



Human 2

Bold **leadership** through crisis and change

Talent

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Fore- word

I am delighted to welcome you to the second edition of Talent's global publication series, Human.

In our first edition, we featured the perspectives of people who have made great strides for diversity in tech around the world. This year, we are focusing on bold leadership through times of crisis and change.

There are many factors associated with highly successful leaders. These include unwavering passion and belief in a cause, incredible hard work, bold decision making, and sheer persistence against the odds. However, the best leaders are the ones with compassion and care for their people and the natural ability to draw on the best aspects of the human spirit. I was fortunate to personally benefit from such leaders in the early part of my life at a time when self-doubt might have prevailed, and it has certainly encouraged me to practice the same habits within my own leadership journey.

In this book, you'll read deeply personal accounts from 20 successful leaders, who have all navigated through difficult times. From surviving extraordinarily challenging childhoods, to making it through economic crises, adapting businesses to volatile market conditions, managing imposter

syndrome and overcoming personal illnesses. No one journey is the same, and every single leader has had their own unique obstacles in the pathway to where they are now.

Their stories are refreshingly raw and vulnerable. Leaving behind the standard corporate jargon, these leaders collectively paint a picture of authentic leadership in our new world. What comes through most loudly is the word "empathy" - something that has always been an essential component of leadership, now more important than ever.

Great leadership often emerges during times of crisis and rarely has that been more required than now as we face monumental economic, social and healthcare related challenges. As leaders and as people we will be measured by how we handled ourselves during this period. Let's make sure human kindness and dignity triumphs!

I want to thank the inspiring individuals who have shared their invaluable insights and deeply personal experiences for this book. They are truly transforming and reshaping the world in which we work.

Richard Earl

Founder & Executive
Chairman - Talent





Stories are data with a soul.

Brené Brown

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Talent



Holly Ransom
CEO - Emergent

Holly Ransom

Named one of Australia's 100 Most Influential Women by the Australian Financial Review, Holly is widely recognised as one of the world's top female keynote speakers. She has delivered a Peace Charter to the Dalai Lama, interviewed Barack Obama on stage, and was awarded the US Embassy's Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Leadership Excellence in 2019.

Holly has presented over 500 sessions across six continents in the past three years, super-charging audiences and bringing a unique voice to public, not-for-profit and corporate decision-making forums.

I've spent the better part of the last 15 years searching for answers to questions about leadership. I have sought out mentors, researched leadership books, curated frameworks and experimented with high performance routines. I've found an abundance of inspiration but little practical guidance to traverse the ambiguous and uncertain territory that everyone speaks about as "The New World of Work." Wherever I go, I find that we are still teaching leadership the way we have taught it for decades. Concepts such as productivity, work/life balance, growth, workplace culture, key performance indicators etc. They feel so combative and foreign to the way I feel when I'm empowered to make positive change in the world.



Leadership is so much more about the questions we ask of each other and of ourselves, than it is about the answers.

When I searched for answers, I wanted to know how to balance competitiveness with self-kindness, I hoped to learn how my energy flow might optimise my work or negotiations, I dreamed of clues to seeing around corners, nurturing trust, weighing up risk. How could I go from being someone with the will, the work ethic and the strong ideals, to being a leader able to catalyse new behaviour for a better tomorrow? What I have learnt, in my search for answers, is that leadership is so much more about the questions we ask of each other and of ourselves, than it is about the answers. It's about asking what's right rather than "knowing" we're right. It's leading oneself as much as it is leading others. And it's listening to what's not said before signing and sealing a course of action.

I believe that leaders who are stepping up in today's environment are already shaping a new paradigm of leadership. The traits and tools they pull from as leaders of the new world are layered, adaptable, and dynamic so as to be useful on the move and at any given moment. I have curated my own six-part framework that covers mindsets, methods and mastery, both for leading oneself

and leading others. I can't help but reflect on the many leaders I've interviewed. Whenever I've asked them 'how' they have achieved such great things, they will always respond with a 'why'. First and foremost, in an age of uncertainty, ambiguity and a chaotic over-abundance of choice, the common thread for every leader is knowing their 'why', holding loosely the reins of their 'how', and firmly anchoring their 'what' in meaningful change.

When I reflect on my own journey, I am probably proudest of having followed my values and heart from a career standpoint rather than taking the easy approach. It would have made more sense to many of my peers had I stayed in the world of mining and banking. But would I have really had the chance to know myself and my capabilities in the big wide world? Particularly in the early days of trying to build a business, and even now with the ways I have to challenge myself to constantly adapt and reinvent, I very much rely on my 'why' to keep me revved up and on my own path!

The linear career trajectory is firmly embedded in our ideas of success and leadership is still tied to hierarchy in many instances, but I'm so glad I've been prepared to create my own path versus follow a well-worn trail. It's equal parts terrifying and exhilarating.



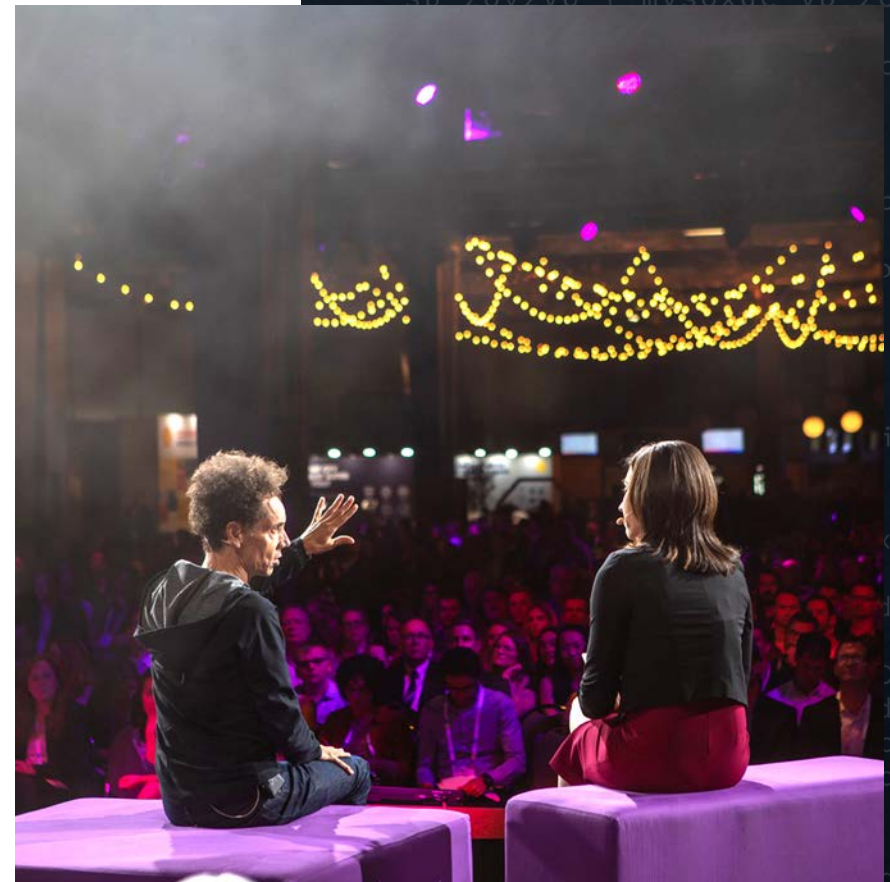
I've been able to make change, and be changed.

At one point along the way, I felt so caged by my own comfort zone that I decided to get very strategic about shifting my boundaries. I rang up my best mate Charlie and asked whether he would want to join me in a challenge. Every day for one year we would do something that honestly scared us. Of course he said "Sure. I'm in." First fear box was ticked! That entire year both Charlie and I logged our fear-confronting activity daily. I noticed that the fears in my head were so much less scary in broad daylight. However, the two fears that stand out to me still as truly terrifying moments were attempting a stand-up comedy slot at an open mic night

in Cairns – a total, no-laughter-to-be-heard epic failure. The other was singing “Drops of Jupiter” at a karaoke night in Sydney – there were legitimate looks of pity from all around the room and I swear the song lasted two hours, not two minutes. Beyond these stone-cold sobering moments, I found jumping into Antarctica’s icy waters, reaching out to US political leaders for a coffee and starting my very own company rather enjoyable.

As I look ahead, I see a world in which ‘we’ are willing to watch our world cave in on itself while waiting for someone else to lead and it absolutely keeps me up at night. How can we inspire a new breed of grass-roots leaders to stand up and be the change they want to see in the world? The idea that leadership is something we are not responsible for – either because it’s beyond our paygrade, missing from our job description or too time-consuming to fit into our busy lives is both understandable and unacceptable. In resigning ourselves to the idea that leading is someone else’s problem, we are giving up our contribution to democracy, we are kissing goodbye a better future and we are selling short the agency of our teams, organisations, communities and children to live in a world built on vision and leadership.

We know that upcoming generations are dealing with greater mental health issues, less secure career paths, a turbulent economic environment and more polarised debate. Our greatest challenge as a race will be empowering and inspiring the every day leaders of the new world to take ownership of what the future could look like. It’s on all of us who have a lesson to share, knowledge to contribute, encouragement to give, to do so in service of those that are trying to change things for the better. Non-corporatised, non-accredited, non-hierarchical leadership will be the ground-swell we need to harness meaningful change. Let’s not forget, we have the technology, the global connectivity, the resources and the knowledge to solve the greatest challenges we face. We just need to stop silencing new questions with old answers.





Andrew Barnes
4 Day Week Architect,
Entrepreneur & Philanthropist

Andrew Barnes

Innovator, entrepreneur and philanthropist Andrew Barnes has made a career of market-changing innovation and industry digitisation.

As the architect of the 4 Day Week, which made headlines around the world, the transformation he has led as founder of Perpetual Guardian has had positive implications both locally and globally.

I grew up in the UK with parents who came out of the war generation. My father had lost his dad in 1943, my mother was from a working class family in the north of England, my grandfather had been unemployed for a large period of time between the wars with the Depression and so on. As a result, my parents were incredibly cautious, a trait I inherited. It took me until I was 40 to actually take a risk, to move from being somebody who was a capable executive to somebody who started to build and run businesses. The word 'entrepreneur' is overused these days, but to actually take the leap from follower to leader was the biggest battle I had.



I was conditioned, like everybody else, to believe that working harder meant working longer.

Early on I was conditioned, like everybody else, to believe that working harder meant working longer, that you had to put in enormous numbers of hours every week and sacrifice everything else for the company. Inevitably, probably in common with a lot of people in my generation, I left behind a trail of destruction in my personal life, divorces, relationships with kids etc.

All of that stuff gets sacrificed because you're trying to focus on multiple things. Of course, you want to provide for and protect your family and therefore working hard is important. But it's the way it was done that was the problem. Overcoming these hurdles for me has been a key part of the journey that's brought me to the position that I'm in today.

It was Franklin Roosevelt who said "we have nothing to fear but fear itself". The reality is that change isn't actually that awful. During crises, people are innovative. During wars, you get technological advancements. An economic crash offers a climate within which we rethink how businesses work. The

problem is that we are all conditioned to fear change. We want predictability. We struggle when things change. One thing I used to always say to people in my businesses was that, if we try and do something innovative, it might fail, but if we don't try and change, we will definitely fail. People look at change with a high probability of failure and think it's risky, but often not changing is far riskier. You must be able to adapt to that way of thinking. Technology is moving, the economy is moving, the world is moving, and if you can adapt to this you will be resilient, and you will be successful. It's when you desperately hold onto something that you know isn't going to work that you end up with an issue. I try and get my people to embrace change, to recognise how it will help us if we're able to embrace it. It means we can be flexible and ultimately successful as a team.

The 4 day week campaign was something that we did as an experiment. It was an academic exercise to determine whether we could improve productivity in my company. That morphed into this campaign that's gone global – we've spoken in 86 countries, 4.6 billion people have engaged with the campaign in some way. What we've seen is company after company, and politicians now, jumping on the bandwagon of the 4 day week. That's the thing I'm the most proud of, out of anything I've done because that's the thing that's making a real difference to people's lives. I often tell the story of one of my people. He's a guy of my age, he has a granddaughter, and thanks to the 4 day week he takes two afternoons off, he walks home, he's getting fit, he spends two afternoons playing with his granddaughter, they have tea together.



The 4 day week is the thing that I'm most proud of because that's the thing that's making a real difference to people's lives.

When he tells this story he cries because we've given him something that he never thought he could have. So when you translate that across the hundreds of people in my company, or the hundreds of thousands of people across the world

who not only have the chance to be the best they can be in the office but the best they can be at home and in their communities, that makes me proud. If my legacy at the end of the day is that I helped bring

about that sort of revolution in how we work, that is far bigger, far better than anything that I could ever have done in business.

