

# Leaders to Learn From

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“My mom likes to tell people that I’ve been the person I am today since I was 12. It could be because at exactly that age, I decided to plan a surprise party for her 40th birthday. Without any assistance from my dad (other than his checkbook), I created an event planning document, complete with a budget for all the supplies needed, assigned tasks for her most reliable friends, a sketch diagramming where decorations needed to be placed and a ‘run-of-show’ for the day of the event. There are pictures of me at this party, very poised and serious, serving perfectly sliced pieces of cake. I also remember my father being asked by one of his friends, “Why are you spending so much money on your daughter’s education? You have two sons who can support you when you get old. She’s just a girl. You can just marry her into a good family.” (Gasp! I know, but it was the early 80’s and these were Chinese men talking to each other). My dad’s response, “She’s going to be CEO of a multinational corporation someday. She’s the one who’s going to support us.” Fast forward almost 40 years, my parents live with me and I support them financially and in every way I can. They make delicious home-cooked meals every night and are still my biggest cheerleaders. Being able to take care of those I love - that’s my definition of success.”



“Facebook COO and *Lean In* author, Sheryl Sandberg said, ‘A jungle gym scramble is the best description of my career. I could never have connected the dots from where I started to where I am today.’ I can relate, Sheryl.”

### Her Pathway to a Fulfilling Career

“I started my career in the early 90s – back then, it was all about getting your MBA and climbing the proverbial corporate ladder. In addition to suits with enormous shoulder pads designed to literally make women look more masculine, we were given advice such as, “Don’t have pictures of your kids on your desk, you don’t want people to know you’re a mom.” Or, “Don’t get emotional, it makes you seem weak.” If you ask any woman over 40 what they had to do to achieve a successful career, you’ll find that their stories and their pathways are all the same – but in their own unique ways. We had to learn how to juggle priorities, we had to reinvent ourselves over and over again, we failed - multiple times - and then we learned to pick ourselves up and start again. My story is no different. My parents are Chinese and Taiwanese, but I was born and raised in Brazil and educated in a private American school for ex-pats where most students were fluent in at least 3 languages.

In their pragmatic wisdom, my parents gave me the choice to attend medical school, law school or business school (and yes, I was also given the choice to play the piano or the violin).

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Since none of those appealed to me at the time (I wanted to be an airplane pilot or an artist), I decide to double down on the pragmatism and put my fluency in Chinese, Portuguese and English to good use, so I earned my first degree in International Business. Fast forward several years, at age 30 I am traveling the entire world making business deals in now 4 different languages (I learned conversational Spanish for my role at Nintendo), but I was away from my family almost 70% of the time. And then 9/11 happened. On that day, I received 103 emails from colleagues and friends from all over the world asking me if I was in one of those planes. Because my company was headquartered in Boston, I often flew from Logan International to other parts of the country. I happened to be at home that day but that's when I realized that had I been in one of those planes, no fancy title or six-figure salary could have made up for the fact that my daughters didn't even know what their mom was passionate about. So, I quit my fancy job and I went back to school for a degree in fashion design!

Fast forward a couple more years, I am now in the fashion industry, starting at the bottom as an unpaid intern but quickly making my way to the role of Apparel Engineer at Cutter & Buck. Then, in yet another career twist of fate, I was asked if I could teach an "Introduction to Apparel Manufacturing" class at the Art Institute of Seattle, the school from which I had earned my degree. I said yes and promptly fell in love with teaching. Seven years later, with a Masters of Education Leadership degree in hand, I became Academic Director of the Fashion Design and Marketing programs where I had the pleasure of mentoring over 300 students towards their dream careers.

Today at MIND Research Institute, I lead the team responsible for building partnerships with corporations and foundations that support our mission. As a nonprofit, social impact organization specializing in neuroscience and education research, MIND partners with organizations that believe in equipping all students with deep conceptual understanding of math so that they can become tomorrow's STEM workforce and more importantly, solve the world's most challenging problems."

### The Qualities the Make a Great Leader

"For all that has been written and documented about great leaders and great leadership practices, one quality stands out for me above all else: humility. Leaders make mistakes. Leaders often don't know how to chart the path ahead. Great leaders have the self-confidence, experience, self-awareness, compassion and emotional intelligence to admit when they are wrong and to build teams full of people who are smarter than they are so that together, they can achieve impossible goals."

### Her Greatest Challenge to Overcome

"The greatest challenge for me has been two-fold: learning to take care of myself and having patience. In a world where we're supposed to be supermoms, great partners, best friends, practice yoga and be successful in our careers, it is easy to feel like we're actually just failing at everything. All the time. Thankfully with age, and the benefit of hindsight, I now see that I have had it all, just not all at the same time. So learn to be patient and take care of yourself so your body can take you where your heart and mind want to go."

### Advice for Future Leaders

"First ask yourself:

1. Why am I here?
2. What is my definition of success?

If you can answer those two questions, you'll have your north star to help you decide what to do next. If you can't answer those questions yet, that's ok! Most of us change the answers to those questions several times throughout our careers. Just remember to keep growing — no matter what you choose to do."

I came to work for MIND because of my daughter, Angela. By 4th grade, Angela failed almost every single math class she took. The way she was being taught math succeeded only in eroding her self-esteem year after year. I knew there had to be a better way but it wasn't until I came across Dr. Matthew Peterson's TEDx Talk that I learned math could be taught the way the brain learns. At that moment, I decided I would someday work here and be a part of this movement.