INFLUENCER
AN OUTLOOK ON LEADERSHIP & CHANGE
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REDEFINING POWER

REWRITING THE PLAY

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OWNING YOUR LEADERSHIP STORY: A PLAYBOOK FOR WOMEN LEADERS

Leadership is often measured by titles and performance outcomes. Yet one of the most powerful and underutilized leadership tools is personal narrative.

Owning your leadership story means understanding, articulating, and confidently sharing the experiences, values, and defining moments that shape how you lead. It goes far beyond a career summary. It reflects who you are as a leader — your struggles and strengths, your setbacks and achievements. Every meaningful leadership story is shaped by emotions, people, courage, and values.

When a woman leader connects her experiences to lessons learned and the value she brings, her influence deepens, and trust grows.

Every leadership story begins with honest reflection.

EMOTIONS

Emotional awareness is not a weakness; it is a leadership strength. Many women leaders, especially working mothers, carry the dual responsibility of professional performance and family devotion. Emotional ups and downs are natural, and moments of self-doubt, thoughts of stepping away from work, and feelings of self-blame may arise.

As a working mother of twin boys, I have also lived the tension between work responsibility and family care. I still remember the overwhelming joy when my family learned we were expecting twins. It was the happiest moment of my life, but followed by the quiet realization that balancing career and motherhood would not be easy.

There were days I locked myself in a room to handle urgent client calls while my babies cried outside, asking for their mother, even though my family was caring for them. In those moments, I questioned myself: Was I a good mother? There were times I forgot to prepare colored pens for kindergarten, and I arrived late to pick them up after school activities, seeing them as the last children waiting. I felt guilt and self-doubt.

Yet those moments became my strength. When my boys ran to hug me despite the delays, proudly handing me their colored pen drawings, I was reminded that love is not measured by perfection. Through these experiences, I learned to pause instead of reacting, to breathe instead of blaming myself. Each emotional challenge became a chapter of growth in my leadership journey.

PEOPLE

No leader succeeds alone. While family responsibilities can sometimes feel overwhelming, I have come to realize that family can also be the most powerful source of encouragement, motivation, and purpose when I choose to see through the lens of shared growth and love.

There were seasons when I felt stretched in every direction. Yet in those very moments, I could share my struggles and even my tears with my family. It was my family who reminded me why I kept going. Their patience, their quiet sacrifices, and even their simple daily smiles became fuel for my perseverance.

I have also been blessed with long-term colleagues in my company across the Asia Pacific who have walked with me for over a decade. Even without frequent in-person meetings, we stay connected through conversations and virtual discussions. They listen honestly to my struggles. Some have become my prayer buddies, supporting me both professionally and spiritually. Their encouragement has strengthened my courage.

My leadership story is not written by my efforts alone. It is shaped by the people who stand beside me.

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COURAGE

Career transitions, difficult decisions, and unfamiliar challenges all require courage. Harvard Professor Dr. Ranjay Gulati defines courage as "a willingness to take bold, risky action to serve a purpose that you perceive to be worthy, usually in the face of an abiding fear."

Courage is what enables women leaders to step into the turning points that ultimately shape their leadership stories. The courage to move forward often comes from a strong sense of passion and purpose for one's career, family, and society.

Throughout my leadership journey, I have had the privilege of stepping into different situations that were far beyond my original plans or expectations. When I first pursued my passion for mental health and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) in Korea, the market was unfamiliar, and stigma remained strong. Expanding into Japan brought new cultural and business uncertainties. There were no guarantees but only conviction. My belief in supporting individuals and helping organizations build resilience carried me forward.

Looking back, I see that those moments of uncertainty have become defining chapters in my leadership story. They strengthened my resilience, sharpened my judgment, and deepened my credibility. Courage did not remove the challenges; it transformed them into milestones. Every time we choose purpose over fear, we write a powerful line in our leadership story.

VALUES

What we value in people often reflects how we lead, more strongly than what we say. Invite women leaders to try one meaningful exercise together - to use your name to identify and express your leadership values through each letter of your name, creating a personal and memorable leadership identity.

Leadership stories are never static; they evolve with every stage of life and career. Owning our leadership story means confidently claiming our experiences, values, and vision to create meaningful impact. Through reflection and story sharing, we rediscover purpose and inspiration. Sharing leadership stories not only strengthens individual leadership presence but also encourages and empowers others to embrace their own paths.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to humbly share my leadership journey and values, hoping to inspire connection, encouragement, and shared growth among fellow women leaders.

LINA – LEADING WITH INTEGRITY, NURTURING, AND AUTHENTICITY

Lina Lam
Chief Transformation Officer,
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ALLYSHIP IN ACTION:

WHAT TRUE CHAMPIONS OF WOMEN LOOK LIKE

If you asked me what the single highest-impact investment I have seen leaders make in this time, it is not a new technology. It is not a better framework or methodology.

It is learning how to read a room, sit with someone in their discomfort, and ask a better question.