I look back on a lot of my career at times when I thought winning was everything, when I failed to recognise that human relationships were way more important than anything else, and didn't realise my own leadership style was rubbish and was rubbish for a long time. It was only when I confronted who I was and what I wanted to be that I actually changed my leadership style to a way which then delivered enormous benefits to me, to the companies that I worked for, and the companies I built.



I look back on a lot of my career at times when I thought winning was everything, when I failed to recognise that human relationships were way more important than anything else.

I recognised this way way way too late in life. I look at my own father who could mix and mingle with anyone. I took my dad to the Rugby World Cup in 2003, and for years afterwards everybody in my company would say "how's your father?", "when's your dad coming back?".

All because he is such a wonderful man. No one would ever have done that for me, because that was not who I was at the time, and I think that is my biggest regret. It took me until way into my 40's to really understand who I needed to be and how I needed to lead. I had to follow what was right, and if you do that you often find that you get better outcomes. This is partly how the 4 day week works.

It's about giving people the opportunity to contribute, to say what's important to them. When somebody works for you, you are borrowing them from their life. If you recognise this and give something back, you will get a better performance, you will get a better outcome, and it took me too long to realise that. But I'm making up for it now!





Johanna Rowe Calvi
Head of UX Design & Design
Ops - Blizzard Entertainment

Johanna Rowe Calvi

Johanna Rowe Calvi is the Head of UX Design & Design Ops for leading video game developer Blizzard Entertainment. She is also the Chair of Diversity & Inclusion for Women at the Blizzard Diversity & Inclusion Council.

Johanna is an authentic leader who combines a caring and inclusive leadership style with an adaptive and forward-thinking approach to the new world of work.

In truth, I found it difficult to pick out the salient moments of my life that shaped me as a leader. So, to help me I consulted my parents. My father told me that the first time he saw a difference in me was when I returned from summer camp. I was only 12 years old but the difference that they saw wasn't just my progression to adolescence but a real self-assurance and self-confidence. It was an interesting perspective and something that they hadn't shared with me before.

The first noticeable change that I recall in myself was during my third year studying for my Master's Degree. I took a year out to live in China where I faced a difficult 12 months. Especially when one of the friends who I was living with became very ill for a long period of time and I had to step up to take care of him. Being so young in a country like China where everything seemed so unfamiliar was intense, but my friend needed me so I had to act and liaise with our embassy to ensure that he got the help he needed.

This experience really shaped me. Before that trip to China, I was always the shy girl who wanted to change the world but would turn very red whenever someone asked me questions. When I came back though, one of my first assignments at University was to stand up in front of 20 other students and deliver a presentation. In that moment I realised that people were listening to me carefully. I had really found my voice and the power of my opinion. I became the non-conformist woman I am now.

Throughout my career, I have always been someone who loves to be part of a team and work collaboratively. My first ever role was as a lead designer, but I had no one to lead, it was just me for the first months. So, my intention from day one was to have a team built around me. I was fortunate that over time the company I was

working for supported me in building a brilliant team and so by default I assumed a leadership role.

At my current company, Blizzard Entertainment, I am blessed to have a great group of people to manage. When I arrived, we merged four separate design teams into one. This presented some challenges as it also coincided with the need to improve processes and to make additional internal hires. The team is now very diverse, and you can really feel the power of that. You often read about the benefits of diversity in blogs and online articles but for us, living it every day is so refreshing. There is no judgement between us, no one holds back their questioning and I think that has a lot to do with the fact that we are so different. My team fills me with pride as a leader and a member of that team.



I was always the shy girl who wanted to change the world but would turn very red whenever someone asked me questions.

When hiring team members, I tend to focus on hiring atypical profiles, the ones that HR teams and artificial intelligence are often reluctant to select because their CV's are not linear nor familiar. I see such a huge lack of diversity in this industry and I try to counterbalance this with my teams.



As we enter a new world of work, we need to be caring but we also need to be able to adapt and have an adaptive management style.

As a leader, I feel that the biggest ongoing challenge that I've faced and continue to face is centred around bias. When I started out in my career, I was the only female in the innovation group, I was also the only creative, so I always felt like an outsider. I also feel as though my personality is different to many leaders. In the Carl Jung personality tests, I am mostly yellow and a bit blue representing sociable, persuasive, and dynamic traits. Many other leaders test as either blue or red. Red being competitive and demanding whilst blue being cautious, formal and questioning.

I have been given advice over the years by senior leaders to sacrifice or hide some of my natural personality and to become more 'red' or 'blue' if I want to progress further in my career. I did try to take this advice and made an effort to be more 'red' for a few years. But this is not a sacrifice that I am willing to make anymore. For me, great leaders are caring, authentic and inclusive. My system of values and my determination not to change or hide them is one of the things that makes me most proud.

I also think these characteristics have especially helped me in recent times. As we enter a new world of work, we need to be caring but we also need to be able to adapt and have an adaptive management style. This has really helped to keep my team connected. We have calls most mornings where we not only talk about work but also about the industry and life in general. With a lot of international team members, this is key to identify the team members that might feel too isolated. Within the company, we recognise that home life is now very interconnected with work life, so we allow for flexibility and trust in the team to find the right balance.

I also recognise the importance of finding this balance in my own life. Outside of work, I try to make time for meditation. This has helped me immensely through difficult moments in life. Meditation is a demanding brain training practice, but I find that the benefits are huge. I usually take 20 minutes twice a day just to clear my mind. I can't commit to it every week but usually, if I'm struggling to sleep or feeling stressed, I can go back to it and it helps me a lot.

I feel that as leaders we are recently embracing a way of working which was always going to come to the fore. The next generation really value their personal lives over their work lives and through their work they want to feel purpose and make sense of what they do. If they don't have that, they have no fear in seeking out new opportunities. Therefore, if you want to attract and retain the best talent, you need brave leadership to build a culture that is fit for purpose and meets these changing needs.





Jane Huxley
General Manager -
Spotify EMEA

Jane Huxley

With nearly 30 years of experience, Jane has held both executive and non-executive director roles with some of the world's best known organisations such as Microsoft, Vodafone, WWF and Spotify.

Her experience includes working locally and globally in blue chip organisations and scale ups - in roles ranging from marketing, sales, product management and business development. She is passionate about developing teams and individuals and fundamentally believes that if you get the people right, the business will follow.

My journey as a leader really began early on in my career. I was pulled aside after a meeting by our CEO who said to me “Jane, you need to make sure you use your powers of influence for good and not evil”. I was kind of shocked by this, as it had never occurred to me that people would listen, let alone act on something that I had said. I have reflected on this advice so many times over the years, to try to be very mindful of what I say, what I do and most importantly, how I do it.



The biggest challenge I've had to manage is being able to clearly separate my head and my heart in business.

I have been able to work with some of the most transparent and authentic leaders in my career - and they have always demonstrated that their lives come with bumps and bruises. Certainly, as a leader, I've worked hard to show people that there is no “perfect” for anyone, put your priorities on clear display and to lead with a warts-and-all approach. I've probably done every stupid thing possible. Tripping over, spinach in teeth, skirt tucked into tights, saying the wrong thing, or having a rant. You just have to have a metaphorical shrug and move on. But there have also been times when I've been silent when I should have spoken up or called something out and I do regret those. Everything we do is based on a choice we consciously make, and there are always trade-offs. I think good leaders can apply sound judgement to those choices and be accountable for the trade-offs.

The biggest challenge I've had to manage is being able to clearly separate my head and my heart in business. I conclude that you need both - logical assessment and intuition, business smarts and empathetic leadership, strength, and vulnerability - all two sides of the same

coin. Learning how to steer a path between these has been enormously challenging, and I remain a student of trying to balance these to this day.

When it comes to leadership traits, I believe the most important are communication, clarity and connection. Turbulent times are opportunities for authentic leaders to step up, and I feel that these skills are self-explanatory. I love Simon Sinek's take on this: “Leadership is not a rank, it is a responsibility. Leadership is not about being in charge,

it's about taking care of those in your charge. And when we take care of our people, our people will take care of us”. It's also important to remember that the leaders themselves are also going through enormous change and are part of the whole system. So, if it's you who leads then make sure you give yourself a break and take care of yourself, and if you are reporting to one of these people - tell them that they are doing a good job, and ask if they are OK.

Looking back, I'm most proud of the relationships I've built with my family, friends and colleagues. I have so many people that I'm grateful for in my life and really strive to ensure that I add value to those relationships, rather than just being a one-way street. It's not always easy, there are certainly things that I could have done better along the way, and I hope I've learned from those things. The best thing to remember



When it comes to leadership traits, I believe the most important are communication, clarity and connection.



here is that you need to actively work on relationships, create memorable experiences and not take them for granted. Listen more than you speak...still working on that one...

I am a bit of an optimist when it comes to the future, but I do readily accept that there will be some overwhelmingly large challenges (we are living through one right now). We need to make sure that we are learning, investing in and practicing the human-based skills required to meet challenges, rather than just a traditional education-based approach. Resilience, tenacity, agility and humility are all learned behaviours, observed and practiced and I wish we put more weight on these earlier on at school for example, in an explicit way. I try to do this at home with my girls, to a point where they now roll their eyes at me and say "Oh Mum, NOT the resilience speech again!" They will thank me one day.



I am a bit of an optimist when it comes to the future, but I do readily accept that there will be some overwhelmingly large challenges (we are living through one right now).





Jane Tewson

Jane Tewson is an innovator with a global reputation for inspiring individuals and organisations to work together for positive social change.

She is the founder of Charity Projects, Timebank, Pilotlight UK, Pilotlight Australia and Igniting Change, and the co-founder of Comic Relief (better known as Red Nose Day).

Jane Tewson CBE
Founder - Igniting Change

I think my dyslexia has greatly shaped who I am and how I engage with the world. Although I now see my dyslexia as being my greatest gift, it did get in the way of the career I thought I would follow - medicine, like both my parents. It got in the way of me finishing school. It crippled me in a major media interview when one of my former teachers, who was interviewing me, suddenly remembered me and called me “a thicko”. It has caused me many challenges that I have had to overcome, but it has also made it possible for me to see the world differently and trust my instincts. It is one of the reasons that I know in my gut that we must not accept the unacceptable and that we must fight for better.

I believe that courage and humility are essential elements of leadership. Without humility, leadership can slide into pomposity and arrogance and without courage, well, I don't think people will allow a person without courage to lead them. In my life never a day goes by without tears. I used to be embarrassed by my tears, but now I celebrate them, they are a part of who I am and an expression of how I feel. I never want to become numb to the people we have the privilege to work with.

Recently, I had to be courageous and do something that was not in my comfort zone. I let author Martin Flanagan into my world to write about my life and Igniting Change for his book 'The Art of Pollination'. I was super cautious about taking this step because I don't enjoy the spotlight. I always say that of all the things I have done – I haven't done any of them, other people have. That's why I agreed to do this book, to bring to light some of the amazing stories of the courageous people I

have walked alongside in my life. I think it's a book for our time and shows that kindness goes an incredibly long way.

I'm not a fan of perfect. I think it wastes enormous time and energy and excludes almost all of us. In fact, it excludes all of us. I'm also not big on leadership styles. I passionately believe that listening is usually more important than talking and that honesty and kindness matter. Imagine how different the world would be if our current world leaders were guided by those two qualities?

I believe that leaders can achieve nothing without a great team. Working with other people, listening and encouraging their ideas, collaborating – these are what make teams magical and leadership possible. Teams enable leaders to get things done. I rely heavily on my team, the people in my life and the supporters of Igniting Change. They keep me real.

A lack of kindness in the world is something I believe will be a barrier to creating a better world in our future. I also feel that there is not enough respect given to the voices that need to be heard. I would encourage everyone to step out of their comfort zone and talk to

people they wouldn't ordinarily spend time with. It's not just about talking to people we disagree with, although of course, that's important. It's also about learning from and engaging with people who have a totally different life experience, whose perspective is legitimate but whose voice we rarely make the time to hear. If we don't listen, or we don't act on what we hear, what can possibly change?



Without humility, leadership can slide into pomposity and arrogance and without courage, well, I don't think people will allow a person without courage to lead them.





Pavan Vyas
CEO - RUSH

Pavan Vyas

Pavan Vyas is a unique leader who combines a huge drive for innovation with a focused, empathic leadership style.

His career moves include incubating startups, investing in businesses and now, leading RUSH - an Auckland-based design and technology studio on a mission to design technology to better serve humankind.

I've been incredibly fortunate in my career and life to have worked for some amazing leaders. The leaders I had early on in my career all had an incredible appetite for my success.

It's almost as if the success of the organisation and their individual success were secondary to mine, in their eyes. In my journey thus far, I have taken this to heart and I always strive to support the people around me to be successful in what they do.

The biggest challenge I've had to overcome personally is the much talked about imposter syndrome. I came to New Zealand in my pre-teen years and at times surviving (not thriving) was my only goal growing up. The biggest challenge was to be accepted in society and then shed the imposter syndrome so that I could go on about my work and have some self-belief to propel myself forward.

