

WOMEN IN INNOVATION

PIONEERS

REPORT

Imagine a future where products, services, and systems are designed to serve all people. A future where voice recognition software recognizes each individual voice, where life-saving technology is designed for every gender, and where women in leadership is the rule, not the exception.

At WIN, we are working to create that future by breaking down the barriers that keep women from advancing and leading in innovation. With support from Ernst & Young, WIN Pioneers was created to showcase the women who are pioneering change.

In this study, we hold the mirror up to the lives of 24 women in positions of influence. To celebrate their success and examine the changing nature of leadership, as more women occupy a seat at the table. With their stories, we hope to inspire organizations to foster more diversity in the boardroom and equip future leaders with tactics to navigate their own path.

A word from our Partner

Women innovators and inventors continue to transform our world through the power of imagination. In a rapidly changing and increasingly complex environment, we need to empower these individuals to rise to the occasion, question the ordinary, and solve our generations' most complex problems.

Diversity of background, perspective, and identity are fundamental to building high-performing teams and driving innovation in an increasingly complex world. An inclusive and integrated approach to innovation allows the brightest minds to come together to create unique solutions.

Having more women leaders in innovation is imperative to reach gender parity and unlock innovation. Today's women leaders have a responsibility to put humans at the center of their organizations' strategies and use their voices and influence to lift up future leaders. At EY, we've seen the importance of creating a supportive workplace culture and having visible senior female role models. As we look to the next generation of women leaders and innovators, it's critical to underscore the importance of mentors and sponsors in career advancement.

EY is focused on creating an inclusive culture to enable women's potential to truly transform society and build a better working world. Our Women. Fast Forward program seeks to empower a diverse workforce by enabling women to reach their potential through education, mentorship, innovation and entrepreneurial opportunities. We are committed to closing the gender gap and nurturing an environment where everyone is able to become architects of the Transformative Age.

We are proud to support Women in Innovation to celebrate these game-changing pioneers and inspire future women leaders in innovation.

Our Approach

We set out on a journey with one mission – to inspire women through stories of success. The world has enough ‘how-to guides’ and ‘5 point plans’ writing prescriptions on being better, smarter, or more effective. Instead, we wanted to inspire change within the industry.

We interviewed 24 senior women in London, San Francisco, and New York – to listen to their challenges, understand their values, and solicit their advice for the next generation of leaders.

These thought-provoking and awe-inspiring women reflect a diverse range of innovators across the industry representing consultancies, corporations, brands, startups, and charities. We met both rising stars well on their way and women who are way up to share a broad range of perspectives.

These interviews were catalysts for the insights contained in the following pages. They were synthesized into three core themes and supported by quantitative data sourced from current reports, articles, and other reputable secondary sources.

We highlight the voices of our Pioneers throughout this study, but their full interviews can be read in our [WIN Pioneer Profiles](#).

Our Featured Pioneers



LAUREN ACQUISTA
Vice President of Product
Strategy, Quicken Loans



ÉLIDA CRUZ
Vice President Head of Com-
mercial and Small Business
Design, Capital One



NEELA DAS
Head of Innovation, Accuity



KELLY DAWSON
Head of Insight & Innovation,
Kinneir Dufort



CHERYL GRISE
Americas Solutions Leader,
Ernst & Young



GRACE HWANG
Head of Design & UX
Research, Microsoft
Mixed Reality



NAMRATA KAMDAR
Founder, Plenaire



MAJA LAPCEVIC
Senior Vice President of
Innovation and Marketing,
Mastercard



PRISCILLA LI
Head of Applied Innovation,
Capgemini Invent



QIN LI
VP of Design, fuseproject



CHRISTY LIU
Creative Director, Facebook's
Creative Shop



AMANDA MUNILLA
Managing Director,
Wolff Olins San Francisco



COURTNEY PACE
Partner, Head of Strategy,
Head of Private Equity,
Fahrenheit 212



CELIA POOL
Co-Founder, DAME



AMANDA RAMOS
Innovation Director, Gensler



**CHRISTINA
DUCRUET ROSS**
Director of Venture
Development, Company



KATE SHAW
Director of Learning, Airbnb



MIKAELA SMITH
Head of Executive Search,
Slack Technologies



SARAH TURNER
CEO & Co-Founder, Angel
Academe



AYNNE VALENCIA
Director of Design,
San Francisco Digital
Services



CHRISTINA VULETA
Chief Growth Officer,
Cofounder, MINDΔLT



JO WICKREMASINGHE
Director of Product, Zoopla

Rewriting the rules

“The world belongs to those who shape it”, pens Time Magazine as they appoint their first-ever ‘Kid of the year’, Gitanjali Rao.

2020 was a year of new challenges, new realities, and new horizons. Things we thought to be true, and limits we had come to accept, were tested. Unforeseen circumstances have made way for unparalleled progress – like creating a vaccine in just six months and electing the first female and woman of color Vice President of the United States. In a year where the world felt isolated, stunted, and helpless, we proved our resilience, and experienced first hand, that change is always possible.

