

A Call to Conscious Leadership

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I'm glad to join this beautiful gathering of dynamic women and just to share the journey, everyone has a journey with us to share. The world is heavily tormented at the moment. The global leadership crisis. Conflict. Chaos. The rise of national sentiment. Failed political leaders who hang on to power. Shifting global narratives. It never ends.

Somewhere in the world today, at this very moment, a mother mourns a child. A partner feels a sting with betrayal. A man sits in silence, stripped of his word. A young girl endures the unspeakable act of rape. And an accident leaves a bright young student in a wheelchair.

Somehow the world moves on.

So early in life, I came to see that most of us long for a happiness untouched by sorrow, a life untouched by loss, health unshackled by illness, freedom unburdened by responsibility, a career free of uncertainty and a wealth that comes without too much struggle with.

Deep down, I've always known that this is this conviction is impossible. But luck, in all its mystery, weaves stories of grief and loss, courage and endurance, the core of the landscape of our experience not only to shape how we see the world, but to also give us a choice in how to respond, to awaken with awareness, or to collapse into the roles of victim or reluctant heroes of our own. Unfinished stories.

Everyone on the planet has a story to tell. Nine billion stories of cowardice or heroism, survival or defeat, tragedy or triumph. And every story is a brushstroke on the canvas of our lives. Our own personal story is a tool to define our worldview and the perception of our experiences writes the tale. We can paint shadows of despair and resignation or we can craft a masterpiece layered with resilient learning and possibilities.

So let me share my own story. The journey into consciousness and how I came to encourage leaders to behave ethically and embrace conscious leadership began not in light, but in darkness. Many years ago, as I sat beside my 21-year-old daughter in a coma after a horrific accident for ten long months in ICU. She was breathing when she was absent. Present yet gone. Admitted dead to us. As such, searching desperately for her essence. And in that searching, I found myself plunged into question: What is life? What is death? What is consciousness? And what is the

purpose of this life? At the same time, I juggled the chaos of a corporate life as a mother with a child in need while simultaneously navigating a manipulative corporate environment.

Nothing in my multi-million rand budget positional power, nor my executive skill set could prepare me for the unanticipated distress that life was about to shovel my way, not able to bear the anguish. How to find another way of being in the world. So I walked away from everything I knew to begin my search. The search took me on multiple journeys across the world and like many in search of truth and consciousness, I wanted to deepen the power of purpose, productivity, profit and responsibility infused with the different kind of thinking and being in the world.

This exploration and the intense longing for answers took me to the far reaches of the globe, meeting humanitarians, priests, philosophers, philanthropists, saints, swamis, gurus, rabbis and God solution merchandisers. I asked them two questions: what is truth and what is consciousness? And you know, they all gave me a different answer. And although the answer was varied, one truth emerged that we as human beings must marry the technology of how to make a living with the psychology of how to live, because all living challenges are here and they are not optional.

They appear in countries, in companies, in the home, and these classes can become an invitation and invitation to lead, to love, to transform and to behave consciously. However, in this country, corruption has hollowed out our nation. Politicians feed at the trough while people go hungry. Corporate leaders destroy livelihoods through shareholder grain. Greed becomes a system and indifference and silent partner, the most destructive force of any country or business, are corrupt and crooked politicians and narcissistic business leaders.

We have seen such leaders both in government and business - so morally corrupt that they drag entire economies to the edge of ruin. I have watched self-serving CEOs destroy livelihoods, erode trust and reduce people to numbers. But here is the truth: Every decay is worth renewal, every shadow offers the possibility of life out of the hot mess of our times. And new kind of leaders must arise ... a conscious leader.

And if I may say so, women must stand up and show themselves to rise to power despite the odds. Because, we don't show ourselves enough because we know these corridors we have walked. We have walked them and we have exposed the toxic old corporate power where we have seen fear and masculine ego corrode human dignity. When we, as women in the workplace, can no longer bear the dissonance between ourselves and the soullessness of our system, what do we do?

This is where we are forced to act as catalyst for change, for the ethos of humanity and leadership. We have to think of those defining moments when we are called upon to choose the hero's journey to face our demons, travel through darkness, and find a way to enlist this in more gentle world. This is not abstract. It is deeply practical and hope.

For in every political arena, in every boardroom and in every home, we face the same choice to surrender to greed and corruption, cruelty and brutality, or to rise to courage, compassion and clarity. The choice to feed our world wisely or to awaken to our consciousness is the choice we have to make.

On the one hand, we have human greed, new dearth of malicious behaviours, and hunger for power and wealth. And on the other, if we look deeper, there is hope. We can acknowledge that one of the consequences of our vices as human beings is that it can facilitate transformation. So what do we mean by that? It means that this transformation can give rise to leadership that is conscious. And the bedrock of conscious leadership is stable.