I had a huge fear of public speaking early on in my career. I was fine in small groups but on a stage when 100 eyes were looking at you, it was scary. I'm still far from perfect. I recognised very early on that if I'm to effectively lead, I'll have to master the art of addressing a crowd. I see this like going to the gym. So these days, I often put myself in situations where I'm forced to speak to an audience. I'll never be Simon Sinek, but it keeps me well practiced.



Good leaders need to think far into the future, but they also have to be prepared to make decisions in real time and often go back and change the decisions they have made.

For me, successful leadership in difficult times requires combining foresight with agility. Good leaders need to think far into the future, but they also have to be prepared to make decisions in real time and often go back and change the decisions they have made. With this comes a healthy dose of turbulence for your people, so making sure that you're open, honest, clear and frequent in your communication approach is critical.

One burning desire I have in my lifetime is for New Zealand not to have all of its eggs in the Primary Industry and Tourism baskets. Whilst these industries are critical, our country's future must be powered by technology and the wider 'knowledge economy'. Every time I look back at the work we're doing at RUSH as well as Frankie Technologies and Take2, two other organisations I'm involved with, I am proud to say that we've made progress towards the overarching ambition.



The biggest challenge I've had to overcome personally is the much talked about imposter syndrome.

The biggest challenge for the future that keeps me up at night is wondering if New Zealand has peaked. I see the geo-political landscape being torn up globally and we often hear that things like that will never happen in NZ. I hope that as a society we truly learn from the mistakes happening elsewhere and carve a more positive path for our future.



David Gonski
Business Leader, Company
Director & Philanthropist

David Gonski

David Gonski AC is one of Australia's most respected business leaders and company directors. He is a leading philanthropist and provides strong community leadership, particularly in relation to education in Australia

He is Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, President of the Art Gallery of NSW Trust, Chairman of the UNSW Foundation Ltd, a Director of Sydney Airport Corporation Board, a non-executive Member of LeapFrog Investment's Global Leadership Council, a member of the board of the Lowy Institute for Public Policy, Patron of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation and Raise Foundation, and a Founding Panel Member of Adara Partners.

Over my career and life, four major events have really challenged me and made me stronger. These were the 1987 stock market crash, the 1997 Asian Financial crisis, the GFC and now what we are currently in the midst of with the Coronavirus pandemic.

The 1987 crash probably had the most profound effect on me. I had just left Freehill Hollingdale & Page and had started my own advisory firm, Wentworth Associates. I had a young family to support and the crisis was very worrying. Dealing with the many challenges of this time helped me grow and learn resilience. It taught me the importance of creating a business with strong foundations. Many of the big players in the market at the time did not survive this crash because they did not have those foundations. At the time, we thought this crash was different. We thought that we would never see anything like it again. We thought that we would never be able to get back to where we

were before the crash. It felt very ominous, but of course, we recovered as a business, an economy and as a country.

When I think about leadership, especially during times of crisis, there are some

common traits that stand out as being important. Strength with humility; pragmatism with a clear view of what is to be achieved; listening and being open to learning. It is so important for leaders to have compassion and to connect that compassion to the purpose of the organisation. We must focus on what is important to the company and the people we lead.

I will never forget a moment that really shaped me. It was 1982 and I was in Melbourne waiting for a taxi. I started talking to the doorman of the hotel I was staying in. He mentioned that he almost made the national team as a runner. I was impressed as I am a hopeless runner. It was only a small interaction but it made me realise that there is always someone who can do things that I can't. I took it on, and I now assume that everybody can do something better than me.

Looking back on my career, what I am most proud of is achieving change. My contributions to the not-for-profit sector are sources of pride for me, especially in education. I feel that you get more satisfaction when

you do things that impact society rather than when you focus solely on creating individual wealth.



When I look to the future, mass inequality across the world is a big concern of mine.

When I look to the future, mass inequality across the world is a big concern of mine. While I don't believe everybody should have the same, as all people have different

focuses and priorities, there is a huge gap when it comes to access to education, healthcare, opportunities and quality of life.

Education inequality is very relevant today. I strongly believe that those who don't have an education and are unskilled are in real danger especially with the technology that's coming. We need to educate all and that way we will be more productive.



I feel that you get more satisfaction when you do things that impact society rather than when you focus solely on creating individual wealth.



Dan Te Whenua Walker
Global Co-Chair of
Indigenous - Microsoft

Dan

Te Whenua Walker

Dan Te Whenua Walker is an experienced business leader with an extensive background in the IT and tech sector. He has a particular passion for how tech can be utilised for Māori and Pasifika economic development.

Dan is the Deputy Chair of NZ Māori Tourism, Pou Tuarā of Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Ruanui, Director of the Centre for Social Impact, and Chair of Whānau Mārama Parenting Charity and a variety of community trustee roles around Auckland.

Ko Turi Arikinui toku tūpuna, Turi is my ancestor. Ko Aotea tōku waka, Aotea is my ancestral voyager. Ko Taranaki tōku maunga, Taranaki is my mountain. Ko Tangahoe tōku awa, Tangahoe is my river. Ko Ngāti Ruanui tōku iwi, Ngāti Ruanui is my tribe.

My father has Irish and Scottish heritage, while my mum is from Ngāti Ruanui, Ngā Ruahinerangi, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairoa, Tūhourangi, Maniapoto and Tainui.

When I think of why it is perceived that I have been successful in life, I pay homage to my parents. Even though they split when I was two, I know I always had the benefit of loving parents and, in particular, two very strong and loving grandmothers. I was born and raised in Woolston, Christchurch during the 80's, a time and place when the Māori narrative I saw in the media was firmly entrenched in negative stereotypes.

I knew I was Māori, but I was very disconnected to my culture, my language and my whakapapa (ancestry). I was a long way away from my marae in South Taranaki and lacked strong Māori role models – in particular those who proudly embraced a Pākehā and Māori shared ancestry. I just felt like I didn't fit in and feelings of inadequacy plagued me for my early years. Due to the negative Māori narrative I saw in the news and media, I was constantly trying to justify actions that were not mine to own. I struggled to reconcile or argue against the incorrect perceptions of others and I thought the easiest option was to just say nothing – but what I know now is that this chips away at the only thing you truly own over time – your soul. I stopped admitting my heritage to others in an effort to try and dodge the judgement – the judgement I felt from others that soon became my own. I remember a conversation as a child that still happens today (last week) “You are Māori? Really? Nah - You

don't look Māori. You are not a real Māori though.” Because of my fair skin it became easier to just say I was Pākehā and to stay away from my culture as much as possible.

As is the case with most things, you can only reject your identity for so long until it comes out in negative ways. For me it was an apathy to schoolwork, some other stupid stuff that could've got me locked up and a resulting strong disconnection to who I was. It was a tumultuous time where I couldn't see a positive future and I left high school without any qualifications to my name. I realise now, looking back, that this was a crossroads moment. I could

have carried on down the same track but I was lucky to have a loving family, some really good mates (who are still my mates today) and a girlfriend (now wife) who made me want be better person. I credit my parents and my grandmothers for helping me discover that I had greatness in my ancestry that I could be proud of.

I started in the corporate business world at the bottom and advanced rapidly. I found that I had a knack for sales, hard work and building mutually beneficial business relationships. I met success in my early years and eventually moved to Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland to take up senior leadership roles. I only thought it was a short-term experience opportunity however our children came along and we now proudly have made Auckland our home.

In my first national role at 30, my CEO told me that I was just a kid and had a lot to learn. I knew he was challenging me not to get too cocky and I was fine with it. I kept working on myself and my personal development, keeping his advice in my focus. We kept in



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touch and in a recent breakfast ten years on he said he was proud of how much I had grown and the person I had become. While I wasn't seeking praise and I don't need validation, as someone I respect, it felt good to hear that from him.

My experiences in my youth has meant that I learned the value of hard work and resiliency. Now I am able to hold on and persevere through tough situations. Sometimes I have seen the only difference between me being successful compared with others is that I stuck with it a little longer. Whether it is in education, work or in the community, this has proven true for me. The important piece about this is it makes failure a natural part of the process to success. I am also very proud of the fact that my narrative has changed. I no longer let societal narratives define who I am, in fact, I have learned that the narrative is exactly what I want it to be.

I suffer from anxiety at different times – it is the voice in my head who is my fiercest critic. For much of my early life this voice meant that I did not want to put myself out there. As I have grown in my understanding of myself, I have learned to live with this part of me. The voice is still there but much quieter. Sometimes, when I get stressed and over-extend myself, this voice does become louder. I have strategies to manage it. I know to at least allow the voice to be heard because, sometimes, the voice is right and that voice is only a reflection of my inner soul. I have learned to love myself as a whole – and specifically the allowance of my weaknesses that make that up. I still sit in leadership roles, either in board roles or at work, where I find myself trying to suppress myself from speaking up. I often think I am too dumb or don't have anything of value to say, that I'm a fraud and they will find me out. It is like a muscle – you have to work at it. Slowly over time I have felt



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myself getting better at saying what is on my mind and not worrying about saying the wrong thing.

For me leadership starts at home. I will never be successful if I have achieved at work but have no connection to my children. The same is true for my connection to my community. I know some people think I'm successful, success for me will only happen when I can help people thrive in the communities that I serve. I get energised by seeing improvement in the lives of anyone – not just Māori but all people. I genuinely get excited when I see people achieving their goals and then seeing them pass that onto others.

Leadership is a privilege and we must act responsibly. Before we lead others though we must lead ourselves first. I try to be realistic in terms of articulating my shortcomings and expectations for those who allow me to lead them. Authenticity is a word thrown around too easily but I want to know that I am being genuine and that means not having to know all of the answers. Leadership requires us to keep filling our cup so that we have something to give to others. To me, I need time with my whānau, karakia (mindfulness), time with my maunga Taranaki and breathing techniques to ensure I am able and willing to give to others.



2020 will always be known now as the year of COVID-19 and it has thrown up some amazing leadership.

I know good leadership when I see it. 2020 will always be known now as the year of COVID-19 and it has thrown up some amazing leadership. I really like Dr Ashley Bloomfield's description of leadership that it is "an invitation to collective action". Jacinda Ardern has been held high with her leadership responses to the pandemic, and I personally agree. I have to say that I am seeing female leadership winning in many different areas of government and business both

here and across the world. As a dad to a strong-willed daughter, I do believe we do some great things in gender equity in Aotearoa NZ – but there is still so much more to do. How are we truly mentoring our female leaders, how do we be more intentional about bringing our female leaders through?

So how do businesses adapt to the new world with restricted ability to operate and international visitation dropping to zero? The cascading effects and resulting unemployment will impact all levels of our country and world. Whole industries have been decimated and many in our SME/ tourism/events/arts sector have been pushed to the brink. Some have transitioned quickly and easily, while others are struggling. In my view, there is a need to lead digitally now more than ever. Leadership that can bring a sense of calm and clear thought is needed as we deal with the new world post-COVID. So I am looking to align myself with leadership that puts people first, rather than profits. Now is a time for caring leadership more than ever.

It has taken me 40 years and the journey is still ongoing. As far as my business skills and successes I am still learning and developing, but I have an identity I own – I now know who I am. I am Dan Te Whenua Walker. A proud Pākehā and a proud Māori. A loving and committed father, husband, son, brother and family member. A man with a passion to create a better future for Māori and for all of the people of Aotearoa New Zealand. My life goal is to be someone that my three children will be one day proud to say they are my children and I am their dad.





Darren Linton
CEO - Yellow
New Zealand

Darren Linton

Darren Linton has held leadership roles across a variety of industries, business cycles, digital transformations, geographies, disciplines and within some of the world's most respected organisations.

CEO of New Zealand's largest digital marketing agency for SMBs, Yellow, Darren is passionate about creating diverse and inclusive cultures that leave a positive legacy in businesses and communities.

My mum and dad always worked hard. They had a desire to grow, learn and move forward in life, and they instilled these strong values in me. Everything I do starts with my values.

When I was 11, I moved from Levin, a town with a population of 15,000, to Auckland. This was pivotal for me and completely changed my perspective on the world. It ignited my desire to see more. I travelled to Australia and lived in Singapore in my 20's and spent six months in Asia before heading to the UK in the late 90's for 18 years. I have been lucky enough to work for some of the best multinational businesses with some outstanding people and leaders, and some not so great ones. My career has always had a huge amount of variety, and I've worked through different business cycles, industries, cultures, people, and geographies.

I feel privileged and grateful for all the opportunities I have had over the years. I had a strong foundation from childhood through to adulthood with support from family and friends. It gave me the biggest gift, the feeling that I mattered and that I was worth something and from that came self-belief.

Like everyone though, I have to get up every day and choose how the day is going to be. I actually think it starts the night before as you go to bed, it's the mindset you have. I choose what to focus my mind on, what to give energy to and what not to give energy to, how I want to engage with others, and this all helps me make quicker and better decisions that shape my life at work and home.



