

Life Lessons

Leading women from the CPG and retail industry share their career journeys



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*From Christina Taylor,
Chair of LEAD Network Education Committee*

Since the founding of LEAD Network back in 2011, we've had the privilege of listening to a huge spectrum of successful women talking about their working lives and experiences – at our events, in video interviews and in writing. We wanted to mark our London 2018 conference by collecting some of their insights in *Life Lessons*, LEAD Network's first book. This is not a publication you can buy online or in a bookstore, but an exclusive collection for our members, sharing stories from inspirational women you may know personally.

In *Life Lessons*, our thirty-five contributors talk honestly and openly about how they achieved career success, how they overcame barriers along the way, and what advice they would give to their younger selves if they could travel back in time to the beginning of their working lives. The women come from many different countries and cultural contexts, and yet their stories contain significant common threads: the need to overcome self-doubt, the importance of mentors and role models, and a belief in our ability to change things through passion and hard work.

I've found these voices immensely inspiring and I hope you do too. Please do share *Life Lessons* with colleagues, with new recruits to your company and with people you are mentoring. It is only by learning from each other's perspectives that we will build a stronger network and advance towards our vision of a truly diverse industry where progression to leadership roles is based on merit, not on gender.



Christina Taylor



Meet our contributors



Caroline Almeida

Caroline Almeida is an international business communications leader with more than twenty years' experience leading public affairs and communications for billion-dollar companies and brands. Known for her ability to build collaborative teams and deliver results, Caroline has lived and worked in Europe, the US and Australia.



Helayne Angelus

With a US diplomat for a father, Helayne lived in three countries before the age of eight and learned to speak Greek before English. She famously signed up on a men-only interview schedule with P&G in 1974 and went on to achieve many firsts in her career with the company. Today Helayne chairs LEAD Network's Advisory Board and is a Partner at Kalypso.

Caroline Basyn

Caroline joined Mondelēz International at the end of 2014 as SVP, Mondelēz International Business Services, to build a new global business service organisation. Prior to that she was the Global CIO and women in leadership sponsor for Bacardi. After university, she worked at P&G, holding several roles across Europe and the US. Caroline believes that investing in people is the best way to grow a business.



Jemima Bradbury-Wade

Jemima has a degree in anthropology from University College London and has worked across two continents for a range of global consumer and digital brands. She is currently Head of Culture and Engagement Communications, Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa, PepsiCo, while also studying sustainability management at the University of Cambridge.



Andreea Calin

Andreea has a degree in finance and a PhD in mechanical engineering. She began her FMCG career in research before moving into logistics for AB InBev, where she now leads the logistics technology team in Europe. In a previous incarnation she was a semi-professional pool player.

Meet our contributors



Marie Dousova

Marie's qualifications include a PhD in biotechnology and an MBA from Rochester Institute of Technology. Currently Head of Sales and Customers in Zone Europe, Middle East and North Africa for Nestlé, she enjoys mentoring young people and travelling. Her favourite holiday destination is Papua New Guinea.



Béatrice Dupuy

Béatrice is Vice President at P&G, and a member of P&G Global Sales Executive Board and Executive Board of Europe. She is married with two children and lives in Geneva. Béatrice is a strong actor for gender equality and environmental sustainability to make the world a better place.

Julia Edler

Julia was born in Germany, raised in Mexico and married a Frenchman. While studying for her degree in intercultural communication she specialised in jokes, and to this day enjoys trying to translate humour from one language to another. Julia is currently Senior Manager Global Vertical Consumer Retail at Schenker, and in her spare time loves acting and singing mariachi songs.



Hanneke Faber

Hanneke is President of Unilever Europe. She is passionate about digital – before Unilever, she ran Ahold Delhaize's e-commerce business. Hanneke graduated from the University of Houston, which she attended on a diving scholarship. She is married and has three children.

Camille Greene

Camille studied at the University of the Philippines before doing a communications MBA at the Asian Institute of Management. Today she is Global Market Insights and Category Director for SIGMA, covering LATAM, Mexico and the US. Earlier in her career, in Spain, she taught herself about football as a way to bond with an all-male management committee. She developed a genuine passion for the sport and is now a dedicated Barcelona fan.



Meet our contributors



Laura Halfas

Laura is Head of Corporate Responsibility at METRO. Her inspiration is her paternal grandmother, who studied pharmacy at university, bore five children and went on to pursue a career in politics as the first female mayor of her home town. Her example taught Laura that women can achieve anything they want to achieve.

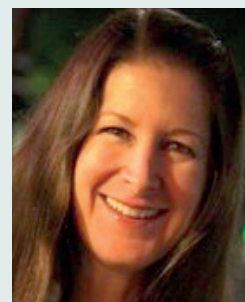


Kimberley Hunt

Kimberley was born in England and moved to America at age six when her father was headhunted to play in the US professional soccer league. She and her husband Rob, son Charlie and daughter Olivia moved back to the UK in 2015. Kimberley is Vice President, Commercial Excellence EMEA & Americas at GSK, and is grateful to Rob for becoming a stay-at-home dad so she could pursue her career.

Sharon Jeske

After observing the lack of senior women in the consumer goods industry, Sharon followed her passion for gender diversity to become the Executive Director of LEAD Network in 2015. She has a bachelor's degree in international relations and an MBA. In her spare time she enjoys hiking and has made it up Uhuru Peak on Mount Kilimanjaro.



Ilham Kadri

Ilham is President and CEO of Diversey. She is a chemical engineer with a master's degree in physics and chemistry, and a doctorate in polymers/reactive extrusion. Her proudest achievement is having founded the Hygieia Network™, an organisation that works to combat illiteracy and advance women at all levels in the cleaning and hygiene industry.



Lill Kleven

Lill hails from Norway and has lived and worked in four countries. She has a bachelor's degree in administration, and is currently VP Marketing at Yara International. She says that knowing her purpose and enjoying life are the two things most important to her.

Meet our contributors



Sue Knowles

Sue has worked in the wholesale market for the last thirty years and is currently Marketing and HR Director for Costco Wholesale UK. She has loved travelling from an early age and Las Vegas is her favourite city. Sue has two daughters and two granddaughters, and loves reading and watching movies in her home cinema.