It is not about flowcharts, metrics, data and strategy, although it has its place in the system. Conscious leadership is about humanity, about the transparency of industry. You cannot affect integrity. You cannot outsource confession, and you cannot pretend to care. Especially as women who engage with writing the wrongs. You cannot fake the credibility, integrity and retain trust. However, instilling a culture of belongingness and doing the right things makes all the difference.

I am often asked what do I mean by contributions? So I can just describe it: When I was addressing a congress of doctors some time ago, I noted that a manager takes a knife and cuts his victim. A doctor takes a knife and cuts his patient. The action is the same. The only difference is the threat of intent. That is the difference between ruin and redemption, between cruelty and compassion. The one wants to take a life and the other wants to save a life.

So consciousness one is murdering while the consciousness of the other is care and compassion. Consciousness is the lens that transforms the act. And since this is the month where we celebrate within our consciousness as women, it is critical for us to understand and embrace our own consciousness.

You know, women in the world of work sometimes still have to navigate some of the treacherous corridors of the corporate world, and life can often get challenging, stressful, and sometimes untenable.

We allow ourselves to be driven by fear and lowered into manipulation, free personal agendas, all of that in our work environments. In this process, we lose something of ourselves. We lose our balance, our innate nobility, our freedom and courage. Too often we are told we are too much or not enough. Too often our brilliance is dismissed as crazy. If we think out of the box or do something that pushes boundaries, we are called crazy.

And perhaps she may be exactly what the world needs right now. But for now, the world belongs to the next generation of women. So it belongs to the young women of today who are lucky enough to grow up in a different era than their older colleagues. Many of my generation before had dreams that were crushed because there were certain expectations from being a woman. Thankfully, this has changed. So the question remains what is the essence of being a woman? Why do we need a woman's world?

Why are you still fighting this? Fighting for women's rights? Whose permission do we need to get those rights? And how do we negotiate in a man's world without emasculating the men in our lives? So the essence of womanhood is not in the permission granted by others. Being from the father, from family, your husband, or whatever it is in the innate nobility, courage and consciousness and strength that resides within each one of us.

Our purpose as women is not to run around trying to save the world, although it has its place. Our purpose is to go within to the inner work that allows us to show up as our most influential and powerful selves. As mothers, as daughters, as partners, as sisters, and as leaders, which will then inspire others to do the same and more importantly, enable us to discover and understand who we truly are. There is a story in the east about the Himalayan master deer with a scent gland located just below his abdomen. The gland is a pouch of muscle, but for most of its life, the deer wanders through the forest seeking the skin, unaware that it is carrying it inside its body. Similarly, we look, search, acquiring, accumulating for most of our lives, looking for that elusive self that seems to be the same. Yet it lies within us.

By knowing who you truly are as a conscious human being. Knowing your innate resilience and courage, your nobility and strength to succeed in a highly competitive environment. This is the key to juggle careers, studies, husbands, children and families and still focus and succeed in a challenging environment where ambition reigns and success regardless becomes an imperative is no small feat. So the essence of who you are as a as consciousness is this to walk bravely, to feel your innocence, to feel the care in the form of your sisters and the way we take responsibility for all your warmth in the form of a friend.

The passion and form of your loved ones and your divinity and blessing in the form of motherhood. When you realize that you are a boundless source of love, that's enough. We all talk about sisterhood, about women empowerment and Women's Day, but these are hollow words. If we do not reach out and give over ourselves. It starts with simple random acts of kindness, of being conscious of those around us. We have to become warriors for the underdog, the underprivileged, the homeless, the hungry, and the ill.

If we are to teach and learn, we must do so in the knowledge that it is not always easy. Sacrifice will be required even if they call us crazy. And that is conscious leadership. Whether you are at home, responsible for the family or the head of a corporation responsible for thousands of employees. You can be a leader anywhere. As much as leader. We can all walk in a conscious way.

A different way of being in the world. And all we need to do is to turn inward and know the secret to consciousness. So what is the secret to consciousness? Initiate the secret. Transformation is intimately linked to the grid. We, often unaware of our breath, get without breath. Nothing can have life. The air we breathe is a conduit to the life force within us. And that life force is activated by the breath. It is the breath that makes our minds move and facilitates our organs to function. Yet in our frenetic days, we sometimes forget that the body breathes even if we are sick, asleep, running or dancing.

From your very first breath at birth to the final gasp of death we breathe. So let me give you a little exercise to demonstrate what I'm talking about. To demonstrate this life force within you, sit up straight in your chest.

Take a long, deep breath.

Breathe out.

Take another long, deep breath.

Then exhale all the air.

Do not inhale again. Just hold your breath. And do not inhale.

Open your eyes. You can't do it. Can't.

Something forces us to inhale. Forces us. And really, this is quite important. Especially when you step out of this room to remember this. What is it that forces us? What forces us do you know is hard to fathom. And what is not.

Moment by moment. Concentration on breath and what compels us to breathe, is an interesting exercise in raising consciousness by knowing and understanding the link that evokes the breath, and the quality of that life force within us is the birthright of every human being and is accessible to all.