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Traveling and living in different countries in my 20's and then moving to London independently was a huge test for me. I wanted to know if I could make something of myself without my support network and everything that came with it. If I'm honest, I benefitted from a lack of diversity in the corporate world. I fit into westernised multinational business culture, and at the time never really gave much thought about how many barriers there were for people who came from different backgrounds. It's part of why I'm so passionate about diversity and inclusion now. I'm learning more today as the world continues to change at increasing speed, and I am aware that I must stay open, curious and humble to learn.



At the time I never really gave much thought about how many barriers there were for people who came from different backgrounds. It's part of why I'm so passionate about diversity and inclusion now.

I have had times when I felt I was failing at work, when I was away from the family too much, and it all felt unrewarding. It's in these times that I have had to think hard about what I wanted, pick myself up and tell myself there is a way forward.

Years ago, I lost a job and it really hurt me. I couldn't understand what I had done wrong. Losing a job is something people often hide, and I did. I have never talked about it, actually. It took a long time to understand that it was the right thing for me and the business. Fortunately, I can say it has turned out for the best as it unlocked so many good things for me. I can also empathise with people that go through it (and there are lots of us – it's not a big deal!) and I'm more grateful each day for the life I have and the people in it. Losing that job was just part of my personal journey and it presented another opportunity for me to grow and learn and change.

It took me about three years to find my new journey. I went through two or three different jobs during that time and I just couldn't find the right thing that I felt really passionate about. It's never as pure as just finding a role, it's also your life and where you're at. I felt a calling to come back to New Zealand and fortunately my wife and kids supported that. I moved four and a half years ago now. It was a wonderful opportunity to do something different. I think hard times help you to empathise with people in similar situations and in completely different situations, I've had quite a few in my life but so has everybody else.



I think hard times help you to empathise with people in similar situations and in completely different situations.

When it comes to leadership traits, for me it comes down to three C's. Clarity: this includes transparency, telling the truth and finding a short-term purpose for the business and your people. Communication: lots of it, both formal and informal and two-way communication is essential. Connection: finding ways to help everyone feel connected to your purpose and to each other.

I have found that balancing the demands and needs of shareholders, employees, customers, government, and environmental issues is becoming more difficult. A leader needs to take all these areas into consideration whilst keeping abreast of all the changes upon us, from automation and the gig economy, to flexible working and D&I.

I believe COVID has accelerated new ways of working. It has created a worldwide work from home experiment, which I think has been a good thing. I believe there will be more flexible work in the future and there will be a massive shift in how much focus businesses place on the office. I also think this will help us get rid of that stigma around people working from home, that they are lazy

or that they aren't working. This year has shown us that physical presence in an office does not mean productivity. At Yellow, we've found it incredibly productive, in fact, I think some teams have been more productive at home. For many years we have been working on and focusing on our culture, and I think that has really helped set us up for the challenges of lockdown and COVID. We have been developing a high-performance culture through creating purpose, establishing belonging, and embracing vulnerability within our company. It's what I am most proud of and it has stood us in really good stead over this time.

As we move forward, people are much more aware of what they want from a company and a leader. This is the time for democratic, open styles of leadership that enable people. They will want to work for you because they know they can bring their whole selves to work. There are lots of people looking for those sorts of workplaces. They don't mind working hard and being competitive but don't want some of the negative stuff that can come out of real, tough, hard leadership styles, the stuff that can become corrosive and really unpleasant.



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I believe that if we have 150 people come to work and we can send them all home feeling good about their day, they will go home as happier fathers, mothers, aunties, uncles, grandmas etc. That just translates straight into how they walk into that house and how they turn up for dinner. If we can do that, then we are having a positive effect on the lives of a lot of people and their communities.





Diana Ryall
Founder - Xplore
for Success

Diana Ryall

Diana Ryall AM is a leading voice and advocate for Gender Equality in Australia.

From 1997 to 2001, Diana was Managing Director of Apple Australia — the first woman in Australia to lead a major IT company. In 2002, Diana founded Xplore for Success, a consultancy that specialises in supporting professionals to achieve career and personal success. More than 16,000 women have benefited from Xplore's career development programs.

I began my career as a teacher and thought I would be a teacher my entire life. However, after relocating to America where I was not able to teach anymore, I had to look for something else. I believe barriers in life often provide opportunities. I found a role involving programming and despite my experience I was hired. This allowed me to gain experience in computer science at the ground level when it was very new in 1968. When we relocated to Canada, I began teaching computer science and quickly saw the unlimited potential of this technology.

After moving back to Australia and having my two sons, I once again needed to find work. At this stage, I faced the challenges many mothers face. I'd been in and out of the workforce for almost five years and had continued studying my Master's degree, but from a CV perspective I hadn't really progressed during that time.

I applied for a job that I wasn't 100% qualified for, and in fact wasn't 100% suitable for, I explained what I could do in the interview and was able to get my foot in the door and then I was able to prove myself. This is something that I don't think enough women do and I would encourage it, especially in IT and STEM roles.

In 1983, I transferred to work at Apple when the company opened a local office in Australia. I had a degree in mathematics and statistics, some postgraduate courses in computer science, three quarters of a Master's degree in education, but I found myself working for Apple in business without any business skills. I believe that if you are passionate about what you are doing, you can do anything. It's not about pretending that you know all the answers,



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it's about finding other people who can help you learn and understand. Good leaders don't know everything, they learn from experts and those around them.

My career developed from being a teacher who had to know all the answers to being a more of a guide. As the saying goes, I moved from being a "sage on the stage to a guide on the side". That's when I began to see leadership in a different light. I saw that it was the ability to bring out the best in other people, to listen to them and capture good ideas in a collaborative fashion. If you surround yourself with smart people who will challenge you, not with 'yes' people, you can collaborate and come up with better decisions. That is the strength of diverse teams, encouraging a range of ideas and skill sets together leads to better outcomes. That way of working really excited me and I evolved into a collaborative and supportive style of leader.

At Apple, we listened to our people at all levels and gave them a voice. That's what leadership means to me. If you're just out the front hoping everyone will follow you, that's a weak approach because you are assuming you know all the answers. I loved working there. I loved the team we had created and we were doing exceptionally well.



At Apple, we listened to our people at all levels and gave them a voice. That's what leadership means to me.

Unfortunately, I was diagnosed with breast cancer after seventeen years at the company in 2000. At that time, as Managing Director, I had a really difficult decision to make about whether to hide my diagnosis or come out and tell everyone. I decided to send an email to all of our staff, explaining what was going on. We went to our press contacts to explain why I wouldn't be there. It is very hard to say "I'm in a difficult situation,

I might die, I'm going to go through a lot of treatment, and I won't be at work all the time, and I'm going to lose my hair". I found that very challenging but the more I spoke openly and honestly, the easier the burden was. People already knew, so they didn't have to ask what was happening.

Leaving the pressures of heading Apple in Australia was the hardest decision I've made in my life. While I was looking for my next step, I met up with a number

of young women and learned that workplaces still presented many obstacles for women to achieve their best. This led me to found Xplore for Success in 2002, which grew to a team of 20 around the country. We develop and deliver programs to support women with their confidence, their career development and their personal

brand, so that they can achieve the success they want. I have been interested in gender equality in the workforce for a long time and was one of the first voices for equality and diversity when I was at Apple. I saw many companies bring women into their workforce just to tick a box in my time. However, over the last five years I have seen more leaders genuinely embrace the many benefits that come from diverse teams.

We still have a long way to go in our workplace and in our homes. I really hope people feel confident enough about the future that they will have children and that men will have the opportunity to be much more involved as fathers. Many men are calling out for that now. They're very scared – they still get messages from above that if you want to be an involved father that's the end of your career, which of course is what women have had for years. The future of work will be more

flexible, more equal. Unfortunately, the cost of housing now is so great that most need a dual income. We have to change that and we have to change Australia's culture that still assumes that women hold the sole responsibility for children. We have got to change these assumptions.



While I was looking for my next step, I met up with a number of young women and learned that workplaces still presented many obstacles for women to achieve their best.

Something else that concerns me is the impact of automation on jobs. We are automating things as fast as we can because it saves money. What is going to happen

to all of these people who are in the jobs that disappear? People need to feel that they are doing something worthwhile. We have to do something for those people whose jobs are disappearing and I don't think we're anywhere near that yet.

What will the world look like in 2030? Will people have jobs? Will our streets be safe? Will we be able to breathe our air? Will we be able to drink our water? Whether I'm here or not, I care deeply about 2030 and beyond. That is something that absolutely matters to me.

If I think of Xplore for Success, what makes me most proud is that I stepped out as CEO although I still remain founder



and owner. The CEO I selected will take Xplore for Success into the future. She has the flexibility to take the company forward. It is time for new ideas and a younger CEO. That is really important to me. I trust her to address the challenges both for our in-house team and our clients. Today we are focused on how we can look after our team, supporting their mental health and wellbeing as well as their work. That makes me proud.

When International Women's Day came up recently, several women contacted me and said "I still remember talking to you 20 years ago or talking to you 10 years ago and it's had such an impact on my career". My legacy now is to make a difference for others, for our community and for the earth. I don't need to be the hero, what I want to do is ensure that our next generations can thrive in the system and be heroes of the future.





Flavia Tata Nardini

Flavia Tata Nardini is an Italian rocket scientist and entrepreneur.

As CEO of Fleet Space Technologies, she is building a nanosatellite network to connect the Internet of Things from space and enable the fourth industrial revolution.

Flavia Tata Nardini
CEO and Co-Founder -
Fleet Space Technologies

I became CEO when I co-founded Fleet Space five years ago. Before that, I was a space engineer and being CEO of a start-up company, regardless of still being in the space industry, is a totally different job.

When my journey started, I was in my 30s, having kids, and I never thought that that time in my life would see me become an executive or a leader in general.

I love space, I was an engineer working for corporates, but I had no other real ambitions at that time. Suddenly, I jumped into creating something that is extraordinary. It was a big jump into very unknown territory. Five years ago, Fleet Space was launched.

At that point in time, space technology was really changing around the world and there was a lot of attention about space tech. When we founded Fleet Space, it was one of the first space start-ups in the country and there wasn't even a space agency in Australia. The big challenge was - I can lead this company and I can make it successful, but this needs to be a country-wide exercise because we need to bring many businesses from around Australia on the journey with us.

So I started thinking maybe we should involve the Federal Government - this country should have a space agency! I found there were already people campaigning for one, so we joined forces and lobbied together. Suddenly I'm not just a CEO of a new start-up, but I am also going hard campaigning for "let's build an Australian space agency, let's make sure this country has a space agency". Suddenly I became really central to the cause, and being involved so closely with the Federal Government to create a space agency was a lot of work but very rewarding. I enjoyed my time working with the government and am now a



So I started thinking maybe we should involve the Federal Government - this country should have a space agency!

part of the Entrepreneurship Advisory Board for South Australia, because I wanted to get involved with helping the start-up community.

Fleet Space, after four years of dedicated work to find a space for space and innovation, is now working really closely with lots of different utilities around the country and the world. I love finding a way to help big businesses improve their performance while also working towards a larger goal of slowing climate change.

In all of my journeys, I easily get attached to a topic I'm passionate about. However, because I'm a female co-founder of a start-up, I am also very visible. So I've learnt that I've got to be very careful of what I attach myself to because people listen to me and I need to make sure my message is strong. I love it and I think it's an honour. I love sharing my passions.



I've learnt that I've got to be very careful of what I attach myself to because people listen to me and I need to make sure my message is strong.

Thinking about leadership, I don't think there is one single definition. Leadership should be about purpose and finding ways that can help, not just profit. I try to bring with me investors that understand this, and I have great supporters that have backed me on both of the Fleet Space capital raising exercises, which shows their confidence in myself and my business. I'm trying to build a company which is exploring new territory both on earth and in space, while doing good for the world and having an impact on people's lives.

As a leader in a specialist industry, everyone wants a piece of you. So you want to make sure you don't lose yourself in the journey. It's beautiful but it's been a struggle. Add to this, I've got two beautiful children under 7 that I include in my work-life balance. One

thing I believe in strongly is the importance of sleep. I sleep like there is no tomorrow! I get 10 hours a day. People think I go out and play sport and network after hours and do all this fancy stuff that leaders do, but not me. I mainly take care of my children after work hours, and once I have got them to sleep, then I jump into bed myself and sleep for 10 hours - that's my way. I think it's very important to not get too close to burnout, it happens a lot in our life, so for me, sleeping is my way of avoiding this.



One thing I believe in strongly is the importance of sleep. I sleep like there is no tomorrow! I get 10 hours a day.