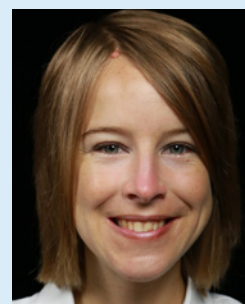


Tanya Kopps

Tanya recently took on a new role as CEO of METRO Cash & Carry Italy. During her nineteen-year career with the company, she has lived and worked in seven different European countries including Romania and Hungary, and was twice named one of the top 100 CFOs in Spain. She relaxes by hiking with her husband.

Fiona Liebehenz

Fiona holds executive education certificates from Harvard Business School and the London School of Economics, as well as a master's degree in business psychology. After eleven years at Unilever, she is currently Head of Vendor Management Pets at Amazon EU, as well as chairing LEAD Network's Marketing Committee. Fiona is a keen drummer who has been a member of different bands.



Sandra MacQuillan

Sandra is a chartered mechanical engineer who has worked in a variety of technology roles for companies including Exxon and Mars. During her career she has lived in six different countries with her husband Tom and son Jack. Today the family live in Atlanta and Sandra is Chief Supply Chain Officer for Kimberly-Clark. She is an avid scuba diver and underwater photographer, writes poetry, and recently completed her first marathon.

Vân Nguyen

Vân's parents were boat refugees from Vietnam who settled in the Netherlands, and she speaks four languages: Vietnamese, Dutch, English and French. Today she works for EY as Manager Business Development, Consumer Products & Retail, Western Europe and Maghreb. Vân is a wine fanatic who studied for a Wine Licence and wrote her bachelor's thesis on millennial wine marketing.



Meet our contributors



Sara Oliva

Sara, who has degrees in mathematics and applied mathematics, is IT Manager in Data & Analytics for PepsiCo Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa. After many years of intensive travelling for business reasons, Sara is now established in Madrid with her husband and son, where they are expecting the arrival of the fourth member of the family.

Veronika Pountcheva

Born in Bulgaria, Veronika holds master's degrees in science and economics from the Technical University and the National School of Economics, as well as degrees from London Business School and Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership. Veronika joined METRO in 1998, working in Ukraine, Serbia and Germany as a member of management boards and CEO. Today she is METRO Group's Global Director, Corporate Responsibility & Senior Vice President.



Val Quinn

Val, who has a degree in marketing, was the first female and first Irish person to be MD of Coca-Cola Ireland, and the youngest. Today she is Global Customer Director, The Coca-Cola Company. Val loves to travel and meet new people. She has done two parachute jumps for charity and has scuba dived with a humpback whale in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Gabriele Riedmann de Trinidad

Gabriele is the founder and Managing Director of platform31 GmbH and formerly Group Director Business Innovation at METRO. Her background is in electrical engineering, majoring in IT, a traditionally male-dominated field where she has worked hard to build diverse teams. The most important thing in her career has been to create meaningful impact by living the values of happiness, authenticity, passion and openness.



Sam Simister

With a degree in food science and nutrition from the University of Surrey, Sam worked for Marks & Spencer before joining Innocent Drinks, where she now serves on the Board as Future Development Director. She has been a member of the LEAD Network Advisory Board from the outset. Sam loves mountain biking and learnt to fly a Cessna 152 during her seven years living and working in the US. She mastered the take-off and landing with flying colours but describes her navigation skills as "appalling".

Meet our contributors



Becky Snow

Becky has a master's degree in mediaeval history from St Andrews University but pursued an entirely unrelated path from there, joining the graduate training programme at Mars in 1995. She is now Senior VP for People & Organization for the Mars Wrigley Confectionery business globally. She lives in Chicago with her wife and two children and occasionally finds time to get back onto the golf course.



Sarah Streicker

Sarah has a degree in foreign affairs and started her career as a public opinion researcher, later moving into the field of HR and working at Mars, both in the US and in Belgium. Today she is the company's Senior Manager, People and Organization Transition. She loves travelling and lives in Portland, Oregon, where she is breathing new life into her older home.

Füsün Tavus

Füsün recently began a PhD in international trade, and plans to write her thesis on the financial effect of women's leadership on international retail companies. She is currently the secretary general of two of Turkey's largest retail associations and chairs LEAD Network's Turkey Chapter. She has a nine-year-old daughter, Damla, and recently married Burak, with whom she is in the process of moving to France.



Christina Taylor

Christina, who is chair of LEAD Network's Education Committee, runs her own HR consultancy business, Learn to Grow. She is German and recently moved to the UK with her husband Grant. She is a keen sailor and has taken part in competitions including the World Championship in Offshore Sailing.



Deanna Thornton

Deanna Thornton is Senior Director of Supply Chain - North America for Kimberly-Clark Professional. She has a degree in organisational behaviour from the University of San Francisco, is married with two grown-up sons, has a black belt in Tae Kwon Do and loves travelling - to date she has visited forty-three countries.



Meet our contributors



Diane Tucci

A graduate of McGill University in Montreal, Diane Tucci is Country Manager – Spain at Costco. Diane is on the Executive Board of Journeys, Costco Wholesale's women's career development initiative, as well as serving on the Advisory Board of LEAD Network. Married with three children, Diane's passion for watching Formula 1 takes her around the world.



Neslihan Nigiz Ulak

Neslihan has a degree in business management, holds CIMA, and worked for Unilever for nineteen years before becoming GM of Barry Callebaut Turkey in 2018. She was the first female sales director during the sixty years Unilever has been present in Turkey. She is married to a banker and they have an eight-year-old son.



Adriana Vazquez

Adriana was born in Brazil to Spanish parents and married a European. She speaks four languages: English, German, Portuguese and Spanish, and when she completed her degree in chemical engineering sought out roles that would enable her to travel. Today she is Executive Director, Digital Transformation & Innovation at Microsoft.

Annelie Verstraaten

For the past five years Annelie has been an independent business consultant, after holding marketing and sales roles for a number of consumer goods companies. She lives in the Netherlands with her husband and two daughters, and feels encouraged that her girls are growing up in a world where they have more options than she did. Annelie has been Chair of the Executive Committee of LEAD Network since 2012.



Cecilie Westh

Cecilie is Managing Director for Nielsen in the Nordics region. She is passionate about advancing diversity, and is the Executive Sponsor for Women in Nielsen in Europe. Cecilie has degrees in marketing and economics and previously worked for General Electric.





How did you get to where you are today?

As our contributors reflect on how they reached a leadership position, the notion of a 'comfort zone' crops up again and again. Many have felt tempted to play safe and do what's expected of them – whether that is sticking to traditionally female roles in HR or marketing, agreeing with the majority in meetings, or accepting that it will take them longer than their male colleagues to get promoted. But often it is when they have the courage to abandon these artificial constraints and seize an opportunity that their career really takes off.