That is the most useful form of emotional intelligence. Not a soft skill that makes your LinkedIn profile look good. A precise tool that changes the quality of every conversation, every team dynamic, and every important decision you make when you are under a lot of stress.

One of the most telling data points on emotional intelligence in leadership comes from a nationally representative survey by Promundo-US (2019) of 1,201 working adults, which found that 77% of men believe they are doing "everything they can" to support gender equality in the workplace, while only 41% of women agree.

There is no disagreement about the 36-point gap. It is a gap in emotional attunement, which means not really hearing and understanding what the people beside us are going through. Most men genuinely believe they are supportive partners. Most of us believe we are sharing the load fairly. But research consistently shows that women take on a disproportionate share of invisible labour: the mental load of managing family schedules, the emotional labour of maintaining relationships, and the administrative weight of running a household.

Babcock et al. (2017), in a study published in the American Economic Review, documented a similar pattern in workplaces: women are significantly more likely than men to volunteer for non-promotable, invisible tasks in mixed-gender groups.

This is not about pointing fingers. It is about awareness. And awareness is precisely the gap emotional intelligence can close when it is practiced consistently.

EI-driven allyship does not require grand gestures. It shows up in four small, consistent behaviours:

1 Credit ideas publicly

When a colleague's point goes unattributed in the room, say it plainly: "That was Joyce's point, I want to make sure we give her credit." Four seconds. Enormous impact. At home: when your partner carries something without complaint, name it. "I see how much you're holding right now. Thank you." Both take seconds. Both shift everything.

2 Redirect the silence

Instead of filling every room with your own voice, try: "I'd like to hear from Joyce before I weigh in." This shifts who carries authority in the conversation. At home, try simply waiting after you ask a question. Let there be a pause. What comes next is usually what actually matters.

3 Check how you assign tasks

Who takes the meeting notes? Who organises the team events? Who is going to do the chores around the house? If the pattern goes in one direction, name it and change it. Patterns do not correct themselves. They require attention.

4 Speak up before it becomes a crisis

Research from Catalyst's MARC (Mutual Accountability, Real Change) initiative found that only 31% of men felt confident interrupting problematic behaviors in the workplace before the program, while 74% of MARC alumni said they were more likely to intervene afterward (Catalyst, n.d.). The shift was not in values. It was in having the scripts. The same is true at home. Knowing how to say "I've noticed things feel distant between us lately, can we talk?" before it becomes a rupture is a skill. It requires courage, but it is learnable.

Whether we are talking about burnout, team leadership, or the quieter tensions of a relationship, the same question sits underneath all of it:

"If you treated yourself and others with genuine kindness today, what would that look like?"

You do not have to change everything at once. This week, make one small, honest change.

At work: the next time someone on your team hesitates, ask what is underneath the hesitation before you offer the fix.
At home: the next time your partner or someone you love starts to share something, put down your phone, stop forming a response, and just listen until they are finished.

These are both small things. And if you do both, they change the quality of everything around you.

Steven Khu
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REIMAGINING LEADERSHIP

for the Next Generation

Leadership for the next generation goes beyond breaking "ceilings". It calls for rethinking how those ceilings were designed in the first place. Traditional hierarchical leadership models that give almost total authority to a singular leader are now giving way to collaborative leadership, collective intelligence, and human-centered strategic visioning. This describes the networked leadership teams in which leaders are involved in sense-making, facilitating learning, and stewarding purpose (McKinsey, 2023).

34% of employees stated that workplace leaders are the main influencers shaping their lives (Gallup, 2025). This tells us how important leadership traits and behaviors are in making an impact on employees. That is a huge responsibility! Today, great leadership is about emotional intelligence that requires listening, considering views, empathy, and adaptability. It's about leading with humility.

In an era of rapid technological advancement, leadership today requires agility to both adapt to and adopt emerging technologies to bridge data-driven intelligence and human insights to drive better decisions and stronger results.

TO LEAD TEAMS SUCCESSFULLY IN THE NEW LEADERSHIP ERA, THREE QUALITIES ARE ESSENTIAL:

- **Human-Centered Capabilities**
  the ability to demonstrate empathy, self-awareness and emotional regulation, while fostering cultural intelligence and inclusivity. Creating environments where individuals feel safe to take risks, give ideas and innovate.
- **Cognitive and Strategic Agility**
  the ability to pivot strategies swiftly in response to rapid changes, translate purpose into clear actionable priorities, operationalize strategy with disciplined execution while remaining flexible.
- **Technology Integration**
  the ability to lead hybrid and digitally enabled teams, using technology and AI to enhance human capability rather than replacing it.

What's also interesting is that all these "new leadership qualities" aren't that new for women leaders. Research increasingly shows that women leaders have all these qualities especially in empathy, inclusive decision-making, and collaborative innovation (Jing et al., 2022). Across sectors such as FMCG, IT, and Pharma, organizations with greater gender diversity at senior levels consistently demonstrate stronger innovation outcomes and decision quality. This evidence shows that women in leadership is not just a symbolic progress but a catalyst for economic growth and innovation.