The biggest challenge I see ahead of us is the pace of change. Everything happens so fast, and as a CEO you have to react quickly. If you look at what's happening now with COVID-19, I'm not worried about the virus itself but as a leader, you look at the macro impact. For example, we require many parts from all over the world for our business, so how do we approach that? We've had some manufacturing that was slowing down due to coming from overseas so we've had to start building things here now. We made this decision very fast to start manufacturing things in-house. It's many decisions that you have to

make very very fast, and we made them. I am super lucky to have a team that is very adaptable and are quick to change their ways of working too. It's all about clarity of message, clarity of journey, and adaptability as people can work everywhere.

When I talk about fast, we changed our focus this year in the middle of this big climate change revolution and it's going really well. I say to people who are still waiting to make a decision, it sounds risky but it's not, because when it's too late, it's too late. It's risky taking too long and not taking that opportunity. You have to be agile and adaptable to move forward.

When I think about what makes me the proudest, I think about my kids and the world we are trying to leave for them. This is a world we are building around them now and if we can have some fun along the way, achieve some great things and improve the earth for them, I will be very happy.





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Dr Saritha Arunkumar
IBM Master Inventor,
Security Leader - IBM UK

Saritha Arunkumar

Dr Saritha Arunkumar, BE MBA PhD is a Master Inventor & Security Leader at IBM with over 20 years' experience in the IT Security space.

She is a thought leader in her industry, named the winner of the Top 100 Asian Stars in UK Tech 2018, TechWomen50 2017, and Outstanding Innovation Award 2017. Dr Saritha Arunkumar is passionate about fostering and nurturing new inventors through teaching and mentoring.

My journey to becoming the leader I am today began while at University. It was there that I studied for an Engineering Degree in Electronics and Communication, however, it was quite a surprise even to me to land my first role as a Security Engineer. I had no idea what cryptography was or what any of the acronyms stood for, so the majority of my formative years in security were actually shaped by learning on the job.

In 2003, I joined IBM and had the benefit of spending some time working in a few different roles centred around security. In these early years, I had experience working in development, consulting, sales and research. This mix of experience really helped build my technical skill set but also helped shape and form essential soft skills.

This journey, however, was not without its struggles. In the early stages of my career I often felt like I was in a battle to have my voice heard – especially being so young and often the only female voice in the room. Being a young female in the industry often led to feelings of vulnerability. Initially it was hard for me to understand it. I often questioned “why are they not listening to me?”. I was constantly having to explain my past experiences and draw on previous client successes to validate my place. I would often go home at night and air my frustrations to my husband. It was clearly affecting my mood. It felt like whomever spoke the loudest was the person who would be heard.

Later in my career whilst working in consultancy, I had to manage the pressure of being the person in the room who was expected to have all of the answers. I also played the role of mediator between project teams who all had their own agendas and perspectives.



I often felt like I was in a battle to have my voice heard – especially being so young and often the only female voice in the room.

There have been many challenges along the way, but I would say returning to work from maternity leave was one of the greatest. I remember feeling so behind in comparison to my colleagues. For a long time I felt as if I was playing catch-up. I felt as if I had to prove myself all over again, which was very difficult.

This experience really helped me to learn that in times of hardship, work comes second. Our first priority every time that we talk to our teams is to ask them how they are, are they happy in themselves and are their families well.

In the age of COVID and in adapting to this new world of work, we must understand that people are having to juggle their home life and work life. At IBM, many of our teams are at home with their children, so we are giving them the freedom to work in a way that makes sense for them. If you can't make a meeting at a certain time – that's fine. If you need to take time out during the day in order to be with your family, you can do that and then make the time up later. We are leading with trust and flexibility to help people navigate through the challenges of working from home against the backdrop of economic uncertainty.

This approach is something that makes me very proud, perhaps to put it better 'happy'. I'm happy to be able to give-back and make a positive impact whether that's through my work with colleagues or within the wider community. In some circumstances that can be a 1-1 with a member of the team or through casual conversation throughout a working day.



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At the core of everything is the outcome. Whatever I do in terms of sharing knowledge or mentoring, I'm always very focused on following the outcome, measuring the impact and taking pride in knowing that it has led to a positive change in some shape or form.



I'm personally involved in a lot of work around STEM and trying to promote STEM-based subjects to young people and more diverse groups.

In terms of the wider community, I'm personally involved in a lot of work around STEM and trying to promote STEM-based subjects to young people and more diverse groups. I think it's such an important topic for our industry and also the future of work. Whilst I deliver talks at colleges and universities, I'd like to do more in the early parts of the education system and try to inspire younger people to consider career paths in STEM subjects. If we are really going to deliver on our ambition to create pathways for greater diversity in technology and also create career opportunities for future generations, we need to be able to connect with students earlier in their education.

Connecting with young people before they reach higher education is where you have the best chance to inspire them to take up a career in cybersecurity or any other discipline of technology. I think young girls in particular still shy away from being technology savvy because it is seen to be quite geeky. We need to work on changing this narrative and I think by connecting with them in those early years and providing them with strong role models so that they have a personal connection, we can really start to make positive changes.

In my current position as a leader at IBM, I'm using this platform to always encourage the younger members of our team to be confident in their ideas. It takes time to develop that inner confidence, but I know that their ideas are fantastic. The younger generation

today have so much to offer but I also think we as leaders need to ensure that we help instil that confidence and be open to new ways of thinking.

Working in this industry does present its challenges though, as changes and advancements in technology and cybersecurity are occurring constantly and at a rapid pace. Working in cybersecurity at IBM, we are at the frontline of the war against online threats. Hackers are continually thinking up new ways to undermine our products and solutions and exploit our increased reliance on technology.

This is something that concerns me greatly, as it poses significant risk to our privacy. So much of our personal data is now stored online. We need to be able to find the right balance between what is appropriate and be clearer about how this data is processed.

Despite these concerns, creating a career in technology has been incredibly rewarding. Taking the time to reflect on my journey, what makes me most proud is being a woman, in particular, an Asian woman forging a career in this space. Thinking back to all of the mentors and coaches and even the critics that have helped me along the way – my success and achievements are all part of what have brought me here today.





Kon Karapanagiotidis
CEO - Asylum Seeker
Resource Centre (ASRC)

Kon Karapanagiotidis

Kon Karapanagiotidis OAM is the CEO and founder of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, and a fierce advocate for rights of people seeking asylum, refugees and Indigenous Australians.

Alongside his team, Kon has supported over 25,000 people seeking asylum and refugees. He is also a human rights lawyer, social worker, Board Member for Children's Ground, and philanthropist.

My journey to being a leader started when I was a child. Growing up in a country town, I was an outlier. I got bullied in school, experienced racism, and felt like I didn't belong.

In high school, I had teachers tell me to drop out, that I'd never amount to anything. All my life I've had to defend myself and figure out who I am. I think what's helped my leadership journey has been my own struggles, my own experiences of discrimination, my own experiences of growing up in a loving but dysfunctional home.

At the heart of it, I think what's brought me here is having a deep affinity and empathy for others that I felt were like me – people that didn't fit in. I tried to find places where my own struggles could provide a compassion and a resilience that I could give to others. Those experiences of not belonging, of not feeling wanted, build deep resilience, and that's helped me now as an adult.

People are looking for authentic leadership. At ASRC, we're not perfect, we make mistakes, I make mistakes. What people are looking for is authenticity, vulnerability, integrity. People are tired of seeing charities become corporations. Because we are real and speak from the heart, we are better known in the refugee humanitarian space than other much larger charities. We have one-tenth of their budgets but what we have is hustle. It's hard work, 20 years of 60, 70, 80 hours a week, just hustle. Often, people lie about some magic formula. Nothing beats working hard, leading by example, constantly staying brave and sticking to your values. I've completed six degrees, but no one taught me this in any of those. They teach you theories and frameworks, but very rarely are you taught about leading with principle, leading with integrity, being vulnerable,



What people are looking for is authenticity, vulnerability, integrity.

and being fearless. If you do this, people will follow you. When COVID hit, charities all around me were cutting their staff left, right and centre. I went to my board and said, "I know right now it feels like the easiest thing to do is find ways to save money, find ways to survive, to think of this in a transactional way, but right now we need to lead. We need to ask ourselves, if we survive this pandemic, what survives with it? If our culture and our values and our mission

don't survive, what's the point of getting through this? If we get there by betraying the very foundation of our principles, of our belief in righting social injustice, then we don't deserve to survive." I remember that night asking the board to give me the chance to give all the staff an initial six week guarantee that they've still got a job, and to give me time to find a way out

of this. Since then I have done two things. One, I've been unwaveringly transparent with our staff. Being completely upfront about every decision. That's everything from sharing, "here's our financial spreadsheet, here's our balance, here's what it could look like". Sitting there, talking to the staff honestly, saying "we could be facing a \$4.6 million deficit by September, we may find ourselves having to lay off a third or half of staff, but I think there's a way through this".

The second thing was to lead with values. That was saying to the board "at a time where everyone else is thinking about saving money, now's the time to double down on our values and put our people first. This will repay itself. We need to be brave, we need to be fearless". I was listening to what a lot of companies were doing, they were laying off 50% of their staff, they were forcing pay cuts. So I said to my board, "what I want to do instead is ask people to voluntarily make a sacrifice and I'm going to set the example". So I set the example by voluntarily taking a 50% pay cut. I couldn't financially afford it, I just did it. Again, lead by example,



We need to ask ourselves, if we survive this pandemic, what survives with it?

set the standard. I found ways of pulling millions of dollars back into the budget without a single person being stood down, without a single person losing their job. We ended the financial year turning things around, resulting in our most successful financial year in our 20 year history, while most other charities were going the other way.

To be an effective, high impact leader, you need to be multi-disciplinary, multi-skilled, resilient and have strong emotional intelligence. The biggest lesson I've learnt is the importance of delegating to others and the importance of showing your own vulnerability. A lot of what I've been working on this year has been trying to be more vulnerable with my leadership team, letting them know "I'm not coping with this, I can't do this all on my own, could you please help me with this?". As a leader, it's about saying to your staff, "I share your anxiety, I can't guarantee where we'll be at the end of the year but what I can promise you is that these things we will do together." It's about making sure that I'm always transparent about why I'm making the decisions that I do. Letting others share in that power and decision-making with me. It's about asking for help, showing I can't do it all, letting people know when I'm feeling run down and trying to be really open and human. It's about admitting to and owning up to mistakes. It's challenging.

What keeps me up at night is how unjust society is. I'm troubled by the failure to create a society where women and girls can feel safe and respected and have equal rights. I'm troubled by a country where we can't close the gap and address the extraordinary systemic injustice and oppression of First Nations people. I'm troubled by the fact that we are literally torturing refugees to this day and we're spending billions harming them instead of safely



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settling them, saving their lives. I'm troubled by the millions of Australians that are about to be thrown right back into poverty when we've got a chance right now to recover this economy by investing in social housing. We need more diversity in our leadership. We need to be hearing more from people of colour, from First Nations people, from women, from people with disabilities, from LGBTQI leaders. You have hope in young people, but at the same time, I think there's a responsibility for the older generations of leaders. I think there's a real responsibility for my generation to look at how do we mentor and support the incredible passion of this generation that's coming up, to equip them with some of that knowledge capital and help them.

Looking back on the past 20 years, what makes me most proud are the little things. There have been over 25,000 people seeking asylum who we've helped. Those moments are everything from the man who turns up who hasn't eaten in three days and we provide him with that first meal, to the refugee who turns up with their family, homeless, has nowhere to turn and we're able to give them a roof that night. I think about kids that I personally helped out of detention centres that would have died in them. I had this beautiful moment a bit over a year ago. To my great surprise, La Trobe University wanted to give me an honorary Doctorate in Law. I was asked to do the speech, and afterwards this young woman comes up to me and my mum. She's crying and she wants to give me a hug. She's there with her sister and parents and she says to my mum, "when I was a little girl, I came to the ASRC with my sister, my mum and dad seeking asylum and your son helped me". She was there graduating from her first degree. It's little moments like that. The pricelessness of seeing those people getting their first degree, starting their first small business, starting a family. I've seen the darker stuff. I've lost count of how many times I've physically had to stop people from taking their lives, people doing

all sorts of horrific things out of sheer despair and desperation. But the thing I'm most proud about is that for 20 years, we haven't sold out. We take no money from the Federal Government, we're independent, we're always lead by trying to do best by refugees. We're not just a charity, we're also a movement. We're genuinely a place of hope and possibility. I'm really proud of that – the fact that we are somewhere safe where refugees can come and feel valued and seen and respected.