Also striking is their readiness to learn from others rather than assuming theirs is the best, or only, way to do things; success is seen as a collaborative effort involving colleagues, mentors and family members. Many women talk frankly about the permeable boundary between their professional and personal lives; Füsun Tavus says that learning to be a problem-solver helped her as a single mother, while for Becky Snow, being authentic with her friends and family spurred her to adopt the same approach at work.

How did you get to where you are today?

In the early part of my career I set a goal for myself



Kimberley Hunt

– a ten-year vision –

which helped me picture where I wanted to go, and from that track back to what types of roles, skills and experiences I needed to get there. It helped to have that dream written down to reflect on as I was making career decisions. You then need to be proactive and clear with your organisation about where you want to go and what you want to do, because this helps the

organisation help you. I always found, and still do, that being undeniable that you are doing your job and exceeding expectations opens up the doors for the next possibility. Another thing that got me to my position is a love of learning – being curious and seeking out new knowledge, through others, through books, through training. Also my husband: we have two children and he is a stay-at-home dad and picks up a lot of the responsibilities. It has been a partnership and I don't honestly know if I could have done it without him.

I think there is not really any magic recipe to get to a senior position. It's a lot to do with hard work and a bit of luck.

And you need to be in the right place and know the right people at the right time.

But one thing that has really helped me during my career has been mentoring.

I've had a lot of mentors, both males and females, formal and informal, and I have used them in very different ways during my career. They have helped to push me and grow me.



Cecilie Westh

I was very lucky, because I chose a great company that embraces flexibility.

So for example, when I travel home to the United States I don't necessarily work the whole time, I mix work and vacationing. And that's been a theme my whole life: you have to find a company that supports you. I was also lucky to have a variety of mentors or sponsors who, when I hit challenges along the way, were there to coach me. Without them I don't think I would have been as successful.



Sarah Streicker

" I've had a lot of mentors, and I have used them in very different ways during my career.

Three things helped me advance my career. Number one, working out quite quickly what I was good at. I think generally in life if you enjoy something you are good at it, so focus on that and don't waste time on things you aren't so good at. The way around that is that you surround yourself with people who are really strong in the areas that you aren't as strong in. The second thing is to ask for help. There are always going to be times, even now, when I don't know the right answer or the right path to take.



Sam Simister

Ask for help and most people will help and be very gracious about it.

The third thing is, do not be frightened to take a few risks; make your mistakes, but my top tip is, don't make them twice.

How did you get to where you are today?

Three bosses have made the real difference.

The first is the one who started to really trust me, and believed in me much more than I believed in myself – he gave me a big job in France and told me I deserved to have an international career. The second one was my manager in Geneva; I was scared to death that I would not succeed and one day after a meeting he told me he thought I could go a lot further and he would help me. I thought it was just kind words, but he did. Thirdly, my only female boss was absolutely great – a great boss, but more than that, a fantastic role model. She showed me you could be a senior female executive and be a mum and a normal woman. Finally my husband. We have dual careers at executive senior level, two kids, and we are both happy. We have made some compromises along the road but he has always believed in me as much as I believed in him.



Béatrice Dupuy

Growing up in an Asian household, my upbringing tended to focus on modesty. Promoting yourself was something that was not encouraged. But I've learnt in the last few years that in a professional environment,



Vân Nguyen

it's ok (or even necessary) to stand up for yourself,

celebrate your achievements and make them known to others. I believe all women would benefit from being less shy about their personal

development and achievements, and expressing them more at work.



Laura Halfas

The person who supports me is my husband. We have a young daughter and he decided to quit his job. He is a full-time dad at home so

I can really focus on my career and know that he has my back.

I'm thankful that I had very good leaders who believed in me when I didn't believe in myself and who let me go when I needed a change. I've also relied on mentors who I've used to reflect on areas that I should spend more time and focus on.

I have a strong determination to figure things out

when I don't know, I go and learn it. A passion for learning and development, both informal and formal, is important throughout a career these days. We are all going to have to work until we are older, so continual learning, pushing boundaries, taking risks, putting yourself outside of your comfort zone, is important and something I always try to do. I was also very fortunate in having mentors and helpers, from whom I could learn a lot and who would spend time with me to coach and mentor, but who also gave me opportunities at good moments.



Lill Kleven

How did you get to where you are today?



My dad told me I could do anything I wanted to do,

which was great. I've also had some really good role models – inspiring women who have stepped up and helped me, and given me the opportunity to go and call on them whenever I needed assistance. Also, my husband has been absolutely amazing. He is always there to support me.

Sue Knowles

What helped me achieve my leadership position was setting very specific goals.



Helayne Angelus

When I was starting out I had no idea that I would become an officer of the company, but my goal was to meet and exceed every single one of the key metrics and add value in a way that nobody else did. The second thing was, to go where the money is. I would always try to ensure that I had positions of responsibility that were tied to net profits and sales, and in many cases that was new for women. It helped distinguish me among my peers.



Diane Tucci

What has definitely helped me throughout my career is being humble about learning from

superiors and subordinates alike, because your employees can teach you a lot. But also, I never felt that the company owed me anything.

It was all up to me to make it happen

and that gave me that energy and that push to be eager to learn, to go outside of my comfort zone by trying different areas that were not naturally made for me.

I am most effective when I love what I do

My illiterate grandmother, who educated me, taught me to love books, respect knowledge and admire the people who expressed their ideas in print. Some of these people became my role models. I am most effective when I love what I do, and when I am inspired by other leaders who allow me to use my expertise and intuition, including thinking and acting outside the box. I have always been privileged to meet outstanding mentors who enabled me to go the extra mile. In fact good teams, great mentors and hard work have allowed me



Ilham Kadri

to take advantage of some excellent opportunities – from the professor at university who offered me the chance to be the first female working with a twin-screw extruder in his lab, to a division president who convinced me to learn sales in the highly male-dominated automotive area. All these experiences have made me the leader I am today. I was simply given a chance, and I picked it up.

How did you get to where you are today?

First is to have a strong support network, whether at home – because I definitely have it there – or in the office, in terms of sponsorship, people who are willing to speak on my behalf, and mentors that I can interact with to talk about what I should do next. Also I set a lot of goals. I wanted to be on the board by the age of thirty-five, which I was able to achieve, and I also wanted to be an MD by the age of forty – I was one year late! Two other key aspects helped me to advance: one was that I was always willing to take a chance – I've moved to several different countries, places I'd never been to.