But 2020 also exposed the gross injustices that continue to persist today. Women were disproportionately impacted by job losses and economic difficulty as a result of the pandemic. Furthermore, a women’s role on the frontline makes up an average of 75% of the world’s total unpaid-care work, including childcare, caring for the elderly, cooking, and cleaning. As a result, women account for 54% of overall global job losses while making up just 39% of global employment. And as women find themselves more vulnerable to the economic impact of the crisis because of existing gender inequalities, the same is amplified for women of color who are uniquely situated within ‘overlapping systems of oppression’ and forced to sustain disproportionate losses of both life and livelihood during the pandemic.

These injustices also impact the corporate world. In 2019, only 28% of Silicon Valley startups had female founders and just last year only 21% of women in the U.S. held C-suite level positions. With the future of business, innovation, and tech lacking in senior female role models, the day to day struggles induced by Covid-19 could potentially set back the pipeline by decades.

However, history tells us that change can and will happen – if we strive together, strategically, and diligently.

Rewriting the rules

So as we try to navigate our way out of this perfect storm, we're reminded that often the best innovation is forced from uncertainty. We've learned that fighting for gender equality beyond 2021 will mean addressing the implicit ways in which society reinforces gender discrimination and disregards intersectionality to find opportunities to dismantle from within.

If 2020 was about resilience, then in this new year, 2021, we will activate. We have the opportunity to rewrite the rules. From building alliances to breaking down archaic pathways, we need to reframe notions of masculinity and feminism in leadership so that everyone feels included.

Led by the experiences of our Pioneers, this is our first cut of the new rule book. We will:

Unlock **THE SECRET OF THE SPONSOR** and how they can accelerate your path to the top

Deconstruct **THE DECLINE OF THE 'SUPERHERO LEADER'** and the rise of human-centric leadership

Celebrate **THE POWER OF OUR INFLUENCE** to create lasting change

We hope this inspires you to rewrite your own.

THE SECRET OF

THE SPONSOR

**CLAIMING YOUR SEAT
AT THE TABLE**

Social connections are vital.

We belong to families, tribes, nations, and increasingly operate as part of an interconnected global community. Men and women are both social creatures, but particularly women.

Neuroimaging studies have discovered that females use more areas of the brain containing mirror neurons than males when processing emotions. Additional studies have uncovered women are also better at turn-taking and being responsive to one another.

So, science tells us that women are 'good' at teamwork.

Yet, this idea that women are naturally suited to collective roles has also been drummed into us culturally. From a young age, change champion and author, Jovina Ang, tells us, “we are taught not to self-promote, rather, to focus on the interest of others – to serve rather than be served.” We see this in the workplace too. Women are over-represented in the non-profit sector – organizations defined by an ethos of collective good and collaboration – and under-represented in other fields such as financial institutions. Both nature, as well as nurture, has perpetuated and prioritized community-focused behavior in women.

Researcher and author, Pam Heim, observes that women are more likely to agree with the statement “being a good team player means helping all of my colleagues with what they need to get done.” In contrast, men are more likely to agree with the statement “being a good team player is knowing your position and playing it well.”¹ For many women, purpose is derived from the shared benefits that come from working in a team.

Safe spaces and coffee mornings won't get you that promotion. Feeling supported and heard won't mean you get that pay raise. While building women's networking groups and acknowledging gender issues within a company propels awareness and improves the overall working environment, it can risk prioritizing the collective over the individual. If women truly want to achieve individual leadership, they need to understand and apply the power of the sponsor.

As a leader, my driving force is that I don't want to cross the finish line on my own...individual contribution is nothing compared to what the ripple effect could be.

PRISCILLA LI, LDN

I see a strong, powerful, close community of women here. However, I think it's important to continue taking credit individually for our accomplishments because it's important as we carve out our paths.

COURTNEY PACE, NYC

**WHAT IF CHEERING EACH OTHER
ON IS NO LONGER ENOUGH?**

Sponsorship, Defined

“Sponsors, mentors, and coaches, oh my!”
With so many labels to describe similar roles, it’s no wonder we get confused.

But being clear about the value of a sponsor can make the difference between getting that promotion or getting stuck in middle management. So, how are sponsors different from mentors?

The crucial difference is this: a sponsor already has a seat at the table and will stick their neck out to help you advance. The more senior your sponsor, the quicker you’ll advance because, while mentors can give advice, sponsors have currency. Mentors might be career developers, but sponsors are career accelerators.² Unless your advocate is a person who actively promotes your ability amongst those with influence over your career, or opens up opportunities for you, they are a mentor and not a sponsor.

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A MENTOR AND A SPONSOR

MENTOR	SPONSOR
Senior person in the organization	A senior leader with influence
Provides emotional support and advice	Provides exposure to their executives
Helps to navigate corporate politics	Recommends you for challenging assignments
Knows your challenges and goals	Knows your strengths and accomplishments
Listens and acts as a sounding board	Opens doors and fights for promotion
Expects nothing in return	Expects loyalty and reputation building in return
Helps mentee to create their own career vision	Helps to drive that career vision forward

A sponsor spends
their political and
social capital on you.
Having a mentor is
optional; a sponsor
is essential.