The key to leadership is working to close the gap between how you wish things would be and how things really are. A lot of it is absorbing people's anxiety and recognising that you're a safe sounding board. And that has a toll. It's had a massive toll on me. It's caused so much anxiety, so much stress, and it does weigh you down. It's an incredibly isolating and lonely space and there is a limit to that vulnerability. People often don't talk about it, but there is. At the end of the day, people are still looking to you. If you don't hold that a little bit for

them, then they get scared too, "If this is breaking Kon, then what's it going to do to the rest of us?", so it's finding that balance of showing enough but

also at the same time, absorbing the anxiety of people. As a CEO, you've also got to look out for your own wellbeing. I really try to focus on that. I think it's so important to be kind

to ourselves. We're not infallible and we're doing the best we can. It's so easy for people just to criticise leaders. Unless you're left with ultimate accountability, you don't realise that it's just a trade-off of a range of hard choices. It's not easy. But there's no point moving as quick as you can if no one's behind you. What you're going to build with others is so much more impactful and important than what you could have done on your own.



What you're going to build with others is so much more impactful and important than what you could have done on your own.





Mark Nielsen
Global CEO - Talent

Mark Nielsen

With a career spanning more than 25 years, Mark has held C-level roles across start-ups, turnarounds and multinational corporations.

As Global CEO of Talent, Mark is responsible for driving both Talent's global expansion and its cultural and digital transformations. He is also the co-founder and board member of Talent's charity Talent RISE, which addresses youth unemployment through the mentoring and placement of young people into technology-related roles. In 2018 he was named Australian CEO of the Year.

My journey as a leader has been one of constantly pushing myself out of my comfort zone and learning the lesson of authenticity.

Being true to my authentic self hasn't been easy. I grew up in South Africa which was a very conservative country at the time. I really struggled to express my identity as a gay man. It was a difficult environment for me to accept who I really was and be ok with it.

When I did come out in both my private and work life, I was finally able to find and be my authentic self. I believe acknowledging my true self helped me find the courage to move out of investment banking and work with entrepreneurs. It also made me a much better leader.



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Vulnerability and authenticity are incredibly important leadership traits. We all have chinks in our armour, and we all make mistakes. Owning, accepting and sharing these imperfections allows for connection. People need to be able to interact with you as a real person and not a veneer. In doing so, this builds trust.

I see the role of a leader during challenging times as being the Chief Energy and Empathy Officer. It's really important to maintain a positive demeanour, bring genuine positive energy and ensure you care about how people in your business are travelling.

It's also important to take away fear. I never want fear to be a factor that holds our team back. Throughout COVID I wanted to remove fear in our people. We assured them their jobs were safe, the business was solvent and we encouraged them to be bold and creative in their work. Every two weeks at Talent, we have held a no-holds barred, open forum which we call a "Huddle". We have

shared our full financial plan, are open about how the business is tracking and allow people to ask absolutely anything they want. I have found that this has had a huge impact on my team during this time of crisis, it lets people know where they stand, it lets them voice their concerns and it takes away the fear of the unknown.



When I reflect on what makes me proud at work, it is the unique and strong culture we have created.

When I reflect on what makes me proud at work, it is the unique and strong culture we have created. People genuinely want to be at Talent, our engagement is high and we have a great family feel. Outside of work, I

am proud and blessed to have a great husband of 20 years and strong friendships. I'm also proud and lucky to be healthy and have the means to live the life I want on my own terms.

What keeps me up at night is the pace at which the world is changing. Like many leaders, I think about whether the business we have built today will still be relevant in five or 10-years' time? How do we position our business model for the future? At Talent, our competitors are other agencies but also digital products and internal recruiters. Our model needs to evolve to be better than all of these and at the same time be strong enough to take on competitors that may not even exist yet.

Ensuring our business is strong requires many things. It requires taking people on the journey and ensuring everybody in the team continually aims to be their best. It requires having the courage to tackle difficult situations like closing non-performing operations or confronting the destructive behaviour of people who may be performing financially but aren't complying with the business' core values. It requires knowing how to prioritise and delegate, giving people in the business the opportunity to learn, showing confidence in their abilities and fostering engagement.

I am inspired by leaders who have empathy and courage to stand up for what they believe is right even if it negatively impacts their popularity and creates hardship for themselves but at the same time ultimately delivers results. We are now at a point in time where business leaders can help achieve change often far more than those in government. Ultimately, I think that there is no point in a business existing if it's not actually supporting the environment it's in.



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As we navigate through these uncertain times, it's important to remember that COVID is a marathon, not a sprint. We don't know how long it will last, and the economic impact is certain to be with us for many years to come. I don't fear this, and think it's another example of the opportunities that lie beneath a challenge. In crisis, people adapt, they are innovative, they come up with new ways of doing things. It's time to be bold and brave, to not be complacent, to continually try new things, take risks and break out of our comfort zone.





Paul Sigaloff
Managing Director -
Verizon Media

Paul Sigaloff

Paul has over 20 years' experience in media across the UK and Australia.

He currently leads a portfolio of dynamic digital media and technology brands under the Verizon Media umbrella across Australia and New Zealand. As a board member of the IAB and Advertising Week APAC, Paul influences digital standards and trends that shape the media industry.

Most people in their life at some point encounter challenges, but it is how you act as an individual in those moments that defines you. Some people use adversity as fuel to drive them forward, whereas others decide to take an alternative route.

When I was seven years old, I became seriously ill and spent the best part of a year in and out of hospital. It was both scary and hugely disruptive, but thankfully I made a full recovery. Shortly after, I returned back to school and had a parents' evening with my former teacher Mr White. I vividly remember him telling me and my parents that I might get some GCSEs but A-levels and going to university were out of the question. He simply wrote me off at eight years old!

At that moment it ignited a fire in my belly and one of my mantras came to bear "believe you can". Needless to say, I got my GCSEs, A-levels and graduated from university with a degree. That was a defining moment in my life, and I have used Mr White's words as fuel to drive me forward. "Believe you can" is something I have kept with me throughout my career and I now use it in all facets of my life - with my two boys, Ollie and Tom, and with my employees at work. I think this mantra and mentality emboldens people to be the best they can be and maximise their potential, through active coaching and mentoring. There is nothing more rewarding than watching people grow and develop.

When COVID hit and shortly after making the decision to close our offices and implement working from home, our leadership team and I were talking about some of the initial challenges this presented for our people. We immediately identified the importance of dialling up our empathetic approach. It was a huge change

for everyone, and understandably different people adapted to this new norm very differently.

We often joked about the highs and lows of the Corona-coaster and how we had to be there for each other. Within days we had adopted a 'human and helpful' approach for both our people and customers. We wanted to ensure that every touchpoint was real, authentic and helpful for everyone who was trying to navigate this change. Another observation was there were an enormous amount of questions and unknowns. The situation was changing daily, and quickly identifying that and creating as much certainty as possible within our knowns was hugely beneficial. This helped our people cope better with uncertainty and minimised the disruption that came along with it.

As the pandemic evolved there was an ongoing focus to keep our people both connected to the business and each other, which in turn helped with motivation in a remote work environment. A lot of people draw energy from one another in their daily interactions, so as our world turned virtual, our focus quickly moved to mindfulness and sustainability.

Interestingly, our latest company engagement scores have just come back, and we are all delighted to see these numbers continuing to improve period over period - a true testament to our approach.

Quantifying what success looks like in business is important, and watching the team kicking goals and delivering meaningful experiences to our customers is enormously gratifying. Outside of



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We're currently focusing on improving three key areas: climate protection, digital inclusion and human prosperity.

successful business metrics there are two areas that make me enormously proud. First up is watching people grow and maximising their potential, be it my children mastering a new hobby (e.g. rock climbing is the latest craze) or with my work family, watching our Verizon team members master a new skill and pushing themselves outside of their comfort zone to deliver on a strategic initiative or project.

Second is the positive impact we are having through our corporate social responsibility program in ensuring we leave the world, society and our people in a better place than we found them. We're currently focusing on improving three key areas: climate protection, digital inclusion and human prosperity. We're working with some truly amazing charities and inspiring people. And being able to support them through driving awareness, raising funds and volunteering time has been incredibly rewarding.



Being able to operate with a high degree of uncertainty can be challenging and this impacts all of us.

Looking at the first half of 2020 here in Australia, we've had the bushfires and floods, followed by the global pandemic. All of the aforementioned events have provided a huge amount of uncertainty to every aspect of our lives - from the economy to the health of our friends and loved ones and the impact on our relationships and work. We all know people who have lost their jobs and a number of business sectors have been hugely disrupted. Being able to operate with a high degree of uncertainty can be challenging and this impacts all of us. My top tip is to focus on the things you can control versus those you can't.





Manjuri Sinha
Global Head of Talent
Acquisition - OLX Group

Manjuri Sinha

Manjuri Sinha is a senior Human Resources leader with over 16 years of international industry experience with special focus on technology and people.

She leads the global technology Talent Acquisition team for OLX Group, a Prosus Naspers company, and is passionate about developing people to allow them to be their best.

My leadership journey started during my MBA days back in New Delhi, when I decided to take up Human Resources Management as my specialisation. It wasn't a common choice among students, but I went for it anyway. I liked the field, I liked organisational design and psychology, and making an impact on an organisation's structure was where my passion already lay.



Things don't come to you if you don't work for them, you have to be resourceful in order to achieve your goals.

After a placement in an automotive company, I started my journey in technology. I worked with organisations like Mphasis, which is a part of Hewlett-Packard, and Accenture, which was my first international experience as a leader. I worked in a global team, in a senior business partner role, supporting businesses across North America, Germany, and Brazil.

In 2014, I moved to Europe and found a role at Zalando. Initially, I thought I might just stay in Berlin for a year, then move back to India. I used to love what I was doing with Accenture, so I never thought Europe would be a long-term thing. But Zalando was where my leadership journey really started, and I quickly grew with the organisation to finally become the Head of Technology Talent Acquisition across Germany, Finland and Ireland. After that, there was no going back!

Last year, I moved to OLX Group, again creating my global footprint - not just in Europe, but within Asia and Latin America as well. Moving to Germany, I have also struggled with the language and cultural barrier. Thankfully, it isn't too much of a hindrance in the tech industry, but I did feel this barrier for example when I tried to speak with People Operations teams. Tech has such a defined way of working that whether you're working in India, London, Amsterdam or Berlin, the processes won't be too different. But with People Operations, I have to get used to the dif-

ferences and work harder to understand the cultural context my colleagues operate in.

So that's pretty much been my journey! It's interesting to realise how little of it was planned. A lot came from just taking a leap of faith, taking a chance and grabbing the opportunities that came my way.

One of the biggest challenges I've faced along the way is getting out of my comfort zone. This has always been a challenge for me, both in my personal and professional life. I've had to accept that things don't come to you if you don't work for them, and that you have to figure things out for yourself and be resourceful in order to achieve your goals.

This hard work has really paid off, and what makes me most proud is seeing the impact I've made and continue to make on organisations, and most importantly on people.

Coming to Germany with a limited knowledge of the market, but still having a really fast growth route and building the tech team for Germany's largest fashion tech company was an incredible achievement, and one I'm most proud of to this day.

But what really makes me happy is when people come back to me and say that I've made some sort of impact on their lives. Whether it's someone I hired, mentored, coached - anything! It's not something you can quantify, and it's not something you can show with numbers or figures, but it's what matters most to me.

My experience with the tech industry has brought up some concerns though. I fear that the technology industry doesn't



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understand the TA profession itself - it's still treated as a vendor relationship, even with in-house talent acquisition teams. I realised that during the COVID-19 lockdowns; the first three months were especially scary, when I started seeing hundreds of recruiters and HR professionals in my network suddenly lose their jobs and being treated as disposable.

I think technology organisations need to learn to understand the value of their TA teams, which goes beyond just hiring. It's your market insight, your advisory, your internal mobility, your process development - everything! That holistic approach needs to be understood by organisations if we want the technology industry and the talent acquisition community to flourish post-COVID.

Throughout this leadership journey, I've discovered that there are three traits that are the absolute most important for any leader: communication, flexibility, and empathy. They don't have to be in that order, but they have to be there - now more than ever, with practically all of us working from home and feeling more disconnected.

As a leader, I think we have to be conscious to put in the time to talk about things which are not just work, not just numbers. The mental health of the team should be first and foremost. Where are people getting pressure from, and can you act as a cushion to protect them from these pressures? Keep in touch with your teams every day, make sure they're coping with the difficulties of

life in a pandemic, give them the time and the tools they need to make sure they can balance life and work effectively - it sounds basic, but it's so important.

It's also important to remember that leaders are not infallible. We have our fears, in fact every leader has their fears. And if somebody tries to portray themselves as if they are infallible, that's the fakest thing that any leader can do. I know I still fear a lot of things; there's the fear of not doing enough for the people you take care of and that look to you for guidance, the fear of failure, the fear of not being good enough.



Throughout this leadership journey, I've discovered that there are three traits that are the absolute most important for any leader: communication, flexibility, and empathy.

I still question myself, and that's something I really struggled with when I first moved to Germany. I remember being rejected from job after job because I couldn't speak German, and being terrified by the idea that the language barrier was erasing all of the experience I had. It really made me question myself and worry that, despite all of my experience, I'd never be able to make a difference

in this market. Thankfully, I think I've proven I can make a difference - but the self-doubt is still there sometimes. And it's what keeps me humble, which can only be a good thing.