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Food for Thought:

EATING PATTERNS THAT FUEL LEADERSHIP ENERGY

Nowadays, leaders are expected to be more responsive and accountable from time to time. Between back-to-back meetings, urgent emails, and high-stakes decisions, lunch becomes whatever can be grabbed in ten minutes or eaten while multitasking. It's understandable why nutrition falls to the bottom of an already overflowing priority list. But here's what many leaders don't realize, a hurried meal isn't just fuel for the body. The way we eat and what we eat, directly shapes our ability to focus during critical moments, maintain emotional stability under pressure, and get the restorative sleep which our minds desperately need. When we treat food as an afterthought, we're unknowingly sabotaging the mental clarity and resilience that leadership demands.

EAT TO STABILISE, NOT TO SURVIVE

When you wait until you're famished, the part of your brain that handles smart decisions and patience basically checks out. The fix? Don't wait. Eat regular meals throughout the day so you've got the mental readiness you need when big decisions come up. Skipping meals often shows up as irritability, rushed decisions, or low patience. So, aim for regular, steady nourishment to protect decision-making stamina.

SMART SNACKING (NOT GRAZING)

Snacking doesn't mean munching all day. It helps preventing those afternoon energy crashes which make everything feel ten times harder. The trick is pairing protein with fibre. Grab some apple slices with almond butter, Greek yogurt with berries, or veggies with hummus. These combos keep your energy steady instead of sending you on that sugar rollercoaster where you crash an hour after that muffin.

HYDRATION AS A LEADERSHIP HACK

The headache, brain fog, or random irritability which you're blaming on stress? It might be dehydration. Even being a little dehydrated can mess with your focus and mood before you even feel thirsty. Keep water nearby and drink it. If needed, use an app to remind you. Your brain is 73% water, so it needs a steady supply to work at its best.

EAT WITH PRESENCE, AT LEAST ONCE A DAY

Pick just one meal a day and eat it without any distractions. That's it. When you're eating while checking emails or scrolling, your body stays in high-alert mode. It can't digest properly, and your brain can't catch a break. Even 15 minutes of eating without distractions helps your nervous system calm down, which means you'll feel more centered and clear-headed afterward. A short and mindful meal supports emotional regulation and clarity.

Leadership energy is not sustained by willpower alone. It is built through small consistent habits, especially how and what leaders eat. By nourishing the body with intention, leaders protect their clarity, emotional regulation, and decision-making stamina. These simple eating patterns are not about perfection, but about creating the capacity to lead with steadiness, presence, and resilience day after day.

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Leadership Doesn't Have to Be Lonely:

CREATING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

> *When was the last time you spoke freely at work?*
>
> *When you step into a room, do conversations subtly shift?*
>
> *Are others as open with you as they once were?*

People managers are often surrounded by teams, stakeholders, and a constant stream of communication. Yet many experience a quieter form of disconnection - a subtle sense of standing slightly outside the social fabric of their own organization.

Leadership loneliness is often episodic and context-dependent, surfacing most during restructures, promotions, layoffs, or strategic pivots. It emerges in moments when leaders are expected to steady others while quietly absorbing uncertainty themselves.

WHY LEADERSHIP CAN FEEL ISOLATING

The Power Shift

- Hierarchy changes relationships. Once you become the manager, you are no longer simply "one of the team." Authority creates an invisible barrier where feedback becomes filtered, and conversations grow cautious. Without realizing it, you may begin leading inside an echo chamber.

The Strength Mandate

- Leaders often feel pressure to project confidence and an "unflappable" personality. Admitting doubt can feel risky. Over time, that self-containment limits authentic connection not because relationships disappear, but because vulnerability feels off-limits.

Strategizing in Silence

- Earlier in your career, you likely had a manager or peer group to test ideas with. As responsibilities grow, that sounding board shrinks. You are expected to provide clarity and direction, often processing the complexity alone.

SOLITUDE VS. ISOLATION

Not all aloneness is harmful. **Healthy solitude** is intentional and restorative; it sharpens thinking and strengthens resilience. **Harmful isolation**, however, is unchosen and draining. It appears when responding feels emotionally heavy, when small decisions feel amplified, or when you withdraw not to reflect, but to cope. The difference lies in whether connection remains accessible.

CREATING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

When leaders openly cultivate relationships, seek feedback, and admit uncertainty, they signal **psychological safety.** They strengthen their own resilience and model a culture of openness.

Start intentionally:

Build a trusted internal circle

Foster professional trust. Share credit, invite honest dissent, and create leadership forums where decisions are not made in isolation.

Seek external perspective

Coaches, mentors, peer advisory groups and leadership circles to share, provide a confidential, "stoic-free" space to think clearly and speak candidly.

Practice balanced empathy

Sustainable leadership requires empathy for your team, empathy for the organization, and **empathy for yourself**. Leaders are most vulnerable to isolation when they are depleted.

Leadership does not have to be lonely, but meaningful connection requires intentionality. It begins when leaders recognize that building support systems is the foundation for sustainable performance and lasting impact.

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