**Saying yes to a new option is always
a good way to open horizons.**

The second is being able to stand up for yourself. There are a couple of times when I've asked to speak to someone to ensure the next moves are in the plan, and that's important because you are the one driving your career destiny.



Tanya Kopps

“

If you see that another woman can do a great job in a very important role and have a family and a life, you think, wow, if she can do it, why not me?



Hanneke Faber

One of the things that helped me in my career is having great role models. I count myself very lucky that *throughout my career I have had fantastic female bosses.*

If you see that another woman can do a great job in a very important role and have a family and a life, you think, wow, if she can do it, why not me?



Veronika Pountcheva

What specifically helped me was the support of my family and my husband, as well as the support and understanding of the management teams.

A lot of customers' and colleagues' insights helped me to grow.

An atmosphere within the company of accepting and fostering people with different international backgrounds has advanced my career development.

You use all your knowledge from the past, from communications, from working with products, from thinking about things from the customer perspective, and

you can transfer that knowledge to different sectors.

This is so important with digitalization when everything is changing and old business models are getting shaky.



Gabriele Riedmann de Trinidad

How did you get to where you are today?



The deepest lesson for me in my career was authenticity.

In my late twenties I told my friends and family I was gay, and at the same time I was promoted to my first director job. Suddenly there was no congruence between who I was at home and who I was at work. I wanted to find out more about my team, and yet I wasn't prepared to reciprocate when they wanted to know more about me, and that's not a good way to build a relationship. So I had to work out how to tell people. Learning to be comfortable with it was a huge issue.

Becky Snow

My mother was part of a generation of women who had very little prospect in life. She was a full-time housewife who, even though she showed capacities to continue her studies further, was not given the opportunity because she was not a man. She always encouraged me to stand on my two feet and become an independent woman above anything else, and I can say that I have always lived by that principle.

Throughout my career I had to reinvent myself a couple of times.

The one that impacted me the most was when the team that I was leading was completely outsourced. Suddenly, the one



Sara Oliva

thing that I was good at was no longer an option. But this brought an opportunity to get out of my comfort zone, learn how to be flexible and adapt to change. The environment where we live is in constant change and being able to adapt to it is one of my main features now.



Caroline Almeida

My career success is thanks to the sponsors and mentors who have helped me along the way, especially those who nudged me beyond my comfort zone, took bets on me, or offered me opportunities that I would have not otherwise have come across. One MD, rather than lose me to a competitor,

helped arrange a job transfer to New York. While there I gained confidence in myself and my abilities, I learnt how to thrive in social situations and I learnt how

positivity and belief in yourself are essential to triumph over difficult situations.

That move to NYC landed me the next three jobs in my career.

I was hungry to be challenged in a new way



so I left the comfort of my friends, family, job and cosy flat in London to move to Barcelona. I uprooted myself from more than a decade in marketing, moving into HR and taking on a large multi-market role.

It gave me a blank canvas, a chance to approach things with a 'beginner's mindset'. I read history books on the city and PowerPoint decks on the company, but I was open to asking questions too – forming my own opinions as well as lending my fresh perspective to existing challenges.

Jemima Bradbury-Wade

How did you get to where you are today?

I have worked for international companies my entire career and I have had to learn how to adapt my style. I have also been attracted to jobs that required starting from scratch – new strategy, new environment, new organization, and new people – and strategically challenging the status quo.



Caroline Basyn

I love to get into jobs that look extremely difficult to do,
this gives me an extra level of energy, drive and motivation.

Several people have been important to my success.

My mother was a sort of pioneer in gender equality, and my father taught me to never give up.



Julia Edler

When shaping my career in supply chain and logistics, I was lucky to have a very experienced senior manager, with an excellent network, deep understanding of the industry and huge business acumen. Although rather a conservative man, he sought to be challenged and pushed beyond his boundaries, to think out of the box, which I continuously did. I then joined forces with an experienced senior engineer with vast operational expertise, allowing me to grow my technical knowledge and promoting me to manage one of our largest retail accounts globally.

My husband is a true believer in diversity and inclusion.

Even in such a macho culture as Turkey, he is always on my side to support.



Neslihan Nigiz Ulak

Constants in my career are to **put myself outside my comfort zone**, coach and develop others; create and drive innovations; and build networks. I enjoy having these opportunities, supporting younger talent and peers to develop their careers as well as broadening my own horizons.



Fiona Liebehenz



Marie Dousova

I started my career in science and I do enjoy the conceptual, intellectual part of the job. But I missed people leadership, and also the execution of my ideas and concepts. So, as a fresh PhD graduate and young mother, I decided to quit academia and move to business. There was a company I wanted to work for and without an invitation I went to the office, rang at the door of the marketing department and asked to be hired, which I considered strategic as well as my destiny. And what a surprise – I was invited on the spot to participate in a marketing meeting with the agency and lead the meeting. I was shocked by this opportunity, but even more so when I was offered the job after the meeting. Today it looks to me like a very unusual and risky move, but

I have learned that life is always full of opportunities if we believe in them.

How did you get to where you are today?



Christina Taylor

My boss of the last nine years has played a huge role in my personal development and career progression. He's always believed in my abilities, has continuously provided me with opportunities to stretch myself, provided me with great exposure in the business and has been a great mentor. Most of all,

I always knew he had my back and supported me in everything I did.

I've also been very fortunate that he's provided me with the freedom to shape my role and go after activities that I have felt passionate about. Without his support and belief in me I wouldn't be the leader I am today.

I have a colourful career history. I've worked in many different sectors such as tourism, real estate, exhibitions and show business, which enabled me to travel the world and work with different nationalities. One job required me to travel to Ethiopia and Djibouti in my first month. Organising trade fairs all around the world was a completely new experience for me, the company was new and I had big responsibilities. It was the most adventurous move in my career. I remember



Füsün Tavus

that at one point I was leaving home with two pieces of luggage, one for the summer and one for the winter, as I had to be in Germany for a week and then in Senegal for another two weeks.

The variety in my career made me a results-oriented problem solver,

which helped me a lot while raising a child as a single mother.

I could easily have failed, as there was not one person at the site where I was located who could help me.