CARLA HARRIS, VICE CHAIRMAN OF WEALTH MANAGEMENT AT MORGAN STANLEY³

Why we need Sponsors

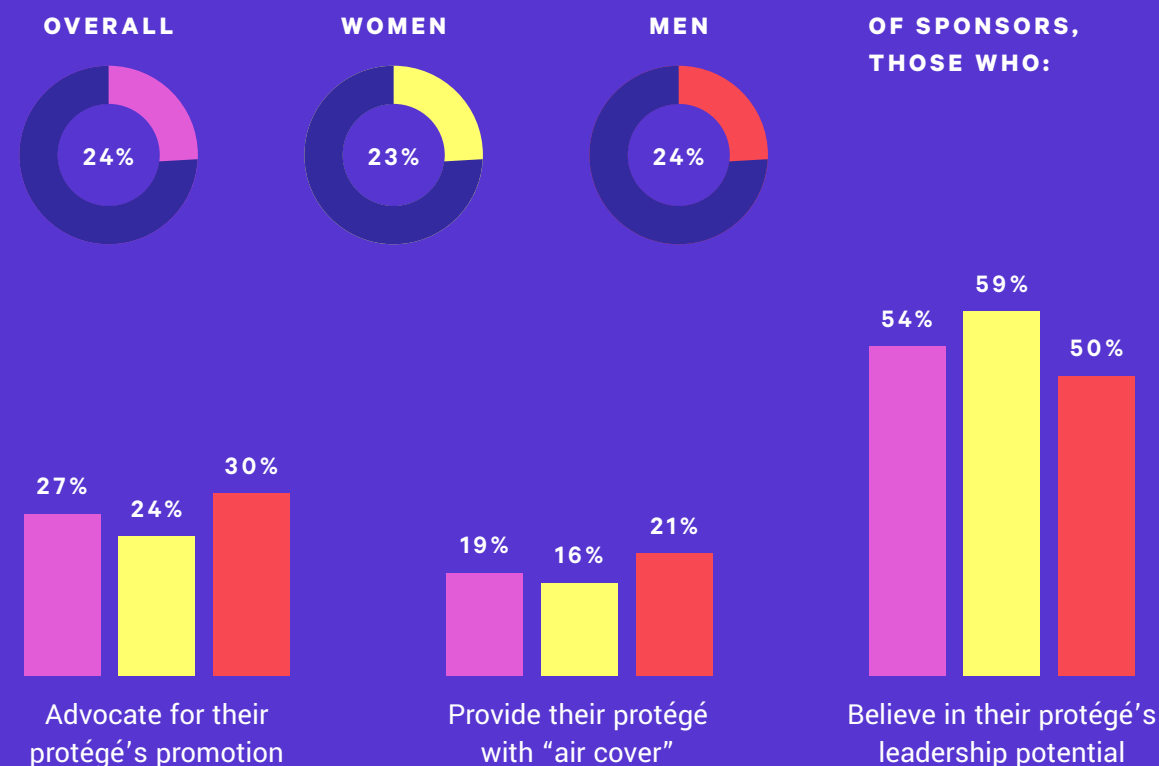
If we work really hard, we go straight to the top right? That's what we're told, that's what we're sold. Unfortunately, this is a myth. There will always be a human element involved. By definition that makes it subjective. This is precisely why we need a person who has a seat at the table to advocate on our behalf behind closed doors.

Lack of sponsorship and senior support has a profound effect on women's career mobility, opportunities, and confidence. Though we have come a long way, the fact remains that too few women are reaching the top of their organizations, becoming key decision-makers, and having an active seat at the table in shaping the world we live in.

01 Over mentored & under sponsored

Many professional women will have some sort of formal or informal mentoring relationship, but very few will have a sponsor. In fact, men are 45% more likely to have a sponsor than women across industry sectors!⁴ Mentoring programs are often held up as examples of a company's commitment to diversifying its leadership pipeline, but despite the resources and good intentions, they rarely bring about real change.

Part of the problem is that programs claiming to help women break the glass ceiling have put too much emphasis on advice rather than advocacy. Women in a 2016 McKinsey study were less likely to say that a senior leader outside their direct management had helped them get a promotion even though they were more likely than men to have been assigned a mentor.⁵ A separate study finds that men are also more likely to report that their mentors have actively tried to further their careers – introducing them to their networks, or pushing for them to win high profile projects. Is it a surprise then that they are more likely to get promoted?



02 Lack of recognition

Many women continue to feel that they are not given credit where it is due for their work. Studies have found that women who worked collaboratively with men on designing multi-year investment portfolios were consistently seen as less competent than their male peers and were seen as playing a less influential role in its success. A 2012 study of alumni of top business schools found that more men than women had direct reports and budget responsibility of greater than \$10 million.⁶ The same 2012 study reported that one-third of men felt they got a great deal of C-suite visibility while working on their projects, compared to one-quarter of women.

Generally, women hesitate to ask for what they want out of business interactions. Instead, they think about what they can do for the other person first.⁷ While this can be useful in building trust, it can mean that the value we bring to a relationship can often go unnoticed and opportunities for exposure can be missed.

It's seen as an unfeminine thing to be the person who is always taking credit for things. You worry you will be seen as too aggressive if you do that, is it greedy, will I seem too 'me, me, me?'

NAMRATA KAMDAR, LDN

33%

vs.

