by the French Ministry of Culture, the country's highest recognition of significant contributions to the arts.

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

Souad Massi: Absolutely, my journey as an artist has been shaped by a multitude of experiences and influences that have played a significant role in defining who I am today. Growing up in Algeria, surrounded by a family of musicians, created a nurturing environment for my artistic inclinations. The love for music that permeated our household sparked a passion within me to explore the depths of this art form.

Having musicians like my uncle, two brothers, and parents in my family exposed me to a wide range of musical genres and styles, enriching my understanding of music's expressive power. They instilled in me not only the technical skills but also the emotional essence required to convey a message through music.

When I moved to France, destiny presented me with a pivotal moment when I met an artistic director from a major record label. This encounter proved to be transformative, opening doors that allowed my music to reach a broader audience. It was an opportunity that I seized with unwavering determination.

Throughout my journey, the Algerian culture and rich heritage have also been instrumental in shaping my identity as an artist. Delving into the works of renowned poets like Rumi and exploring the beauty of French and Arabic poetry became a wellspring of inspiration for my songwriting. These cultural influences enriched my music with a blend of diverse elements,

creating a unique fusion of sounds and emotions.

During my formative years, I found solace in poetry, which became a sanctuary for my innermost thoughts and emotions. As a shy and reserved individual, I struggled to express myself openly. Poetry allowed me to confide in myself, giving rise to a world of artistic introspection and creativity. This deeply introspective journey helped me understand the power of songs as a medium to communicate profound emotions and ideas. It was a transformational process that enabled me to transcend my inherent shyness and share my musical expression with the world.

One of my songs, "Hagda Wla Akter", is an embodiment of the ethical dilemmas artists may encounter when touching on personal stories, in this case a story of a tragic, sad reversal of fortune. Through this experience, I grappled with the responsibility of sharing someone else's private life in my art.

This introspection and ethical awareness have made me more sensitive to the stories I choose to tell through my music, ensuring that I respect the boundaries of others' personal experiences.

“Stay persistent in pursuing your dreams, and remember that success is a journey, not a destination.”

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

SM: For me, leadership is not merely about authority or power over others. Instead, it is the ability to earn respect, inspire, and empower those around you. Drawing from my personal experiences, I believe leadership is rooted in authenticity, sincerity, and the courage to listen to oneself and others.

Authenticity is the foundation of leadership. Being true to oneself and staying grounded in one's values and principles creates trust and fosters a genuine connection with others. Leaders must have the courage to be themselves and lead by example.

Sincerity is equally essential in leadership. When one genuinely cares for their team and their well-being, it fosters a sense of camaraderie and loyalty. This sincerity in building relationships, combined with empathy, forms a strong bond among team members, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment.

The courage to listen to oneself and embrace fear is another hallmark of effective leadership. Fear, rather than being a deterrent, should be seen as a driving force to understand oneself better and empathize with others' struggles. Leaders who embrace their vulnerabilities and fears

create an open and compassionate space for their team to grow and excel.

In any industry, these qualities of authenticity, sincerity, and courage to listen and empathize are essential for leaders to inspire and empower their teams to achieve remarkable success.

HS: 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?

SM: Throughout my career, I have faced challenges and setbacks that have tested my resolve and determination. One of the most critical lessons I learned from these experiences is the significance of staying true to oneself and maintaining the conviction in one's message.

In an ever-evolving music industry, staying authentic and true to my artistic expression was not always met with immediate acceptance. However, I remained steadfast and continued to deliver my message through my music. This unwavering commitment to my artistic integrity resonated with my audience, creating a deep connection and loyalty.

Navigating through difficulties, I also discovered the power of embracing negative moments as opportunities for

growth and self-discovery. When faced with a period without a record company, I found myself at a crossroads. Instead of allowing this to discourage me, I used this time as

an opportunity to explore new creative avenues and rediscover my artistic voice.

In essence, the key lesson for

leaders facing challenges is to remain authentic, steadfast, and open to embracing adversities as catalysts for personal and professional growth.

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

SM: Resilience and determination are essential qualities for any artist, especially during challenging times. To maintain resilience, I have adopted various strategies that help me stay grounded and focused.

One of the most effective techniques is meditation, which enables me to find inner peace and clarity amidst chaos. Meditation allows me to reflect on my experiences, past and present, and draw strength from them to navigate through challenges.

Sometimes I like to sit quietly in places of worship. This helps me connect with my spirituality, providing a sense of purpose and meaning during difficult times.

“To be a leader, you have to trust your intuition and you have to take risks.”

Additionally, fostering a strong connection with my audience has been instrumental in maintaining my drive. Understanding their experiences and empathizing with their joys and struggles fuels my desire to create music that resonates with them deeply.

Engaging in conversations and interactions with my fans after concerts further reinforces the bond I share with them.