Deanna Thornton

The riskiest move I ever made professionally was to move into finance and take on a controller position. It was a difficult period in my career as it was overwhelming to be with a new company and in a role outside of my comfort zone. I could easily have failed, as there was not one person at the site where I was located who could help me. It taught me a lot about myself and about business, which I have leveraged in my career ever since:

I learned that I had to be vulnerable in asking for help in order to learn quickly

and build trust with people in order to succeed. And I learned about the financial side of the business, which set me up to be promoted to the first female GM in the company. Understanding the connections between the functions and their impact on the P&L and balance statement has enabled me to succeed in ways that others have not because I can always tie my teams' actions directly to business results and that resonates with all business leaders.

How did you get to where you are today?

I consider myself a result of diversity, being born in Brazil from Spanish parents and married to a German. From an early age, I learned foreign languages and dreamt about working in multinational companies and traveling around the world. Even being a Brazilian woman coming from a low middle-class family,

**I always believed everything was possible
if you work hard and stay focused.**

I like challenges and I was never afraid of taking them: I could do project management or sell a project or work in marketing. I always executed my tasks with passion and desire to succeed and when I failed and fell, I stood up again with a few learnings.



Adriana Vazquez



Sharon Jeske

The curiosity seed was planted early when I had the opportunity to be exposed to different peoples and cultures. My parents sent me overseas to study and I realised that the world was much bigger than the village where I grew up.

**Diversity creates curiosity. Curiosity opens
the window to enriching experiences.**

In many small ways and on an everyday basis, I try to strengthen my ability to be a champion of diversity both on a personal and a professional level. I am a Filipina, having worked most of my early years in the east (the Philippines) and during my later years in the west (Spain), with strong personal ties to the United States where my family resides. This has been a tremendous advantage for me in my career, because

***I can relate to different cultures with ease and
transform difficult or challenging problems
to win-win situations***

with visible results for the company.



Camille Greene

Key takeaways



A willingness to explore the areas of business beyond traditionally 'female' roles in HR or marketing helps prepare people for leadership roles.



Taking risks and new opportunities even if you don't feel ready can accelerate progression.



Relationships with mentors are often critical to helping women succeed.



What barriers have you faced along the way?

Few would dispute that in general women face more external barriers to career success than men, whether in the shape of discrimination, harassment or competing personal and professional demands. But most of our contributors have found themselves more preoccupied with an internal barrier: a lack of self-confidence. Whether they refer to it as low self-esteem or imposter syndrome, it's clear that a sense of not being good enough hampers many women throughout their careers and takes serious efforts to overcome.

Our contributors talk about the loneliness of having to prove themselves in a male-dominated world – but they are also energised by their achievements and their sense of forging a path for others. Sandra MacQuillan speaks for many when she says: “I had to shift away from feeling that people were judging me and waiting for me to fail. Dropping that burden has been huge for me.”

What barriers have you faced along the way?

My child was diagnosed with a chronic disease three years ago. He was awfully sick and even at Harvard University there was no answer. Then I decided to take a sabbatical and started my own research, and after six months we found the cause. He is still on medication and follows a strict diet but at least it is under control now. When I took that sabbatical I thought I would never be able to go back to work and although my only focus was my son, from time to time I was sad to leave my career. In the end, though, I returned to work and received an excellent job offer at the age of forty, and thus everything turned out well. What did I learn?

Never lose your hope, never.



Neslihan Nigiz Ulak



Helayne Angelus

There was never a woman who had done my position, so I was the first in 150 years to become an associate director of sales and one of the first to become a vice president. And

I would always ask the 'why not' question. Why not a woman?

In many cases I had to set the standard for what it looked like for a woman to actually achieve that career position. I had some wonderful role models in my mother and my grandmother who were pioneers in their own right.



The biggest challenge I think women face is the double burden syndrome – we are responsible for both work and family.

My career took me to Dubai, and it was a real challenge at that time for a woman to lead a business in the Middle East. But women don't have it easy even in developed countries. The biggest challenge I think women face is the double burden syndrome – we are responsible for both work and family. Things are changing,

but sometimes I still feel like a foreigner in an industry traditionally run by men.



Ilham Kadri

One of the key barriers has been a lack of confidence: am I good enough, are other people smarter than me? So throughout my career in different roles I have really trained and rehearsed before meetings what things I want to highlight, what good things I want to PR, to make sure that comes clearly across. It's a journey and I will never fully be there –

no matter how senior you get there are always things you can develop.

But the key point is to think about how you overcome that barrier.



Cecilie Westh

What barriers have you faced along the way?



Lill Kleven

One of the barriers that I felt, especially in the early years, was an internal one.

I had to learn to believe in myself and in the possibilities out there.

I wasn't very conscious about these things early on, and experience and mentoring have helped over the years. Being more conscious and advancing myself more early on would have been a great help. Fifteen or twenty years ago, diversity and inclusion and female leadership weren't such a huge topic. Culturally it is much easier these days.

I think there were mainly two barriers. The first barrier was me. I was feeling so lucky to have joined the company that I thought that was it, and I just had to do my job well. I didn't have the confidence that I could do more and progress more in the company.

I also thought that somehow it's the norm that for women it would be more difficult

– they would have to work harder and it would take longer to be promoted. The second barrier was my senior managers in France, and the way they thought about women in the workplace. They contributed to making me feel I was already very fortunate to be here, and I should be thankful and just do my job.



Béatrice Dupuy



Sam Simister

As a young female graduate working in corporate land in the late 1980s and early 1990s it was tough. I think there was a lot of both conscious and unconscious bias that I had to deal with and I was quite green, so I didn't necessarily have the confidence to ask for help or identify a mentor who could help me navigate corporate life. So

I made a lot of mistakes and I learnt by them.

There's one big barrier, and that's self-confidence.

I always knew what I wanted to do, and I always did what I wanted, but in new or unfamiliar situations I didn't feel confident. What I did to overcome this was to put myself deliberately in these situations. There were some nights where I couldn't sleep, but I learned. Now I know that I can handle it.



Laura Halfas

What barriers have you faced along the way?



Diane Tucci

I have always worked in an area that was very male dominated – that was definitely a challenge because naturally **women always feel that they need to work harder and faster**

in order to achieve the same goals as men. I never felt any discrimination or anything negative with regards to moving up. But if I look back at a previous employer, I had a daughter and then I gave birth to twins, and they automatically assumed I would never come back to work – that because of my ethnic origin, being Italian with three children, there would be no way I would want a career. As a result I lost a beautiful opportunity that I had hoped to get one day. It was a long time ago, but it taught me never to take a decision for anyone.