25%

OF **MEN** FELT THEY GOT A GREAT DEAL OF C-SUITE VISIBILITY WHILE WORKING ON THEIR PROJECTS

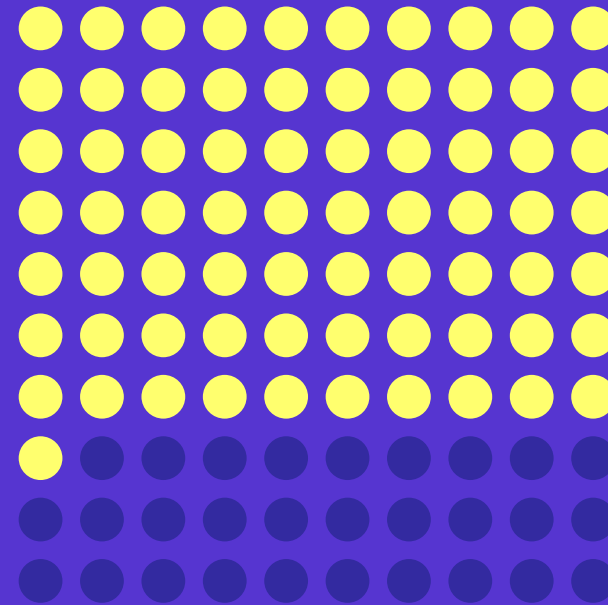
OF **WOMEN** FELT THEY GOT A GREAT DEAL OF C-SUITE VISIBILITY WHILE WORKING ON THEIR PROJECTS

03 Unequally invisible

According to research, we are naturally more comfortable around people with whom we share similarities, who share our gender, race, upbringing, religion, or culture. This 'similarity principle' affects all workplace relationships and becomes glaringly obvious when we look at sponsorship. Research by the Center for Talent Innovation finds that sponsors are far more likely to select proteges who share their race or gender.⁸ This creates a cycle in which men give other men opportunities to lead, and women and especially women of color are left behind.

While more women than ever are entering and graduating engineering and design schools, they don't always stay in the industry. I have a suspicion that is because as a woman of color, no matter how much you have achieved, you always have to keep proving yourself to people who don't see your talents and capabilities.

AYNNE VALENCIA, SF



71%

SPONSORS WHO ARE
THE SAME GENDER
AS THEIR PROTÉGÉS

Benefits of Sponsorship



It literally pays to have a sponsor

According to HBR, sponsorship provides a statistical benefit of up to 30% for high profile assignments, promotions, and pay raises. Salary data uncovered that overall those who have a sponsor are paid 11.6% more than those who do not. Women with sponsors are 27% more likely to ask for a raise and 22% more likely to ask for the 'stretch assignments' that build their reputations as leaders.⁹ And critical for us innovators, they have a 119% higher rate of having their ideas developed and a 200% higher rate to see their ideas implemented.¹⁰

It is definitely not easy for women in the world. The times that I've been most successful is when I've had really strong allies, both women and men, who advocated for me. Without that sponsorship, it would have been far more challenging for me to have succeeded.

ÉLIDA CRUZ, NYC



Sponsorship increases retention

68% of women with sponsors are satisfied with their career advancement.¹¹ When women feel advocated for, they will not only grow, but they will want to contribute to the same program that helped them succeed. And considering 68% of women with sponsors are satisfied with their career advancement, sponsorship is an opportunity to retain diverse talent.

[Having a sponsor] absolutely kept me with the firm longer, made me feel supported. And whenever there's times of being with working arrangements, there's always someone I could go to, to get wise counsel.

ANONYMOUS PROTEGE¹²



Sponsorship is a win-win

The protégé gets put on the fast track to leadership through exposure and promotion. And the senior executive expands his or her impact across the organization. Sylvia Ann Hewlett reports in her book, *The Sponsor Effect*, "Senior-level managers are 53% more likely to have received a promotion in the last two years, if they have a protégé."¹³

**IT'S TIME TO HARNESS THE
POWER OF THE SPONSOR.**

To identify who in the organization or industry would advocate for your progression, you have to take the time to understand each other's values, needs, and career goals and where they could align.



Invest in Relationships

Sponsorship requires a degree of risk and investment, both in terms of time, profile, and finances. This is why it's important for proteges to remember it's not just about doing their job well, it's about investing in relationships to provide that social currency needed come promotion time.

It's important to cultivate a strong network within the organization that you are a part of so that you are in touch with the pulse of your organization and the leaders who can support your development.

MAJA LAPCEVIC, NYC



Think Transactionally

Women tend not to self-promote as they believe that their work would speak for itself. While men not only self promote, they get proactive, by prioritizing relevant stretch assignments for their sponsor. Women shouldn't be afraid to act in their self-interest when it comes to getting the recognition we deserve. A mutually beneficial relationship aligns the needs of both parties and prioritizes efforts on those. Being upfront with your goals and ambitions, and tracking your output can help a Sponsor spot an opportunity to cash in.

Sponsorship is about someone spending their political capital on you. They need to take risks to place a bet on you.

KATE SHAW, SF



Reframe it as a Business Opportunity

Less than a third of employees, both men, and women, say they get the sponsorship they need to get ahead.¹⁴ Identifying the quantifiable value of sponsorship – at an organizational and an individual-level – creates the equitable infrastructure needed to enable women to progress. Organizations need to unearth the personal stories and statistics that illuminate the unique needs of their people and it's existing paths to leadership. How are employees currently progressing? And what value has diversity already brought to leadership? This data can help to align business goals with the ambitions of potential sponsors – and offer the incentive they needed.

Don't feel intimidated by people who aren't saying what you expect. Don't feel intimidated by the difference. The difference is good, the difference will make you more money.