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Michelle Perugini

Dr Michelle Perugini is an entrepreneur, academic and an internationally renowned expert in healthcare and AI.

She has a PhD in medicine and has founded two global AI tech companies, the first of which was acquired by EY in 2015. She is Founder and CEO of Presagen, an AI healthcare company that has an advanced global federated AI platform, and Life Whisperer which uses AI for embryo selection in IVF and is being sold globally.

Michelle Perugini
Co-Founder and CEO -
Presagen and Life Whisperer

My journey to becoming the leader I am today started with a PhD in Medicine and nearly a decade in stem cell biology and genetics as a research scientist.

It was here that I first truly developed leadership skills, running my own project and thesis, managing junior staff, and pioneering new methods in medical science. It was a very exciting time.

In 2007 I founded my first AI start-up, which was a massive leap into an area of unfamiliarity and one that I could not have known then would shape my journey immensely. The company successfully applied AI for predictive analytics to many industries around the world and was acquired by Ernst & Young in 2015. My journey was further shaped through working within a consulting environment which opened the door to new experiences, but also meant losing control of my own academic and commercial destiny.

In 2016 I founded Presagen, an AI healthcare company with a big vision to become a global leader in AI enhanced healthcare. Presagen is an advanced AI factory comprised of a platform and advanced tech that enables global clinical collaboration through private data sharing to build scalable AI medical products. Presagen's first product Life Whisperer uses AI for embryo selection in IVF. It can find the most viable embryos 25% better than the current visual assessment. Life Whisperer generates patient demand and revenue for IVF clinics, and reduces the cost, trauma and time to pregnancy for IVF patients. Life Whisperer is ready for global market expansion with authorisation to sell into 60% of the world's markets. I feel so grateful to be part of a project which is making a real difference in people's lives. Having experienced infertility personally, I truly empathise with those that experience fertility issues. IVF is the only



I feel so grateful to be part of a project which is making a real difference in people's lives.

option for many of those couples and it can be lonely, stressful, and financially burdensome. Knowing that we can help improve that process for patients, and help them achieve the dream of a family sooner is a great joy.

Throughout this journey to leadership, the biggest challenge I have had to overcome is finding the confidence within myself to know that I can be a leader on a world stage. That has taken many years of persistence and development of resilience to build the confidence required to establish the company I have today. This is something I am very proud of. Resilience is my strongest trait and my continued ambition and persistence regardless of whether I succeed or fail has held me in good stead over the years. However, this is a journey I have not travelled alone. I have had the support of an amazing team and also a strong network of like-minded entrepreneurs and successful business people.

As leaders, we need to be able to remain strong while flexing and changing to the needs of the future industries and in light of uncertainty. In fact, I believe that the biggest challenge facing the future is uncertainty. We live in a technological age of rapid innovation and change. This is both exciting but will also be a challenge for people of my generation that were born into traditional jobs and career paths. There will be a real need to adapt, so resilience and agility are paramount.

It's also important to remember that we're all human and we all struggle. Leaders are often viewed by others as perfect because they are required to set an example for those that aspire to be led by them, however, we all endure hard times and we all experience failure. The ability to adapt and learn means that failure is always a means and never an end.



Paula Steed
Chief Internal Auditor -
ASB Bank

Paula Steed

Paula Steed is Chief Internal Auditor at ASB, based in Auckland.

With extensive experience in the financial landscape of New Zealand, Paula has held a number of leading roles in some of the country's biggest organisations. This includes ANZ, AMP and Deloitte.

I've been really lucky over my career to have some really inspiring leaders I have been able to look to. I have also spent a lot of time inside my own head getting to know myself and getting to understand what my motivations and passions are. Ultimately there are two things that have really shaped me as a leader.

Number one is trust - trusting myself and trusting the organisation that I am a part of. Trusting that what we are doing is going to have the right impact for our people, including myself personally, the people that I work with and the community. The other one is around making a difference. I am not good at just turning up and doing a job that needs to be done and turning the handle and going home and then doing the same thing the next day. I take a lot of satisfaction out of feeling like the world is better because of something I have done or something my team has done.

The trust element has probably been the hardest one to learn.

You would be hard-pressed to find anybody who hasn't encountered that little voice in their head that says "you're not good enough." I had a pretty good lesson early on in my career where I had the opportunity to be considered for a role that would have been the perfect next step for me. It was a role that I really aspired to and I said no to the opportunity. I said no for a few reasons, one was that I was newly pregnant and I felt guilty that I would be letting the organisation down by taking the role and then going on parental leave,

and the other reason was that I was scared that there were things that I didn't know or experience going into the role. So I turned down the opportunity to be considered for it and instead spent the next eight months before going on parental leave supporting the person who had gone into that role, discovering that I could have done the job better and that I was more than capable of it. So trust and belief in myself has been a real lesson for me.



You would be hard-pressed to find anybody who hasn't encountered that little voice in their head that says "you're not good enough."

Now as I coach and develop people in my team, I want to help them change that mindset. Instead of going into something and doubting ourselves, we work to highlight and understand what makes each person successful. We look at the strengths that they bring to everything they do and then help them to understand how they can use these to be successful in a new situation. We are always going to have to learn new things as we go in to new roles and the need to upskill and learn is a given, but it's about looking at the fundamental things that have made you successful and helped you to progress in previous roles which will keep you going in the future.



Leaders need to try to understand that people will be processing these challenges differently and they need to try to understand each person's experience is unique.

The things that I think are really important in terms of leadership in the current environment aren't really anything new. I think that having empathy and understanding and being able to put yourself in other people's shoes is key. That's not new, but I think it's really heightened in this time of turbulence and uncertainty that we are living in at the moment. It's important to remember that everyone has their public face and their work face. I turn up every day and I appear happy, but unless I tell people, they

might not know that I've had a dreadful morning or that I'm in a bad place. Understanding people's intent and having empathy is really important.

It's also crucial in a leadership role to let people know that it's ok to not be ok. We need to encourage people to know that it's ok just to be normal and have good days and bad days. I don't know if I've

done it consciously because it helps the people I work with feel more comfortable, or because I am naturally open about how I'm feeling or my difficulties inside or outside of work, but I think as a leader, talking about or showing my own imperfections helps me to send the message that that's alright for others to not be perfect.



It's crucial in a leadership role to let people know that it's ok to not be ok.

Since COVID I do think things have been tough for people, I think that the open-endedness of things has been hard for people – the length of this has also been difficult for people. We went into this in NZ as a team of 5 million people and we were going to beat this thing but to have gone back into a lockdown and the continued uncertainty for people has been difficult. This uncertainty has become a new reality and its impact has covered everything, and just working from home has been difficult as there is a blurred line between work and home, so I think it has brought up some real challenges for people. Leaders need to try to understand that people will be processing these challenges differently and they need to try to understand each person's experience is unique.

At ASB we are really focused on our diversity, inclusivity and belonging and how this will support our people and the bank in achieving its purpose of accelerating financial progress for all New Zealanders. There is a high degree of executive sponsorship of this focus. ASB also has a strong network of D&I groups and we bring the people from different areas of the business who are really passionate about certain areas to come together and work to make change in our organisation. The two groups that I am executive sponsor of are Women's Influence Network and our Flexible Working Group, both have done some really great things. Recently Women's Influence Network group has worked with our talent acquisition team to make sure there is a more inclusive system in place to ensure we have a more diverse and representative pool of candidates for roles with ASB. The Flexible Working Group has been essential since

COVID but COVID has also helped to get many of the initiatives that we were working on across the line. We were able to mobilise our almost 5,000 people working remotely when necessary over the past year. The key for that now is to solidify some of the new practices enabled in response to COVID and not let the elastic snap back.

What has been exercising my mind since COVID and going forward is how can we get to a point that we can co-exist with COVID and other similar challenges. So how can we co-exist with this in a way that maximises everybody's physical and mental safety? How do we move forward to ensure the economy continues? Working in a bank I see the financial impact that this crisis is causing for many people. How do we keep our country going?

When I reflect on my life, my greatest achievement so far has been my three boys. My objective of my three boys is that by the time they are let loose on the world they are three good men going out there and doing good things and maintaining good relationships. For me, when my father who is from a different generation says "stop squealing like a girl" and Aaron can correct him and say – "I am squealing like a child, not a girl", I love that. I love that they have a diverse range of friends from different ethnicities and that they are so accepting of everything. That ties into why I feel so strongly about D&I in the workplace and giving everyone an opportunity to participate.



When I reflect on my life, my greatest achievement so far has been my three boys.



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Vanessa Sorenson
Managing Director -
Microsoft New Zealand

Vanessa Sorenson

With more than 30 years' experience in the IT industry, Vanessa Sorenson is a key driver of change and digital transformation.

Passionate about Microsoft's mission statement: to empower every person and every organisation on the planet to achieve more, Vanessa is an advocate for diversity and inclusion, with a specific focus on Māori and Pasifika representation in tech.

I had a very challenging upbringing. I came from a broken family and after my father left us, my mother remarried a chronic alcoholic. We moved and moved and moved, and I went to eight different schools. We lived in multiple caravan parks and even ended up in a tent for several months. We had zero money and I remember feeling hungry and unsafe.

I got my first job at 13 at a bakery. My pay went towards rent at the caravan park and school fees. At 17 I “got out”. I left Cairns and flew to New Zealand to see my father. When I knocked on his door, he didn’t know who I was. He asked “can I help you?” thinking I was some woman whose car had broken down.

Soon after, I got a job as a receptionist at a start-up IT company ran by my father’s next-door neighbour. That company turned into Gen-I, which turned into Telecom, which turned into Spark and then I was shoulder-tapped to come to Microsoft.

My whole life has been an obstacle, but I’ve had to fake it till I made it, especially in the tech industry. In the early days, everyone asked me about what education I had. I never lied, but I never gave the full story.



My whole life has been an obstacle, but I’ve had to fake it till I made it, especially in the tech industry.

Growing up in the environment that I did and feeling very poor, I knew from a really young age that I would never rely on a man for money. When I landed in IT, I didn’t mind being the only woman. A lot of people say tech is a man’s world but I quite liked that I was different and stood out.

I have so often been the only woman around a board room table and have been asked to make the coffee. However, what I have found the hardest is what people have said behind my back.

Hearing things like, “she only got the job so they could get the gender quotas up”, and “she must be sleeping with the boss” has been hard to deal with. I always thought about that saying “sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me” - I could handle someone putting a fist up to me because they would never believe that I would punch them back because I witnessed such terrible abuse, mainly to my brother. I find words are harder. If people say terrible things about me, I really feel it.

I believe what makes a great leader is empathy, empathy and more empathy. Listening, open communication and leading with heart. I feel too much for people and my husband always says “you can’t save everyone”.

What makes me most proud is surviving and then thriving. People that have hurt me over the years – my husband Chris says, “you forgive far too easily”. But I think that’s a leadership trait – if you can forgive and let go, you then don’t get held back. But it’s not for everybody. Even my stepfather, I spoke at his funeral not about what I thought of him, but I spoke on behalf of my mother and his daughter. I think misery loves company and there’s radiators and drainers out there and I want to be a radiator. That doesn’t mean it’s been easy, but I want to be that way. That doesn’t mean everyday is an amazing day, don’t get me wrong, I wake up and have bad days. I reckon you’ve got a choice, I really do. And I do think whatever gets thrown at you it’s how you either let go of it or move forward.

I’m somebody that’s had to lean in and understand therapy and mental health. I’ve suffered terrible anxiety and imposter syndrome and so I’m really open about it now, but when I was in it I didn’t



I believe what makes a great leader is empathy, empathy and more empathy. Listening, open communication and leading with heart.

tell a soul. I was so embarrassed. I really felt that people could use it against me. Especially when you're getting promoted and you don't think you can do it.

Recently I've reconnected with a lot of people in the caravan park. I'm proud. I actually think it's a good thing now. I've got old school friends there whose parents said they couldn't hang around with me because I was trailer trash. They refused to listen to their parents. I know discrimination. I might not look like the person that would be discriminated against but so many people have stuck by me. I have got very deep connections that go a long way back even though we moved a lot. They're the people who got me out.



Something that really keeps me up at night is the divide between the haves and have nots.

Something that really keeps me up at night is the divide between the haves and have nots. I really worry about that. That's why at Microsoft I do a lot for Māori and Pasifika specifically. All of the interns since I've been at Microsoft for three years, were young Māori and Pasifika people who never in a million years thought they would work at Microsoft. I'm now spending my time preaching this out there to get others to do the same because there's incredible talent out there and it takes one person to go "I'm going to make this happen for you" and I think there's just not enough of that. I think our leaders, including myself, we get caught up in our jobs and numbers, and our own teams and our own families. But we've got to try give people a shot.