I love this example. It's a man who experiences in an instant. He was Roger Bannister, the first man to ever run the mile in less than four minutes. When asked how he did this, he said, 'no longer conscious of my movement, I discovered a new unity with nature. I'd found a new source of energy, power and beauty, a source I never dreamed existed before.

Another instance was a mother named Sarah who was trying to change the punctured tire of a family sedan when she heard the unthinkable. Her three year old son steering parts, screamed from beneath the car. The jack had failed and 2000 pounds of steel fell on him. Sarah's body became a conduit of forces that defied every law of physics that she thought she knew. Without invitation, without thought, without the limiting voice of impossibility, she lifted the car. These moments glorious, transcendental, grand and Sarah's superhuman strength are not anomalies.

They are glimpses into the extraordinary potential that lies sleeping within every human being, waiting for the right conditions to awaken the hero in the dust. What Roger and Sarah had both activated was the life force and energy source that had always been there within them. But like many of us, they were totally unaware of it and it never existed before.

In a single minded focus, in a moment of going beyond oneself, without thinking an instantaneous new level of consciousness that logic cannot express is what we truly, truly experience. Roger and Sarah tapped into something within their being that was so powerful that it made the impossible possible. This transition from ordinary to extraordinary is a rite of passage, and we all have the potential to do so. So when we are open enough to engage the truth of us and get out of our own way and play with us, we will understand that we can access this force that can change the rhythm of our lives.

This can only be done with your career, but this is a proven that we radiate the life force and the electromagnetic energy field all the time with every waking moment. And since I'm speaking to a roomful of women in the media today, let me say this clearly: Like the Himalayan musk deer wanders the forest searching for the fragrance it already carries, we spend our lives searching for what already lives within us as women. The world needs you not to play small. The world needs you awake. It needs your voice, your fire, your compassion, your courage. It needs your boundless capacity to nurture, uplift in need.

Yes, this will ask for sacrifice. And yes, they may call you crazy. But history has always been moved forward by the courageous, willing few who are willing to be

misunderstood. Because as mothers, as women, we are the architects of change, and the future depends on the consciousness we bring into the world. We must understand that power does not lie outside of us. It is not granted by capital position of circumstances. It seems quietly as a whisper within the psyche of our being, and the call that begins in our relationship with ourselves.

It led us in how we think, act, feel, respond, and it reveals itself in the way we navigate both our professional and personal lives. And from that inner foundation, it cascades outward into trust, into tolerance, into sensitivity and awakens the courage to challenge the many obstacles that may come our way. It summons the strength to live and work with grace. And this is where true transformation begins. But without personal transformation, external transformation is not possible. So without conscious human beings, they cannot be a conscious world. So where are these leaders, these conscious women and men? These heroes? They are here. They are us. Because this is the call of our time. This is the demand of our society. This is the need of today to serve not only stakeholders, shareholders and self-interest, but to serve humanity itself and which we as women take radical responsibility for that need.

Something extraordinary happens. We are transformed, and in our transformation, the world is transformed. So the time is not tomorrow. The time is not some day. The time is now. And the leaders we have been waiting for are us. So let us not wait for the world to change. But like Gandhi said: "Become the change." And in doing so, we will leave behind not just success, but a legacy.

You know, in the wake of this moment, in this era, the only era that we get to leave our mark, what is our legacy? I would like to ask you this. What is your legacy? Whether you are young or old, think of your legacy. Someday, when we find ourselves at the end of the runway, when we have to look back on our lives before we take our last breath. What will your legacy be? Did you act in a way that would make you smile proudly while taking your last breath? Did you understand that life was what one life includes influencing another? About oneness, about humanity? About belonging. About trust and transparency. About care, compassion, kindness and being. Did you see that the only source of power within your sphere of your life was the human being itself?

So did we help to create a conscious, humane society even with our little acts of kindness, despite the need of greed and chaos around us? And did we become the voices of integrity driven by moral purpose, reason, thinking and balance to save the day. Do we understand that no matter who we were, we served at the bidding of an inner sense of purpose?

It is never too late to think about legacy. So what would your legacy be? And as you're thinking of this, I want to leave you two questions: Who are you and what are you in the world for?

These questions will lead you down a rabbit hole. But this can also be a gateway together with the breath, to initiate the inner journey of consciousness. It is simple enough, but if you go beyond your academic understanding of who you are, beyond your status, your position, your power, your bank balance, and your asset base beyond being a father, mother, husband, lover, sister, son and daughter. Beyond the intellect. If you go beyond all that and ask yourself often enough in a quiet space with every intake of breath: “Who am I?”

Ask it again and again in silence. Because if you peel away titles, the roles, the deadlines, the delivery, ambitions, responsibilities, possessions and position of power until only your essence remains, then you will glimpse the truth that you are not separate from consciousness.