NEELA DAS, LDN

Further Exploration

Who in your organization or in your industry could be advocating for your progression?

Watch → [How to find the person who can help you get ahead at work](#) by Carla Harris

How can you push for more diversity in your organization by sponsoring junior and mid-level employees?

Read → [The Sponsor Effect: How to Be a Better Leader By Investing in Others](#) by Sylvia Ann Hewlett

How can you build your individual sponsorship case and reach out to your potential sponsor?

Listen → [HBR Women at Work: Sponsorship: Defining the Relationship](#)

How can I be 'sponsor ready?'

Read → [Strategic Relationships at Work: Creating Your Circle of Mentors, Sponsors, and Peers for Success in Business and Life](#) by Wendy Murphy and Kathy Kram

THE DECLINE OF THE

‘SUPERHERO LEADER’

**DESIGNING A MORE
HUMAN-CENTERED
BOARDROOM**

We celebrate our leaders and idolize new start-up founders and hotshot CEOs on the covers of magazines. We admire their charisma, their persistence, and their innovative perspective. **It's this image that inspires us to succeed.**

But we don't just look to leaders, we look up to leaders; **we put them on a pedestal.** Heroizing our leaders provides us with a dream to believe in, or a greater purpose to contribute to. And leaders, like heroes, provide a sense of safety¹ when we're feeling insecure.

Romanticizing leadership taps into some of our basic human needs – whether we seek security, belonging, or success. But there's a dark side to heroizing our leaders. We risk creating perceptions that they are infallible, perpetually-strong, and all-knowing. We risk creating a chasm between them and us – one that can seem impossible to cross for mere mortals. We can be left feeling helpless, overcome with imposter syndrome, the desire for perfectionism, and self-doubt. We risk perpetuating the narrative of traditional leadership in its gendered, masculinist paradigm.² We jeopardize opportunities for diverse representation in executive leadership. Those who do not fit the mold are faced with the choice of trying to be something they are not or abandon hope of leading altogether.³

We think it's time to champion a new model. One that isn't rooted in myths of superiority, but instead, one that celebrates what it means to be a human being. What it means to be you. Human-centric leadership enables us to design an authentic leadership style based on our core values and the needs of those we serve. If we are to design a better, more resilient, and more equitable future for all, successful leadership can no longer look like what has come before and what currently exists.

There are some unhelpful myths about leaders. When you think of a leader you think about that person having some sort of superhero quality. They are the person at the top of the mountain holding the flag having led the troop up safely and to success. You often forget that those people are human and fallible too.

CELIA POOL, LDN

**WE MUST BUILD NEW
NARRATIVES AND COMMIT TO
PUTTING OUR PEOPLE FIRST.**

Human-centric leadership defined

There is a core value that lies at the heart of both innovation and leadership: human connection. We need to develop deeper, more meaningful connections with both ourselves and with others in order to thrive as businesses and as leaders.

Human-centered leadership embodies the humanity of leadership exhibited by balancing hard and soft power, technical and moral expertise.⁴ We now demand traits like vulnerability, fallibility, and sensitivity that are often missing in the traditional leadership archetype. Furthermore, it's an approach fundamental to innovation – a process defined by its focus on people.

Gone are the days of the omniscient leader. It's time to accept ourselves as the fallible, brilliant mortals that we are. From superhero to human, it's about time we brought leadership back down to earth. What makes us great leaders is exactly what makes us human.

FROM...HEROIC LEADERS	→	TO...HUMAN-CENTERED LEADERS
A repetitive model of leadership		Your own style of authentic leadership
On a pedestal		Inclusive and participatory
Ego-driven		Values-driven
Try to do it all		Focus on their strengths
Always being strong		Embracing vulnerability
Unrealistic expectations		Self-awareness and self-compassion
Perfectionist; made it to the top		Aims for continuous learning

Vulnerability is the absolute heartbeat of innovation and creativity. There can be zero innovation without vulnerability.

DR. BRENE BROWN, RESEARCH PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Why heroizing our leaders is not OK



It creates an 'us and them' dynamic

By focusing on what makes them different to us rather than the same, we drive division and hierarchy. Singular spotlights push aside the most important values of innovation: teamwork, collaboration and challenging the status quo.

It's easy to get caught up in this idea that it's going to be confrontational. A direct conversation is everybody's right.

CHRISTINA DUCRUET ROSS, NYC



It exacerbates the gender divide

Traditional gendered constructs leave little room for diverse representation or inclusive leadership styles. When women adopt heroic or 'masculine' traits within their styles of leadership or seek to meet the norms in male-dominated cultures they can often be perceived as unlikeable, arrogant, and self-promoting. The resulting cognitive dissonance is a significant energy drain for women executives and a factor in women opting out of the leadership track.⁵



It perpetuates imposter syndrome

Evidence suggests that female leaders experience imposter syndrome to a higher degree than men, with 54% vs 24% reporting high or frequent.⁶ Presented with unrealistic expectations of leadership, women and minorities are disproportionately susceptible as 'the first', 'the only' or 'the few.'⁷ These pioneering labels are accompanied by idolization which implies a level of perfection and a lack of mistakes – leaving no room for learning.⁸

I fall into this place of feeling like I have to do everything perfectly at work and at home and that as a woman, I can't make a mistake. It's a tremendous responsibility for all women.