At the start of my career it was unusual for a woman to be in a senior role. And still to a certain extent today, I am often the only female senior executive. The fact that it is male dominated means

you have to be more forceful, more positive, and you have to motivate yourself.



Sarah Streicker

I find this a tricky question because I don't think of myself as having faced any unusual barriers. Maybe mobility – because

I found that I did have to be mobile to advance my career in the areas I was most interested in.



Sue Knowles

The first barrier was to do with feeling comfortable. Moving to the Czech Republic, after I'd spent most of my career to that point in the UK, was a big move in terms of stepping into the unknown and learning to look at it as a real opportunity and adventure. The second barrier, which is the biggest of all, is focused around my belief in myself, my self worth. For many years I was unconscious of the fact that I was expecting to be found out that I couldn't do a job. That constrains you in ways you don't realise.

I had to shift away from feeling that people were judging me and waiting for me to fail.

Dropping that burden has been huge for me in recent years.



Sandra MacQuillan



Being young, female and not that tall has led to some bias in client meetings or internal meetings.

I think sometimes people thought I was the secretary or the assistant.

I tried to overcome it by asking the right questions, being challenging and showing that I was the right sparring partner.

Vân Nguyen

What barriers have you faced along the way?



Tanya Kopps

The key barrier I overcame was to be able to say no, or actually quit something. When I still lived in the United States I was a lawyer. I'd trained and I'd had this huge dream of becoming a lawyer and I hated it. It was one of the biggest decisions to say, okay, I'm going to stop, I'm going to start something new.

Everyone around me was a little shocked that I would take such a drastic decision

but it was one of the best decisions of my life because that's why I am where I am now. Sometimes you have to give up on a dream because you don't know what other dreams are out there.

In consumer products and retail, ***as you go through your career it's important to get different experiences***

and for me that has always meant different countries and moving around quite a bit. That's not always easy when you have a husband who may also work and children. I've been lucky in that at home we've always been able to talk about these things and work out what was best for us as a family.



Hanneke Faber



Veronika Pountcheva

The first type of barriers were inside of me and are very much related to the level of self-confidence I had and the ability to promote what I am doing.

Secondly, **in retail there are very few female role models and I was looking for a little bit of inspiration**

- mentoring was not something common. There were specific external barriers too: in retail there are very few women in top managerial positions so being part of that world is a constant challenge.

In one job I wanted to recruit more people to my team and I asked HR to send me some CVs and I got only male CVs. And I asked HR, 'Hey, where are the female CVs?' And they told me, 'Oh yeah, we are filtering them out.' And I said, 'But I don't want them to be filtered out –

I am the filter, and the filter is purely on knowledge and not on gender.

I went on to build a diverse team and a very successful one.



Gabriele Riedmann de Trinidad



Füsün Tavus

During my career, ***I was always one of the very few women in boardrooms.***

I was often in search of women leaders in the industry when we were publishing our magazine or organising a press conference. I realised that there were women directors or managers as the heads of IT, HR, marketing or sales departments but the number was extremely low when it came to top management positions.

What barriers have you faced along the way?



Becky Snow

At my first appraisal, my (female) manager said: 'You have to stop behaving as if you were sent the wrong letter.' I was getting good feedback but I didn't believe it, that I belonged in this great organisation with all these clever people.

I had imposter syndrome for a long time,

it took me probably five years to overcome it. Another big issue is balance. I have come to parenthood relatively late and I am in a senior position that requires a lot of travel. Bath-time is at six but I'm in Dubai or Moscow or Washington, and I don't know what the answer is to that.

In the early part of my career, **I struggled getting ahead compared to my peers**

even though I was equally intelligent, accomplished and accountable. What it made me realise was that I was different to many of my peers (I was female, working class and of ethnic origin) at a time when men held the top PR jobs, and there were very few minorities or working-class people in the PR industry.



Caroline Almeida

Starting in supply chain and logistics some sixteen years ago, I was often the only female in a strongly male-dominated, rather conservative field. Equal development opportunities and equal pay were far from a reality and even females themselves would give up on this for fear of seeming too aggressive. Still, I never gave up, convinced that by going my own way I would contribute to improving things for my generation and the ones to come.

Getting pregnant was surely the biggest challenge for my career.



Julia Edler

Nobody doubted that I could accomplish my role and targets – until I got pregnant. At the time, women in Germany would stop working altogether, or at best return to work part time after three years of absence. I had to prove that nothing had changed with regard to performance and career aspirations. I was convincing. The next time I got pregnant, nobody questioned whether I would come back.



Camille Greene

When I started working in Spain in 2003, the management committee in my company was composed mostly of men. This was a big surprise to me, as in the Philippines it was the opposite. Being a woman, being Asian and being new to the culture were difficulties I had to overcome on a daily basis. In the beginning, it was hard for me to adjust as

I tried to learn to be like everyone else instead of showing everyone what I could contribute in light of my different background.

It wasn't until I was empowered to share my eighteen years of marketing experience from an emerging market that I realized that there was a lot of value I could add and that the majority of people are willing and eager to learn.

What barriers have you faced along the way?

I didn't think there were any barriers at the time. I had a true talent champion who worked with me early on in my career and pulled me up through the organization and found me stretch assignments. I think that was one of the reasons I didn't feel there was a barrier, because I had this champion. I do wonder though, if I hadn't had someone who was looking out for me, would I be where I am today? I remember getting a few roles where I was the first woman to do those jobs, and

**you'd hear whispers around the halls,
basically of people saying
'she got that job because she's a woman'.** And my reaction to that at the time was, I'm going to work harder, I'm going to prove them wrong.



Kimberley Hunt



Deanna Thornton

I have spent the majority of my career in either businesses or functions that were predominantly driven and led by men.

***I had to work really hard
to get into senior leadership positions***

and on more than one occasion was the first woman to be promoted to a senior role. The experience can be very difficult and isolating. It did teach me resilience and an appreciation for what others who are in a minority position go through.

I have often been one of the few women or the only woman in the room. Though I did get some very good advice at times from male mentors, there were quite a few moments when

**I would have loved a female leader's perspective
or a female role model.**



Annelie Verstraaten

Key takeaways

- ➔ Developing self-confidence is often as important to a career as overcoming external barriers.
- ➔ Women benefit enormously, both practically and psychologically, from seeing females in leadership roles.
- ➔ Women must speak up to their company about what their career ambitions and working preferences are.
- ➔ Companies must enable people to take their own decisions about career options after starting a family or taking a sabbatical, rather than making assumptions.



