

Women at the Top Leadership Research

Started in 2017, this research project is about leadership from the perspective of women at the top. Always curious, I am fascinated by the potential for women at the top to inspire upcoming women essentially by sharing broader, different, surprising maybe even similar perspectives. Influencing, and encouraging the realisation that we are all role models, inspiring teachers, brave trailblazers.

How are those doors opened, glass ceilings dissolved, seemingly insurmountable cliffs scaled, limitations challenged, assumptions overturned? One courageous or foolhardy person or a combination of many making those ripples spread way beyond what might be thought possible?

What women at the top are thinking about leadership gives women the courage to say if that is possible, if she did that so can I.

Thank you for being one of those inspirational women.

As a result, I have invited women at the top to share their thoughts regarding leadership and create this series of interviews. I began with five questions and as the first interview was nearly finished two more questions were determined to be asked: What question would you like to have been asked? And who would you like to be interviewed or suggest that I interview?

Alice Ingram, Business Engagement Manager, York & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce

26th in the series - interviewed on 24 July 2023 by Halina Jaroszewska

You have no doubt inspired a lot of aspiring leaders – from where (or from whom) do you draw your inspiration?

I draw my inspiration from a whole host of different things. When I first looked at the question my mind jumped to the wonderful people that I have encountered on my journey, thought leaders and personalities etc. Actually, my inspiration often comes from unexpected places, nature, articles I read or chance conversations that I have.

Being out on walks and conscious of what is around me in nature is really important to me. I'm always intrigued at the balance of our natural world and the interdependence of eco systems, from mistletoe needing a host tree to thrive on, to tiny, unimpressive looking seeds that grow into beautiful plants or flowers, even down to bird migration and how timing is important when we consider different elements of a plan or a project. Nature offers us valuable lessons on collaboration, understanding and the importance of nurturing differences and all of these have a big part to play in the world of commerce.

I read a lot, listen to podcasts and watch too much television however find that I can be inspired by any and all of those. Desert Island Discs, Diary of a CEO and Dragons Den are probably my top choices at the moment – oh and Who Do You Think You Are for how history and heritage can help to shape us and Race Across the World to see relationships develop under extreme circumstances!

What would you say have been the biggest developments in leadership that you have witnessed in your years as a leader?

I've been around for a while, how long have you got?! Two really positive developments I've seen in recent years are the shift in the emphasis of emotional intelligence and that of more inclusion and acceptance of differences.

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Effective leaders need to be authentic and genuine. They need to be able to demonstrate empathy and self-awareness in order to build strong relationships and motivate their teams. In turn, authentic leaders inspire trust and loyalty.

Inclusion and embracing differences in the workplace fosters a diverse and innovative environment, where a variety of perspectives and experiences lead to enhanced problem-solving and creativity.

What do you think are the most significant trends and challenges faced by leadership today?

Trends towards the adoption of technology and AI are probably the most significant of my career and the changes are speeding up as time goes on. I think leaders need to embrace them but with caution. We need to be able to 'cherry pick' the enhancers whilst retaining the human element and decision making. I also don't think leaders should be afraid to push back and say when something isn't right for the organisation or the culture. I love tech and use it in many different ways. However I don't always trust it. I tend to approach most new developments with what I see as a healthy dose of scepticism whilst wanting to be won over!

Another trend is the shift to consuming everything in bite sized pieces. When combined with the pace of change in the business landscape the two together can lead us away from strategic, long term thinking. The art of impactful, agile leadership is really important. It doesn't often come naturally, it has to be learned. Being able to pivot if necessary whilst knowing when hold fast to principles and long term goals is a really hard line to tread. For the long term development of businesses, brands and individuals this move worries me the most. We need to get back to relationship building with consumers as well as with our teams in order to engender loyalty and a long term approach to shaping the future together.

One of the biggest challenges in leadership has been the impact of hybrid working. Although not always possible for all roles, I'm generally in favour of offering a range of remote and in-office working. I believe that we should be measured on our outputs and achievements rather than on the amount of time spent in an office. It can help to foster inclusion by enabling those that have been traditionally disadvantaged by complex personal or family commitments to move back into the workplace. It allows everyone to manage their workload in the most appropriate way for them.

I find it interesting how polarising discussions around hybrid working can be. I do agree that it can cause issues when not well managed. On the other hand I believe that it can foster a real sense of trust and autonomy which can have a positive impact on culture. From a leadership perspective, it comes with an additional burden to ensure that we learn to manage remotely, embrace new ways of communication and collaborative working practices, often aided by tech solutions.