GRACE HWANG, SF

WE'RE READY FOR CHANGE.

Benefits of Human-centered Leadership

Human-centered leaders are authentic. And authenticity makes you a more effective leader.⁹ Coupled with transparency and vulnerability, human-centered leaders create more trusting, open, and collaborative teams. Research on the neuroscience of trust has shown vulnerability as a critical component. Being asked for help stimulates oxytocin production, encouraging our human tendencies towards support and cooperation.¹⁰

When leaders show up in this way, others do too. When they show they are human beings in their fullest capacity, the effect ripples across the whole organization,¹¹ being stronger, more curious and more connected in the face of adversity.

It's important for leaders to have a strong moral compass and a sense of integrity. When you build trust, there's a level of loyalty that you get – and that level of loyalty is very motivating.

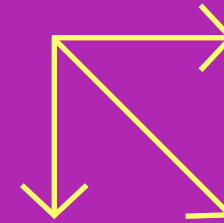
MIKAELA SMITH, SF

Those of us who stay curious and authentic go further. Curiosity helps us open our minds up to it, empathy helps us understand it.

PRISCILLA LI, LDN

72%

OF EMPLOYEES ARE APPEALING FOR A NEW DEFINITION OF 'LEADER' IN TODAY'S WORLD¹²



47%

ARE CALLING FOR LEADERS WHO ARE **MORE TRANSPARENT**

50%

ARE CALLING FOR LEADERS WHO ARE **MORE AUTHENTIC**

53%

ARE CALLING FOR LEADERS WHO **RECOGNIZE THEIR OWN WEAKNESSES**¹²

Our guide to Human-centered Leadership

As an innovator, you are probably familiar with human-centered design. It's a creative approach to problem-solving where the user is always front-of-mind. We propose applying the same approach to designing our leadership style. Just as there are no one size fits all products, **there are no one size fits all leadership styles either.** We draw fundamental parallels between human-centered product design to create our guide to human-centered leadership.

01 Explore

Let's think of this first phase as 'investigative research',¹³ a deep dive into exploring your teams' needs and your own intrinsic motivations.

→ **Lets start with you:**

What are your motivations? What drives you? Unpack it, get out the post-its, explore everything that informs what might ultimately define your purpose as a leader. What do you want to be known for? What are your non-negotiables? What would you absolutely not stand for? What values guide your decision making?

Be sure to define what leadership means for you personally, and have a strong sense of purpose. When you have a strong purpose, you will draw people towards a common goal.

AMANDA RAMOS, NYC

→ **Now, let's explore your teams' needs:**

Do you know them well enough? Dive deeper into what you don't know and spend some more time with them – individually or as a group. What do they hope to achieve? What inspires them? What do they need to do their best work?

It's about getting someone to understand what some of the factors are contributing to a situation or, if we're talking about growth, factors in helping someone get from A to B. For me, leading teams is pretty relational and dialogue-based.

AMANDA MUNILLA, SF

02 Define

So now that you've explored your teams' needs and you've clarified your own motivations as a leader, it's time to use those insights to define your 'leadership proposition'.

Just like we would in product design, this is about crafting your 'offering' addressing the needs of your team in a way that is in line with your purpose and your values. Here are three top tips to help you develop your leadership proposition:



Zero in on your most important values

Living in line with your values is key to being an authentic leader. In doing so, you can bring your whole self to the role. Values-driven leadership is not about getting ahead, pursuing status, or furthering your own agenda, but engaging the team, achieving greater workplace alignment, and generating meaningful change.¹⁴

I went about this by allowing myself to be vulnerable and self-aware enough to clearly admit my own knowledge gaps. As a leader, that's always been important to me.

LAUREN ACQUISTA, NYC



Give vulnerability a voice

No longer an admission of weakness, vulnerability implies the courage to be yourself.¹⁵ In creating a psychologically safe space, those we lead are open to sharing their own vulnerabilities.¹⁶



Own your strengths, own your average

Your greatest strength as a leader is knowing when to admit your weakness. It allows you to empower others in an authentic way.¹⁷ Leadership is no longer synonymous with one single person. Leadership is a practice and not a position, a mindset and not a role.¹⁸

To overcome [imposter syndrome] I've had to recognise that to be a leader of a team it doesn't mean that you have to know everything inside out – that's the quality of a leader.

KELLY DAWSON, LDN

03 Test & Iterate

As with a new product proposition, it needs to be road-tested, iterated, and improved upon. As human-centered leaders, we strive for improvement over perfection. Here are two key principles to keep in mind during this ongoing phase of development.

Aim for continuous growth

As an integral part of innovation, it's crucial for human-centered leaders to be life-long learners. Change is central to our practice, and this must be reflected in our mindset too.

Whether we're pushing ourselves or trying to inspire others...It's going to be constant learning and we have to get comfortable with that.

PRISCILLA LI, LDN

Meet self-awareness with self-compassion

This means treating ourselves kindly in moments of inadequacy or failure. Wherever we are on our leadership journey, we need to embrace it and enjoy it. Appreciating the humanity of all individuals and their imperfections, self-compassion is a key trait of human-centered leaders. More than ever, we need to support our own emotional resilience and psychological well-being as we embark on our life-long leadership journeys.¹⁹

I do look back and wonder at just how much time I spent catastrophizing, making up negative scenarios in my mind. By focusing on my breathing and appreciating the present moment...I manage emotions very differently.