What advice would you give to your younger self?

Hindsight is a wonderful thing. If only we could travel back in time to meet our younger selves, what pearls of hard-won wisdom we could impart, both professional and personal. But then, would our younger selves listen to the advice, or would they insist on making the same mistakes all over again? After all, failure is how we learn.

Perhaps the best thing we can do is to remember what it felt like to be starting out on a career, and reach out to those who are in that position today – to listen, and to offer guidance and support. It is encouraging that more and more individuals in our industry, both women and men, are doing just that in a more formal way through mentoring.

What advice would you give to your younger self?



Sam Simister

I would definitely say to myself that **if someone is offering you an opportunity, or you identify a gap that someone thinks you could fill, do not think twice about filling it.**

Don't do what most women in their twenties do which is spend more time worrying about what they can't do than what they can do. That is where I think we differ from our male colleagues, who won't think like that and will just jump in. I would definitely say that to my young self: take the risk and go for it, because you will learn on the job.

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I would have taken a mentor earlier.

Take more risks, both personally and professionally.

A lot of companies are very good at celebrating wins and highlighting best practice, but we are not very good at celebrating 'worst practice' – things that have gone wrong – and learning from our mistakes. We senior leaders have to say it's ok to learn from failures. That will create more creativity and more opportunities for our talent, whether male or female.



Cecilie Westh



Sarah Streicker

I would advise anyone in their twenties to **make sure that you're pursuing something that you're passionate about.**

We're living in a world where it's no longer work/life balance, it's work/life integration, so more than ever you need to love what you do. I would have taken a year off between high school and going to college to do just that: to confirm what my passion was and take some time to reflect. You always feel like there's this pressure, this rush to start being a grown-up, but in retrospect that would have been a great time to press pause, see a bit more of the world, and confirm what it was that I really wanted to do.

I would have taken a mentor earlier. A mentor can make a difference by being with you along the way and helping you in moments of doubt and the times when you don't see things clearly. Secondly,
I would have worked on my self-confidence way earlier and tried to trust myself much more.

And thirdly, define even earlier what's my vision in life – and by that I don't mean just my professional life. The moment I was clear about what I wanted to achieve in my life, most of the choices were much easier to make.



Béatrice Dupuy

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Find your sweet spot: the combination of what you love doing, what you're good at doing and where you can add value. This is very valuable to think about from an early age, and it's something you can apply in different roles, in different industries, in different settings in your life. For me it turned out to be helping other people and playing a good role in society; working with marketing of sustainable products; and learning and development. The



Lill Kleven

combination of these three gives me satisfaction and purpose in different parts of my life. Another important thing I would advise is to build a support network. Everybody meets a lot of challenges along the way but if you have people you can spar with, who can coach you and give you contacts, that helps. We shouldn't have to go it alone.



Laura Halfas

Learn more languages.

It took me a lot to learn English and this is the only language besides German that I can speak. The world is more and more globalised, and having more than one or two languages helps you connect to people. The other thing is not always to be professional – to share your personal insights. Laugh sometimes and don't always be stern; that's something I would do directly from the beginning.



Kimberley Hunt

I would have spent more time thinking about the different approaches between men and women, because it was always about emulating how men act in the business world, rather than, 'what strengths do I bring?'

I would speak up more and advocate for myself more.

I would advise myself to grab every opportunity that I could – move more, and sooner than I did. I probably would have tackled more areas, because I have remained very much within HR or marketing.

I would have been more open to lots of different moves and lots of different areas

because now I want to be a CEO and there are areas of my expertise that are probably not where they need to be.



Vân Nguyen

I would have told myself to learn more about digital and incorporate that into my job.

Technology now is moving so fast and the only way to keep up is to learn and benefit from it.



Sue Knowles

What advice would you give to your younger self?



Diane Tucci

I would coach my younger self to

try to find a better work/life balance, to carve out from your schedule some time just for you.

That helps you to centre yourself, to regain the energy to be able to continue doing what you want to do. Otherwise you're just a slave to your work. On a professional basis, I would say don't wait to know everything at 150%, just go for it.

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I would have gone into operations or buying or different parts of the business.

Helayne Angelus



Looking back I would have made the same choices. But I think

I would have been a lot kinder to myself.

I think women tend to be very difficult toward themselves and create self doubt. Even though I went for the positions, there was a lot of internal strife.



Sandra MacQuillan

I would advise getting connected with the brands a lot sooner, and really getting to know what your customers and consumers want.

Go off and learn, reach out and be curious.

I think the biggest thing I would change is to get a broader experience.

I started out in finance and I worked my way up very steadily in finance and then I switched to the managing director position. Looking back, I would have gone into operations or buying or different parts of the business before making the leap because I think it would have been easier. Having that broad range of experience can be a huge benefit for any type of leadership position.



Tanya Kopps

What advice would you give to your younger self?



Hanneke Faber

In my twenties there was barely an internet. What I would say to someone in their twenties today is learn some technical skills, because our industry is being disrupted and is going more and more digital. So

*if you can program,
if you can do data science,
you have a distinct advantage versus others.*

If I had the chance to advise my twenty-year-old self, I would say that a career in FMCG and retail is very exciting.

Connect as early as possible with customers

because spending time outside of the office and looking through the eyes of the industry helps a lot, not only to satisfy customer needs but also to predict future trends. The other thing I would advise is not to take things too seriously and have fun with the whole job.



Veronika Pountcheva

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Don't take things too seriously and have fun with the whole job.

There is no stereotype - simply be yourself.

In the old days women needed to match masculine behaviour. Those times are over – we are who we are.



Ilham Kadri



Gabriele Riedmann de Trinidad

Go ahead with the passion that you have and get things done.

Make sure that you build diverse teams, and have fun.

Take it easy and accept whatever life brings.

Take care of your health, believe in yourself, and be patient.



Neslihan Nigiz Ulak

What advice would you give to your younger self?

I once applied for a job that was highly competitive and was exactly where I wanted to go next in my career. I did not get the role, and though I was very disappointed, what I learned was that sometimes the time is not right for the company to have a personality like you in the role. A couple of years down the line you might be the right person. What I mean by this is that I'm someone who goes into roles and who wants to build, improve, remove or change things, and some roles do not require this, for example, stability may be more important than change. I also learned that it is fine to wallow in bitterness and disappointment for a day. The next day, get over it,

push your reset button, and seek out new opportunities.