These interactions offer valuable insights into their needs and desires, inspiring me to improve and connect with them on a more profound level.

Overall, the combination of meditation, spirituality and genuine audience engagement helps me stay resilient, focused, and driven, even during the most challenging times.

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

SM: Promoting diversity and inclusion is a cause close to my heart, and I believe in using my platform to contribute positively to society. While my primary focus is music, I actively engage in initiatives that empower underrepresented groups, especially women, both within and outside the music industry.

In my artistic life, I strive to foster a diverse and inclusive environment that welcomes individuals from different backgrounds and

perspectives. I create opportunities for talented artists and professionals, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or cultural background, leading to a fusion of sounds and ideas that celebrate the richness of global musical heritage.

Through these collaborations, I aim to break down cultural barriers and showcase the power of music to connect people from all walks of life.

“Leadership is about a choice: Intimidation or Inspiration.”

I also collaborate with organizations and movements that advocate for gender equality and women's rights. By participating in benefit concerts and

charity events, I raise awareness and provide support to women facing various challenges.

One of my initiatives involves offering mentorship programs for aspiring female artists. I firmly believe in empowering the next generation of musicians and sharing the knowledge and experiences that have shaped my career. These mentorship programs not only provide guidance on the artistic aspects but also focus on the challenges women may encounter in the music industry, helping them navigate and succeed.

Furthermore, I use my music to raise awareness about social issues and advocate for change.

By addressing topics such as gender equality, social justice, and human rights, I hope to inspire listeners to become more empathetic and actively contribute to a more inclusive world.

In conclusion, I believe that promoting diversity and inclusion is not just a responsibility but a privilege. As an artist, it is my duty to use my platform to amplify voices that are often unheard and to champion the power of diversity in enriching our lives and societies.

HS: As a successful artist and leader, what advice would you give to aspiring musicians and young leaders aiming to make a positive impact in their respective fields?

SM: Embrace your authentic self and remain true to your artistic vision or leadership style. Your uniqueness is your strength, and it will set you apart from others in a crowded industry or competitive field.

Challenges and failures are an inevitable part of any journey. Instead of fearing them, see them as opportunities for growth and learning. Embrace adversity, and it will propel you forward.

In the face of obstacles, maintain your resilience. Trust in your abilities, and

believe in your capacity to overcome difficulties. This unwavering determination will fuel your drive and passion, even during the most trying times.

Seek the company of like-minded

individuals who encourage and inspire you. Having a strong support system will help you navigate challenges and celebrate successes together.

Success rarely happens overnight. Be patient with yourself and your progress. Stay persistent in pursuing your dreams, and remember that success is a journey, not a destination.

Always stay connected to the essence of why you chose this path. Whether it's the impact you want to make through your music or the change you wish to bring as a leader, your purpose will guide you through the highs and lows.

“Your uniqueness is your strength, and it will set you apart from others in a crowded industry or competitive field.”

Reflections

In our thought-provoking exchange with Souad Massi, her profound insights carry relevance for business leaders seeking to excel in their respective fields. As we delved into the topic of success, Souad shared a nuanced perspective that goes beyond mere performance and recognition. She reminded us that true success lies not only in the limelight but also in the ability to connect with people and experiences on a deeper level.

One of the notable takeaways from our conversation was Souad's recognition of the inherent solitude that often accompanies leadership positions. Despite being surrounded by a support network of family, friends, and fans, Souad expressed a sense of personal solitude that serves as the cornerstone of her artistry. This resonates with the experiences of many business leaders who, despite their outward success, often grapple with the challenges and complexities of decision-making and responsibility.

Souad's ability to delve into themes of conflict, introspection, and the search for meaning in her music holds valuable lessons for leaders in the business world.

Just as she seeks inspiration and creativity in exploring the depths of human emotion, business leaders can embrace moments of solitude to gain clarity, reflect on their values, and navigate the complexities of their roles.

Furthermore, Souad's emphasis on posing thought-provoking questions rather than providing easy answers reminds us of the importance of critical thinking and continuous learning in leadership. By embracing uncertainty and seeking meaningful solutions, leaders can foster a culture of innovation, resilience, and adaptability within their organizations.

In conclusion, our interview with Souad Massi highlighted the profound connections between art, leadership, and personal growth. Her experiences and perspectives underscore the significance of authenticity, introspection, and embracing solitude as catalysts for personal and professional development. By incorporating these insights into their leadership journeys, leaders can navigate the challenges of their roles with greater empathy, creativity, and purpose.

Leadership – A Synthesis

In synthesizing insights from nine diverse perspectives on leadership, key themes emerge, weaving a dynamic tapestry of effective leadership across industries.