NAMRATA KAMDAR, LDN

Further Exploration

What does it mean to be your authentic self in the workplace?

Read → [Celebrating failure: the power of taking risks, making mistakes and thinking big](#) by Ralph Heath

[Humanise: Why Human-Centred Leadership is the Key to the 21st Century](#) by Anthony Howard

[Failing forward: turning mistakes into stepping stones for success](#) by John C. Maxwell

[What is Human-Centered Design?](#) IDEO Design Kit

[Showing Up as Your Full Self](#) WIN LDN x Huge

What can you learn from other senior women about leading with humanity?

Listen → [Connect to Your Inner Compass w/ Gesche Haas, CEO & Co-Founder, Dreamers and Doers](#) WIN/WIN Episode 04

How can you transform your imperfect journey into your greatest strength?

Watch → [The Power of Vulnerability](#) Brene Brown

THE POWER OF

OUR INFLUENCE

**CREATING LASTING
CHANGE**

When we reach the top there's a belief that we've made it. But when it comes to long term change, that's often when the hard work really begins. When we've got a seat at the table that's when we have a responsibility to create the opportunity for others to join us.

It's a common myth that we only earn the right to influence once we have secured a position of leadership. In reality, **we all have the power to influence each other every day.** From the moment you set out in your career, someone will be learning from you.

We've entered a new era of womanhood. We have been through the defiant period when men were the enemy. Then came the time of empowerment, when we moved beyond competing against men and started fighting one another for that one female-allocated spot at the top. Founder and author Mikaela Kiner brings to life this female rivalry in an anecdote about a young woman who had applied for a transfer but wasn't selected. She heard that the team already had one woman on it and "didn't want another." She was so frustrated she left that company for one that was more inclusive. Not everyone has the luxury to do this, but by voting with her feet, the woman in question was able to increase her own confidence and improve her situation.¹

Now women are pulling together, inspiring one another and opening up opportunities for each other. No longer in competition but working together to 'lift as we rise'. It's time to uncover the many ways that we can make our voices heard and amplify our influence at every level of our careers. Whether it's through finding the platforms to tell our stories, or breaking down barriers to unlock doors for others, or taking a leap of faith to create the space that was missing, we are obligated to be pioneers.

If there are women already at the top, they should be driving change.

SARAH TURNER, LDN

It's your job as a leader to amplify the voices of others. Our voices don't always get heard. We need to amplify female voices.

CHERYL GRISE, NYC

**WE HAVE THE VOICE TO
CREATE LASTING CHANGE.**

Be seen and heard: being visibly vocal empowers others on their journey. There is a severe lack of female role models in the innovation space, so it's essential to showcase those who have reached the top, and also be vocal about your journey in getting there. This is about putting the ladder down for others so they can join us on the climb. To inspire more women to push for greatness, women need to connect their tribes, spread their message, and share their platform.

Cultivate a Community

Currently, professional connections play a much bigger role for men in getting ahead in their careers than for women. In the UK, 29% of men say connections are important in succeeding, whereas only 15% of women say the same. The difference is even greater in the US.² In the startup world, female founders often highlight differences in the size and strength of their professional networks as barriers to access capital, mentors, and customers.

Pick up the Microphone

Manferences, manels, and mexperts are everywhere. Nearly two-thirds of all speakers globally are still men.³ When female leaders are invisible on stage they're invisible in the statistics too, and vice versa. When handed the microphone as a speaker, it's an opportunity to spark societal shifts. More than ever, audiences are craving authenticity and realness in their speakers. In other words: less show and more honesty.

Find a 'speaker sister'

Speakers receive more board seats and job offers, promotions, and raises as industry and thought leaders. One of the best-kept secrets of speaking is to find someone who's at a similar experience level but addresses different topics. Work out a referral structure where you refer your "speaker sister" to past events for a small cut of her fee. Then she can do the same for you.

It is so important to show you value your female leaders. I've had female team members come up to me to say how inspired they are seeing me thrive in my position but also in my personal life as a mother.

LAUREN ACQUISTA, NYC

Don't be afraid to talk about and emphasize the impact you are creating. Because at the end of the day, you often need to create more visibility than your male counterparts need to.

CHRISTY LIU, NYC

On one hand, I'm a shy person. But I see there's a need to communicate, talk about ideas, and be able to speak about the things that are important for other people to learn, to know. So I push myself to find the opportunity to practice.

QIN LI, SF

There are three layers of progress for women. There's the breaking in part of getting onto boards. Then there is the critical mass part of getting more than one woman on each board. **And then there is the influence part of getting women into leadership positions where the real power resides.**

Lift as we rise: a woman alone has power; collectively we have an impact. For years we have been conditioned to be competitive with one another because there were so few jobs and opportunities at the top. The truth is, that raising each other up is how we'll change the equation – and while someone always has to be first, being a true pioneer is creating a pack in your wake. Constellations, not stars are what create new galaxies.

Almost all women can be pioneers at some point

Change won't come from sitting on the doorstep waiting for someone to open the door. It's about being the first to climb in through the window to unlock the door for others. In 1967, Kathrine Switzer became the first woman to run the Boston Marathon. During the race, the race manager repeatedly assaulted Switzer trying to grab her bib number and stop her from competing. She persevered and revolutionized the sports attitude towards women. Although the challenge may be daunting, we can all take steps to be the first.