Caroline Almeida



Jemima Bradbury-Wade

Take calculated risks, and be flexible in accommodating new ideas and opportunities when they arise.

Don't be scared of scale but welcome it. If you have a clear shared goal, the right network plus passion, you can achieve great things.

I would tell my twenty-year old self to enjoy the journey as much as I did.

I love my life and would not trade it for anything in the world

and I have a strong balance between my private and business life.



Caroline Basyn

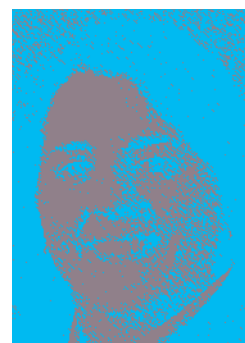


Julia Edler

Accept help and guidance from others, do not fight alone.

Every year, set both business and personal goals, and make sure to write them down.

Break down each goal into tasks and set timings for each to be completed. Review these often, at least once per quarter, and at the end of the year you will be happy with what you have achieved and can make your list for the following year. Also, create a 'personal legacy' – this becomes ever more important the older we get. It will link with what is important to you, your personal values and how you want to leave a mark in the world. It also helps when faced with challenging choices to be able to refer back to your legacy statement.



Val Quinn

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Something that I share with my mentees who are aspiring to bigger roles is that

our careers do not always follow the most obvious path and if you are willing to take some risks, it can have a big pay-off in the long term.



Deanna Thornton



Füsün Tavus

I would advise my twenty-year-old self not to worry so much about failing in business, or marriage. Those are the best opportunities to learn. I also say,

don't hurry all the time.

Life is long enough to achieve the important stuff and the pleasure is usually hidden in the moments.

I remember trying to imagine in my twenties how the rest of my life would look, with all the opportunities an engineering degree offered. It sounds like a cliché, but never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I would be anywhere close to today's reality. I consider this a big triumph over the fear of taking chances, the fear of going outside (self) set boundaries, the cosiness of a low-risk life. I am a big believer in 'you make your own luck',

you just need to have the courage to take that first step and follow the opportunities.



Andreea Calin

Key takeaways

- ➡ Take time to explore what it is that you really want from work and life.
- ➡ Be yourself, and be open to unexpected possibilities. Interesting career paths are seldom straight.
- ➡ Don't try to go it alone – build a strong support network.
- ➡ Learn languages and develop technological skills in areas such as programming or data science to prepare yourself for success in today's globalised and disrupted workplace.
- ➡ Enjoy the journey, be kind to yourself and learn from your mistakes.

LEAD Network's mentoring programme

Many women in this book talk about how important it has been to their career to have a mentor. At LEAD Network, we run an annual mentoring programme that helps bring people together for mutual learning and support. Its unique advantage is that participants are matched with individuals from other companies and often other countries, bringing valuable new insights and perspectives.

The programme, which is free of charge, is run by the LEAD Network Education Committee, and led by Maren Gerhäuser-von de Fenn, Head of Leadership Development for METRO AG in Düsseldorf. Maren says: "Both mentors and mentees make new contacts and discover different perspectives. It's all about building self-confidence and experimenting with new behaviour – we tell people to use this period to try new things out."

The scheme is currently open only to individuals who work for LEAD Network's Partner companies, although this may change in future depending on demand.

How the mentoring programme works

Each spring, we contact our Partner companies and invite them to nominate two individuals: one mentor and one mentee. Mentors can be either male or female. Mentees should not be at the very beginning of their career, but have some experience and be looking to advance. To date all mentees have been women, although we are open to applications from men too.

The prospective mentors/mentees fill in a form about their needs and aspirations, which could be generic ("I need to learn how to get my voice heard") or more specific ("I want to move into a supply chain role"). We then embark on the matching process, which carefully considers all the individual profiles and preferences. Each mentor is paired with a mentee from a different company, and the same for each mentee.

The programme launches with a webinar where all the participants get to 'meet' each other and find out how the scheme will work. We provide guidance on how to conduct the mentoring relationship together with useful materials such as articles and webpages. The programme runs for six months, with a further webinar in September to check how things are going, and the chance in November to meet face to face at LEAD Network's annual conference.

At the end of the six-month period our support comes to an end, although individuals are welcome to continue the mentoring if they wish. We finish the programme with an opportunity for participants to give us feedback on their experiences.

Find out more

If you work for a Partner company, contact your Ambassador to express an interest in becoming either a mentor or a mentee. Alternatively, you can email mentorship@lead-eu.net

Read about the journeys of two participants in our mentoring programme: Beverly Peeling, Associate Director Online Digital Strategy at Kimberly-Clark Professional, and Mick Broekhof, co-founder of LEAD Network and Managing Partner of Kalypso. <http://www.lead-eu.net/mentorship-program/>

Contacts and resources

To find out more about the mission and activities of LEAD Network, visit our website:

<http://www.lead-eu.net>

For more information on our contributors, watch our Inspirational Video Series:

<http://www.lead-eu.net/lead-network-video-channel/>

Read our Member Spotlight interviews:

<http://www.lead-eu.net/member-spotlight/>

To inquire about LEAD Network's mentoring programme, email:

mentorship@lead-eu.net

When Mick Broekhof and Sharon Jeske asked me to manage the production of *Life Lessons*, I felt it was a wonderful opportunity to help make a positive impact on female empowerment. I hope this compilation of stories from LEAD Network members will motivate and inspire other women and men as much as they inspired me.

This experience has allowed me to interact with thirty-five extraordinary women, each of whom has taught me something valuable for my career, whether it is taking the time to explore what I really want from work and life, seizing the moment, or recognising that some of the best opportunities can emerge from failure. Thank you to all the women who agreed to contribute and gave their time to speak boldly about their career journeys. I would also like to thank Roger van der Klugt, who designed the book, and Jill Hopper, our writer.

If you would like more information about our contributors, please visit the LEAD Network website at <http://www.lead-eu.net> where you can view our Inspirational Video Series and read Member Spotlight articles. Please do share your feedback on *Life Lessons* with mick.broekhof@lead-eu.net or sharon.jeske@lead-eu.net. Your thoughts are valuable and will help us to improve future LEAD Network publications.

Ultimately, I hope *Life Lessons* shows that it is possible as an individual to commit to gender diversity by example. You can be a strong advocate and help women advance by sharing your experience. A single publication won't reverse years of corporate inequality, but I am hopeful that things are beginning to change.



Elise Misse
Consumer Insight Manager | Nestlé Switzerland