- *Reliability and Preparedness*: Leadership is defined by reliability, transcending mere presence to embrace the ability to delegate and accept replaceability. This perspective challenges conventional notions, emphasizing preparedness for unexpected absences.
- *Unity, Inclusivity, and Empowerment*: A recurring theme is the holistic leadership approach, celebrating unity, inclusivity, and authentic expression. Empowering individuals within a collective setting fosters collaboration and a sense of belonging.
- *Direction and Psychological Safety*: Providing clear direction and ensuring psychological safety stand out as fundamental principles. Effective leadership involves coordinated guidance, steering away from dictatorial approaches, and creating an environment of trust and efficiency.
- *Adaptability and Collaborative Focus*: Leadership in the modern context demands adaptability, shifting from traditional directives to collaborative approaches. Understanding and accommodating the preferences of new generations fosters a connected and valued team.
- *Authenticity, Sincerity, and Courage*: Rooted in authenticity, sincerity, and courage, leadership builds trust, fosters camaraderie, and transforms fear into a driving force for understanding oneself and empathizing with others.

Resilience and Setbacks

Drawing from a wealth of nine varied experiences, resilience emerges as a central, multifaceted quality that transcends both professional and personal spheres.

- *Alternative Passions and Resilience*: A unique approach to resilience is unveiled through the lens of alternative passions. The integration of a secondary pursuit, be it writing, music production, or charitable endeavours, becomes a source of mental rejuvenation, offering fresh perspectives and renewed energy in confronting challenges.
- *Perspective Shifts and Inner Balance*: Resilience emerges from intentional shifts in perspective and a commitment to self-care. From consciously broadening viewpoints by engaging in charitable activities to incorporating daily relaxation techniques, these strategies contribute to maintaining composure and inner balance.
- *Vision and Self-Care as Resilience Anchors*: A clear vision of personal and collective goals becomes a cornerstone for resilience. Balancing the pursuit of objectives with self-care practices, such as sufficient sleep, nourishing food, and nurturing relationships, creates a resilient foundation capable of withstanding life's challenges.
- *Reflection, Phased Motivation, and Acceptance*: Deep self-reflection, a phased approach to motivation, and acceptance of both successes and failures form the bedrock of resilience. Recognizing that occasional setbacks are part of the journey, resilience is cultivated through self-awareness, introspection, and an understanding that failure can be a catalyst for growth.

Diversity and Inclusion in Practice

Integrating insights from nine interviews uncovers a unified narrative on diversity and inclusion.

- A central theme is the *active advocacy for diversity*, with leaders implementing tangible strategies to challenge and redefine traditional norms and stereotypes. From quota regulations to the pursuit of equal opportunities, they work diligently to reshape environments and promote inclusivity across various professional domains.
- *Mentorship* emerges as a powerful tool, with leaders actively engaging in supporting and empowering the next generation. Sharing personal experiences and offering guidance becomes a cornerstone of their commitment to fostering empowerment.
- Recognizing the need for systemic change, leaders advocate for the *integration of diversity into organizational structures*. Establishing Diversity Groups within companies and consciously incorporating empathy into decision-making processes, they strive to create workplaces that are not only diverse but also responsive to the unique needs of all individuals.
- The leaders emphasize the importance of addressing issues beyond gender, *championing an intersectional and holistic approach to diversity and inclusion*. Actively supporting initiatives combating racism, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism, they advocate for a comprehensive understanding of diversity. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of human experience, these leaders contribute to a more inclusive and equitable future.

In summary, these themes collectively signify the leaders' commitment to alternative communication methods, the challenge of traditional norms, mentorship, organizational integration, and an inclusive, intersectional approach. This synthesis underscores their collective efforts to foster inclusivity and equity across diverse professional spheres.

Conclusion

The paths of female artists, athletes, and leaders depict a leadership paradigm marked by reliability, adaptability, and a strong commitment to inclusivity. Their alternative communication ethos goes beyond conventional business language, embracing non-verbal expressions, collaboration, and authentic voices to foster meaningful dialogue across diverse backgrounds.

Resilience, a central theme, extends beyond professional spheres, encompassing alternative passions, perspective shifts, and self-care. These strategies showcase resilience as a dynamic force to turn challenges into opportunities, offering valuable insights for business leaders to cultivate resilience within their teams.

Diversity and inclusion are core narratives, challenging norms, implementing strategies, and emphasizing mentorship for empowerment. Leaders can draw lessons from integrating diversity into structures, advocating for an intersectional approach, and pursuing a comprehensive understanding of diversity to create more equitable workplaces.

In essence, these narratives provide business leaders with a diverse palette for their leadership journey. Threads of authenticity, unity, empowerment, resilience, and inclusivity serve as guiding principles beyond the boardroom. As leaders assimilate these lessons, they embark on a transformative journey, transcending industry boundaries and fostering inclusive environments.

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