What do you think today's leaders should be doing to keep moving leadership to a new level?

I'm passionate about individual and corporate learning. I've always admired those leaders that encourage personal and professional development within a business, ensuring that there are clear lines of succession and that everyone has a personal plan to help get them to the next level of their own career journey.

Teams that work well together will always be learning and improving. We all have so much to learn from each other. Learning doesn't need to come at a financial cost to the business. It can be managed internally through mentorship and guidance which ends up giving the mentor a better understanding of their own skill set as well as helping the mentee to develop theirs. It also allows for those more junior member of the team to mentor senior team members in certain aspects which is an opportunity that a generation ago wouldn't be seen.

One challenge for leaders is to ensure that they don't recruit people like themselves. A good team is made up of many parts. A good leader will spot the gaps in their own and their teams' knowledge and look to fill the gaps with new and different talent. By doing that the opportunities to learn and grow within a business are boundless. Feeling confident enough to allow others to challenge your thinking and help you grow as a leader often leads to a higher level of leadership.

What advice would you give to young aspiring leaders?

It sounds trite but be true to yourself. Never lose sight of who you are and who you want to be. In all areas of your life, treat people how you would like to be treated, the people that work for you now could be your boss one day.

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What question would you like to have been asked?

What do you think your best attribute as a leader is? My answer would be that I hope that I motivate, support and encourage others to reach their full potential. If we are all working towards our full potential and happy in what we do then together we'll be driving the business towards success.

Who would you like to have / recommend be interviewed?

Haddy Nije – Founder of Inclusive Equal Rights

Details of previous interviews in Series One

1. Fiona Jordan – Associate Dean [External Engagement], Faculty of Business and Law UWE (03.02.17)
2. Michele Crossman – Senior Leader in Defence (24.03.17)
3. Katharine Finn – Regional Leader, PwC West and Wales; Assurance Partner (15.03.17)
4. Laura Stambouleh – Partner, Public Sector Advisory – UK Consulting, Cushman & Wakefield (09.05.17)
5. Isla Baliszewska – UK Director Smart Coaching Training Ltd (26.06.17)
6. Fleur Bothwick, OBE – Director of Diversity & Inclusive Leadership, EMEA Ernst & Young LLP (15.10.17)
7. Donna Whitehead – Pro Vice Chancellor and Executive Dean, Faculty of Business and Law UWE (15.10.17)
8. Sarah Pullen – Commercial Director - Regionals, Reach plc (30.06.17)

Details of previous interviews in Series Two

9. Vicky Gardner – Director, ZiaBia Events Consultancy (01.09.21)
10. Patricia Patilla Sanchez – Technical Service Representative, Rolls Royce plc (23.09.21)
11. Kate Redshaw – Senior Associate, Burges Salmon LLP (09.11.21)

Details of previous interviews in Series Three

12. Heledd Wyn – Director and Head of Private Client & Long Term Care at GL Law (25.02.22)
13. Tracey Burleigh – MPWR Business Club Founder & CEO (04.03.22)
14. Michelle Michael, MBE – Director Grand Pier Weston super Mare & Director AGM Holdings Ltd (09.05.22)
15. Pauline King – Regional Employer Engagement Director, RFCA (31.05.22)
16. Susie Warran-Smith, CBE – Award-winning business woman, author, speaker; The Food talk Show; Breakthrough Funding Founder (31.05.22)
17. Sarah Brooks – Head of Business Development, EVO Ultra (21.06.22)
18. Emily Gee, FCILEx – Chartered Legal Executive, Sadlers (11.07.22)
19. Emma Godivala – Director & Founder, York Gin (11.07.22)

Details of previous interviews in Series Four

20. Liz Barclay – Small Business Commissioner UK (04.01.23)
21. Katie Machin, FPFS – Director, YorWealth Ltd (19.01.23)
22. Ciara Eastell, OBE – Professor of Practice in Leadership, University of Exeter Business School (27.02.23)
23. Michelle Mook – Managing Director, Pro-Development (UK) Limited (28.02.23)
24. Stacey McVeighty – Founder, Change Accountants (21.03.23)
25. Joy Newton – Deputy Branch Manager, Handelsbanken (28.06.23)

Check them all out at [Women at the Top - Halina Jaroszevska](#)

**To discuss how Halina Jaroszevska can help
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Halina helps fast track and aspiring leaders, also key teams, to turn uncertainty into a powerful tool for exponential growth. Her aim is to enable clients to switch surviving into thriving, take business and personal performance to the next level and maximise their potential during challenging times.