

The real keys to great leadership

Mandy Holloway, founder of Courageous Leaders, is changing what it means to be a corporate leader.

As told to Allison Hore

"PEOPLE say 'natural born leader' ... but there is no gene for leadership.

Anyone can become a great leader if they want to be.

Most people get promoted into a leadership role because they're good at what they do. Then they're thrown into a role where they're managing and leading people.

I'll never forget the day it happened to me. I'm a chartered accountant by trade and I still remember the managing partner, with his magic wand, saying 'we've decided to promote you to manager, go and manage.' And I thought, 'that's excellent, but what does it mean?'

I was excited I'd been recognised, because when I first entered the profession there wasn't a single female manager or partner.

But I was also overwhelmed. All of a sudden I had a desk with chairs on the other side of it and those chairs were always filled with people who had problems.

I looked at the people who led me, and I thought, 'I don't want to be like you.' I went on a journey to explore the kind of leader I wanted to be and thought about how I would have liked to be led.

I really could have done with someone stepping in and empathising with and having trust in me.

My experience as a leader in the corporate world led me to want to inspire people and support people to develop their leadership capability. That was the essence of what started Courageous Leaders.

I guess I've been a trailblazer in my career. I was the first female partner at PKF. I was also the first partner to take paid maternity leave at KPMG. I negotiated it. It wasn't very much payment, but it still was paid.

One of the performance appraisals I had early on in my career as a partner was that I was 'too naive,' 'too trusting' and 'too idealistic.' I thought, you need more of me, not less of me.

I've worked really hard to rise above those stereotypes that we've had, historically, for leadership.

It was hard work, and that's why I want to support people- men and women- to know

that they can be courageous and change the culture.

I also spend a lot of time with senior leaders, executive leaders, and I challenge them to bring empathy, compassion and emotional resilience into the workplace.

I never stand at the front of the room and tell people 'this is the way you have to do it' because I don't believe there's just one way to be a leader.

I tell them there's a smorgasbord of behaviours you can choose from. For many people they've only eaten from the breakfast end and they have no idea what the yummy desserts are down the other end.

Someone who's really been an inspiration to me is Anita Roddick, who founded the Body Shop.

I remember her saying, 'until business

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leaders think of public good and not private greed, the world won't change'. She inspired me to think about the business world differently.

I chair two syndicates at the CEO Institute in NSW, which is a partner with Vinnies. Vinnies have their annual CEO Sleepout event and I signed up with an overwhelming passion about what is happening in Australia with homeless women.

It horrified me when I read the number of women who find it safer to live on the streets than in their own homes because of domestic violence.

And the number of women over 50 who haven't worked for years because they're raising children and find themselves on the streets after marriage breakdowns.

We live in the lucky country, as people call it, and yet so many people are homeless.

I thought I needed to do something about



BEACHES BUSINESSWOMAN: Mandy Holloway, founder of Courageous Leaders, in Rialto Lane, Manly. Picture: Geoff Jones

this, I can't just talk about how awful it is. I raised over \$10,000 so I was really excited. I was part of the CEO institute team and, as a group, we raised \$250,374. We were so proud.

At the CEO Institute I chair a Future Leaders group which is a way of grooming people into CEO roles in the future.

There are quite a few instances where the son is in my group and the father is in one of the other chair groups. We haven't got a mother and daughter yet, but I think that would be my aspiration.

One of the things I tell the women I work with is to define success on your own terms, and stop trying to live up to other people's definition of what success looks like.

It is really important for women to develop a strong level of 'self-mastery,' the confidence, conviction and courage in the kind of leader they really want to be. And being true to that."

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