To attract diversity you have to show diversity. People are attracted when they see other people like them in the space, especially when young women see themselves represented and know they're not invisible. They're not sneaking in somewhere – they belong.

AYNNE VALENCIA, SF

Critical mass can bring about lasting change

Research from scholars and organizations has found that women need to hold at least three board seats to create a "critical mass," which can lead to better financial performance.⁴ We're seeing progress in response to this, as in 2019 36% of global boards had at least three women, up from 32% in 2018. Reaching critical mass can change boardroom dynamics substantially and create more creative, innovative, productive, and successful environments. An MIT survey showed that 32% of directors on boards that included at least three women rated innovation as one of the top three strategic challenges companies face, versus 26% of directors on boards with no women.⁵

Having better balance will help everyone. It would be really bold for companies to make that part of the interview process: "If we could make this the perfect job for you, what would that look like?" And you know what? Actually make that real.

JO WICKREMASINGHE, LDN

Until 'critical mass' is reached, there is plenty of work to do

Until a board has recruited a critical mass of women, male directors can play an important role in educating the rest of the board on the business case for diversity, recommending that more women directors be added, and supporting the women directors and making sure they are fully included and heard.⁶

When you have diversity of thought, ideas, and voices, you are going to get somewhere that you have never been before.

AMANDA RAMOS, NYC

IT'S TIME TO

REWRITE THE RULES.

Rewrite the Rules.

Many women are turning to entrepreneurship to create the change they want to see. Women now make up a whopping 40% of new entrepreneurs,⁷ as they've grown tired of fighting archaic business structures. There's power in recognizing when to walk away and start with a clean slate. This creates exciting opportunities for innovation and for shifts in societal norms. But while there has been a sharp increase in female entrepreneurs, women are still vastly underrepresented as investors and as founders:



Female founders have proven their success



Women may struggle to secure the same level of investment men do, but when it comes to driving revenue, female-led startups simply generate more. For every dollar raised, female-led startups generated 78 cents in revenue and male-led startups generated 31 cents in revenue. First Round Capital had similar findings, noting that companies with a female founder performed 63 percent better than companies made up of all-male team members.⁹ As women, we're used to rising up against the odds, but it will only get easier if there are more of us starting businesses and becoming investors ourselves.

I got involved in the startup world, and soon understood just how male dominated it is. Less than 2% of VC funding goes to women and less than 0.2% goes to women of color and it helped me truly understand how much has to change.

CHRISTINA VULETA, NYC

Women founders can rewrite leadership



Starting a business allows women to find meaning and leave behind a legacy of change. We build companies designed to meet the day-to-day challenges of being a woman. Being our own boss generally allows for more freedom and flexibility than working for someone else. This additional autonomy is especially helpful when family is our number one priority. The ability to set our schedule makes it easier to make time for work and a healthy lifestyle. 74% of women said flexibility is more important than making the most money.¹⁰

When I saw how wrong some companies are getting it I had a kind of rule book of what not to do! I remember people say 'You're going to get crushed.' An entrepreneur doesn't think like that. You think try it, test it, learn, feedback, change it, road test it.

NAMRATA KAMDAR, LDN

Women founders can shift diversity to multiplicity



When it comes to innovation, diversity drives breakthrough thinking. Goldman Sachs thinks about the power of diversity by reframing it as "multiplicity,"¹¹ — there is a multiplier effect of engaging a range of backgrounds and experiences. Varied perspectives lead to a team that better understands people and the needs of its customers. For many female-founded companies, diversity is built in from the start. Making a conscious choice to have differences in terms of experiences drives us to see the world differently. It's much easier to make happen when you have a blank slate.

Amplify your influence

Being an advocate for women is one of the most impactful ways you can contribute to closing the gender gap in innovation. You can unlock your influence through telling your story, offering support and publicizing opportunities.

Be an instigator of change

Join the WIN Hub to share your experience and ideas with others so we can all rise together. Engage in conversation with other women at the same stage in their career as you to share the challenges you face day-to-day and ask how they have handled similar situations. Or share your story of rising with those starting out in their careers giving them the skills and lessons you wish you'd had.

Ask, Ask, Ask

Don't suffer in silence or think a relationship is one-dimensional. Ask for help, ask for introductions and ask for funding. Reach out to the WIN community for sharing any roadblocks you face and elicit advice. Tell WIN what skills you feel need to acquire to grow to inform programming.

Pass it forward

Create opportunities for others by sharing jobs or freelance roles, spread the word about speaking opportunities. Celebrate female investing potential with the WIN community so they can be re-shared and spread far and wide.

Showcase pioneers

Shout about the amazing women around you and celebrate their achievements. Nominate them for a WIN/WIN podcast. If they've unlocked their own career path ask them to partner with WIN to deliver training to help others learn the skills to succeed.

About WIN

Women In Innovation is a community of doers and solvers, women* who are creating, designing, and defining the future. We are united across countries, industries, disciplines, and roles to close the gender gap. We exist to bring the most diverse set of women together to be inspired and learn the skills we need to shape our collective future – from one another.

→ Continue the conversation at the [WIN Hub](#)

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*WIN seeks to close the gender gap for everyone who identifies as a woman.

Join us at www.womenininnovation.co to forge a more equitable future together.

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