I do a lot of projects outside of Microsoft that I'm really passionate about. I think our government does a great job with feeding the vulnerable, but when they go home on school holidays they live off a bottle of Coke or whatever food they can scab off someone else, and that's been my life. I partnered with Sir Ray Avery on Amigo Bars which helps feed the most vulnerable in New Zealand. I'm one of the three amigos. Sir Ray Avery is doing some amazing work.

I'm part of the Genesis trust board and that's basically giving money to the most vulnerable schools to help them to access the internet and other resources. The funding model for schools is if they get any money, it has to go towards maintenance of buildings. So Genesis Energy has set up a trust where if you're a customer of theirs, at the bottom of your bill you can add a dollar. Hundreds and hundreds of schools write to us and we have to work out as a board who's most in need. If you want to spend a couple of hours balling your eyes out, you should read these submissions. That's very dear to my heart, we've got to nail that.

And I think this is the opportunity for NZ Aotearoa coming out of COVID-19. We're very fortunate that we've had a leader like Jacinda Ardern during this time. I don't believe in all of her policies, but she's a woman who made a call. No matter what people think of her, she's been incredible. I have the utmost respect for her. She's phenomenal. As you say, strong leadership, make the calls, not everyone's going to like them. Microsoft can't get close to government, but she got behind our announcement and amplified our investment in New Zealand because she knows what it's going to mean for New Zealand. She's smart. I really rate her as a human being. I think the world needs more of that. In life and in leadership, people will have an opinion and you're often trying to make everyone happy – but you just can't.



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Sam Stubbs
Managing Director -
Simplicity (NZ) Ltd

Sam Stubbs

Sam Stubbs is the founder of not-for-profit KiwiSaver fund Simplicity. Sam's career spans politics, philosophy, technology and finance.

He believes the finance industry should be as much a force for good as a source of profit which he thinks can be achieved by embracing long term thinking, sustainability and full diversity.

The journey to become the leader that I am today has been one of many mistakes. I have learnt from experience, and sometimes bitter experience, what not to do. This has strongly shaped my choices and my career.

In my lifetime, I have had two or three jobs that I have strongly regretted taking, but they have arguably been the most formative and learning phases of my career. I have had a lot of experiences at the coal face and they were challenging times. But I have also been lucky enough to have a handful of incredibly influential people in my life who have massively impacted how I feel about the world and I have tended to emulate them. They are natural leaders and I often copy what they do and things tend to work out, more so than when I do things my own way.

I think when you're ambitious and you want to be a leader it can take a toll on your personal life. There are friends and family I wish I had more time with and for. In hindsight, I probably wish I had prioritised those areas of my life more.

My personal challenge has been that I have a stutter, so the ability to hold conversations has been difficult for me. I have learnt many coping techniques over the years. Most people don't notice. I have had to create many mechanisms to deal with my stutter and one of them has been to train myself to think two to

three sentences ahead. I have been known to dominate conversations because that way I can control what I am going to say and I can try to avoid the words that I know I am going to stutter on. Sometimes when I am stressed and tired the stutter comes out and I can't control it, it takes too much effort and that's when it can become noticeable to those around me. It affects the way I present myself around other people, I can come across as more



I have had to create many mechanisms to deal with my stutter and one of them has been to train myself to think two to three sentences ahead.

confident and more in control than I am in reality. At the end of the day everybody has their shit and this is just part of my shit.

I think that effective leadership is always about what you do and not what you say. In this world “we” matters more than “me”. In this time, people want to work in effective teams, they want much flatter management structures and they want leaders who enable this. I think that leadership is totally about walking the walk. Leaders who are trying to be an example and who work with the attitude to be the strongest team member rather than the leader are the best type of leaders. I think true leadership is given not taken. It's up to your team, if they respect you they will allow you to lead them effectively. If they don't respect and value your leadership, then your position is almost pointless.

In the future of work, the biggest challenge is for people to understand how to integrate work and leisure. With the gig economy, remote working or the ability to work from home and the increas-

ingly connected world we all live in, the line between work and leisure is blurred. In the past, work and life used to be compartmentalised, you could go into work with a different mindset and behaviours - you could often be a different person at work. Now you can't. Work is folding itself into life and life is folding itself into work. So the challenge for workers is to ensure that their work and themselves are authentic enough for work and life to merge. It will require more than balance, people will have to integrate

these areas of their life, so that work doesn't feel like work and leisure doesn't feel like leisure, but they both feel like a happy day-to-day exercise.

What I am most delighted about with our company, Simplicity, is the impact we are having on the lives of our members and our community. We are making money for our members and at the

same time, we are giving to some amazing charitable causes. We are a non-profit and we give 15% of all our fees to charity. Our members tell us what areas they want us to support, it's a variety of causes from helping children in need, the homeless, the environment and financial literacy. We have 59 volunteers, we have only been operating for three years, but our aim is to be one of the biggest charities in the country.



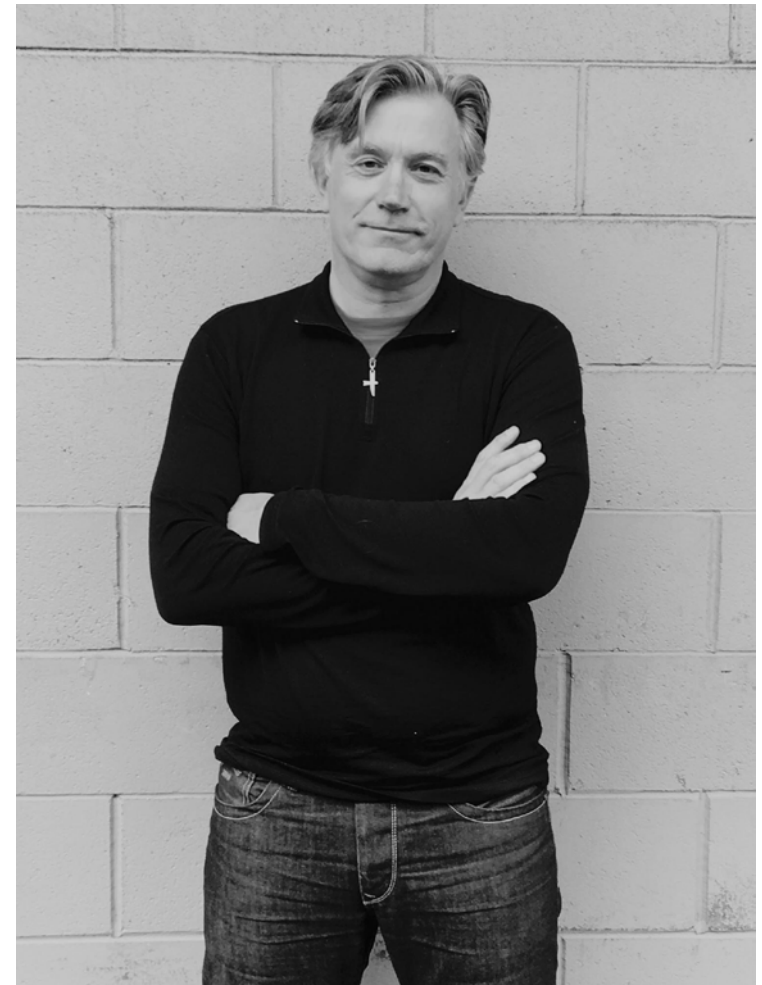
I don't pretend to be perfect at all. I am forever apologising for my mistakes and I am making them all the time. I don't think I am any different to anyone, we all have shit and I do as well.

We think of ourselves as a dignity company. We want to give people dignity. We are in financial services and we feel that people have dignity when they have choices, and money gives people the ability to have choices. If you don't have a choice in life it's hard to have a dignified life. The money we are making for our members is allowing them to make choices and with that comes dignity. It matters to me that ordinary people are better off because of what we have done, that feels nice.

I think I am a very human leader. My employees are smart, they see the things that make me real and human. I don't pretend to be perfect at all. I am forever apologising for my mistakes and I am making them all the time. I don't think I am any different to anyone, we all have shit and I do as well. There is no such thing as a perfect life. Messy is a better

way to describe mine; with four children, three animals, 15 employees, 59 volunteers and 40,000 members. I often feel that I am disappointing someone.

My advice for aspiring leaders is: don't try to be perfect. Be authentic. It must be very exhausting trying to be perfect in everyone else's eyes or trying to be someone you're not. But when it comes to me I don't think people see me as someone who has it all. I think they see the real person and I think that makes me a better leader.



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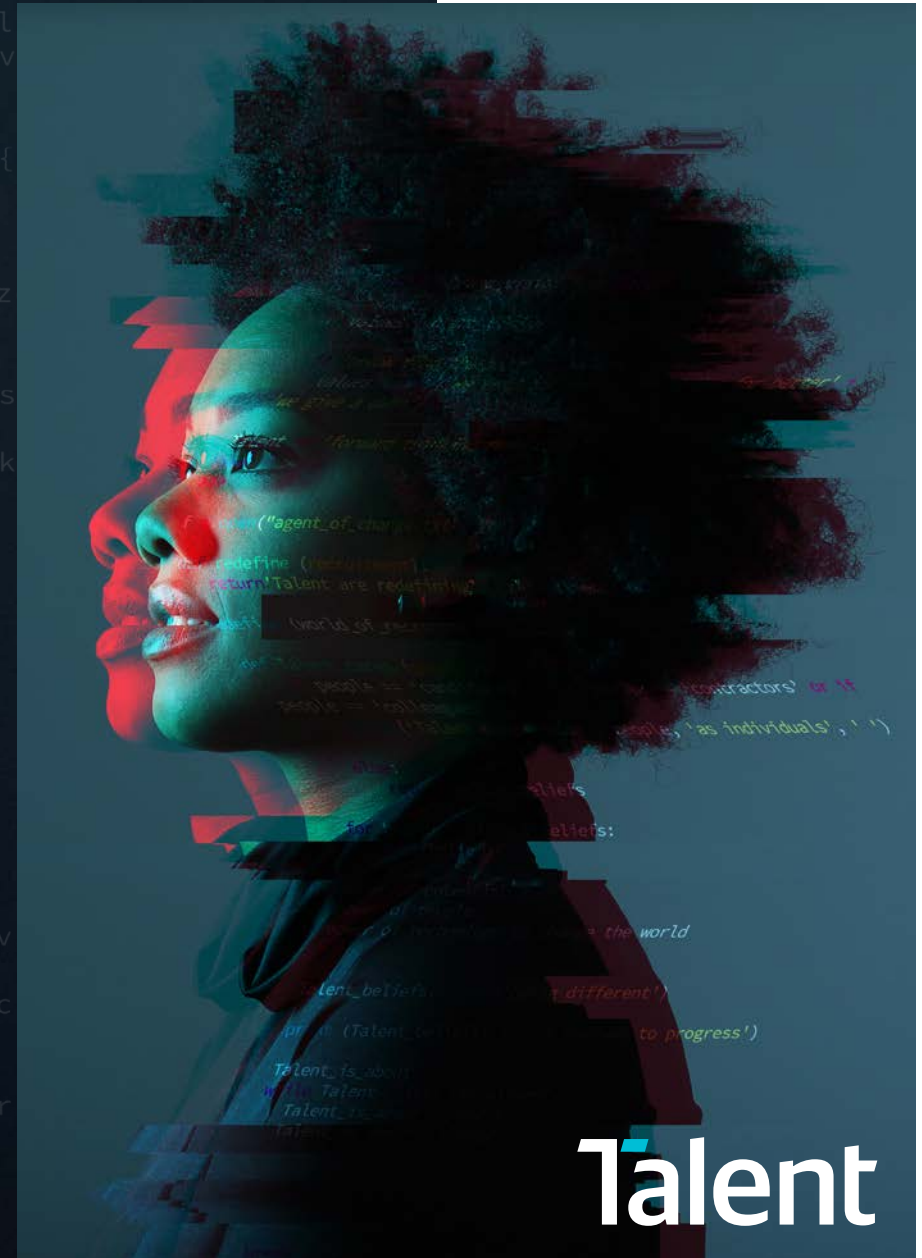
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Talent is a global leader in tech and digital recruitment.

We work with thousands of contract and permanent tech and digital professionals across the globe, in each of the cities represented in this book. Our specialists find talent for promising start-ups, small to medium sized enterprises, public sector organisations and multinational corporations across diverse industry sectors.

Our vision to redefine our industry and our commitment to building a healthy, inclusive company culture for our team have helped us achieve unparalleled success. We've had year-on-year growth, received 26 industry awards in the past 10 years, and achieved world-class employee engagement levels.

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CEO OF THE YEAR
AUSTRALIA 2018



CORPORATE SOCIAL
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About RISE

Getting your first career opportunity can be difficult. For young people with challenging personal circumstances, it can feel impossible.

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