

# LADDERS

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## 10 female executives on how you can empower younger employees

Even though the number of female executives reached an all-time high on the annual Fortune 500 list, the digits still leave much room for improvement. With just 32 women managing the top companies in the world, the journey to equality is still ripe with opportunity. To not only rise to a leadership position but to exceed in influencing younger generations of trailblazers, it's important to approach the workplace and your career through the lens of female powerhouses who have already carved their own paths.

In honor of Women's History Month — and in an effort to inspire more women to negotiate their salaries, fight for the titles they deserve and own their much-deserved seat at the boardroom table — take some notes on how you can empower younger employees:

### Be ruthless — but kind.

For Annie Cheung, the co-founder of Noon Home, Inc., success requires two very distinct — and different — qualities: being ruthless, and yet, kind. Without empathy and effort, you never develop the resilience you need to keep chug along, no matter the setback. "These are the values that create an atmosphere of trust and collaboration, and that's key when you're working in an industry where you have to constantly innovate to survive. Don't build a workplace where your best talent is out for themselves. Build one where they're constantly throwing new ideas into the ring, and feel supported doing it," Cheung adds.

### Don't beat yourself up over mistakes.

Everyone from Sheryl Sandberg to Indra Nooyi not only have days when they're off their A-game, but they're willing to admit it. It's this quality that [Shruti Gandhi Buckley](#), the global head of Hampton by Hilton, prescribes to younger generations of female employees.

In fact, she says asking for help and owning when your shortcomings is a sign of strength — not weakness. When you're able to do this, you take ownership of your career and gain the ability to communicate your next steps: "Women are tough on themselves. Don't beat yourself up about a mistake or misstep, instead, learn from them. Use your mistakes as a tool for learning and development," she says. "Make sure you know what you want and clearly articulate your needs in the workplace to ensure you are positioned for success."

### Trust your gut.

While science might not be able to prove if it's biology or a figment of our imagination, Sarah Frey, the founder of Tsamma Watermelon Juice, encourages entry-level females to tune-in to the whisper of their intuition. It may not be

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able to spit out reports, predict business trends or manage your finances, but it can be a powerful tool when you trust it. “I have found that 9 times out of 10 that truly listening to your gut and believing in yourself, even when there’s a little risk involved, will lead to amazing things...and those are good odds,” she explains.

## Just try it.

For the chief marketing officer at ClassPass, Joanna Lord, the best approach to getting started as a leader is, well, just that: taking the step, the leap, the offer, the whatever. “The most empowering words a female mentor ever gave me was ‘just go’ and I pass it on any chance I get,” she explains. “Just try it. Take the job. Make the leap. Don’t overthink it. Don’t second guess yourself. Trust that you are were brought to this moment for a reason and that you have what it takes because you were and you do.”

## Surround yourself with interesting women.

And not only in your own industry, but in others that evoke your creative flow, too. The owner and creative director at the Rose Gold Collective Sarah Sebastian, says your tribe is everything, and more you work together — instead of against one another — the happier you’ll be in your career. “Having a mindset of collaboration will help reshape the workplace and support more women executives,” she shares. “We can learn so much from women in other industries that can provide universal creative solutions.”

## Your age has nothing to do with your ability.

When Meryl Draper, the CEO and co-founder of Quirk Creative started her company she was only 24 years old. At the time, she was worried her clients would think she was too junior to lead an ad agency. After she removed that limiting belief, she actually found the opposite. Instead, she realized actions and talent spoke much louder than the date on her birth certificate, and applied that knowledge to many facets of her business. It’s the advice she’d give to all hiring managers: “I don’t care how old you are or how many years of experience you have, only that you’re confident you can get the job done.”

## Always be adaptable.

Once you reach the manager level, finding your footing is often a foreign experience. Even if you excel in your skills, the process of teaching others to hone their individual talents and guide their working style takes practice, according to the chief product officer at HelloFresh, Stacy Gordon. “Embrace an adaptable leadership style to better understand and meet the individual needs of your team. There may be some team members that do their best work independently and you shouldn’t micromanage or opposite, while with others you may need to provide more hands-on support,” she explains.

## Take learning into your own hands.

For the CEO of Three Girls Media, Erika Taylor Montgomery, sitting still was never an option. In fact, she credits her success to her self-motivated commitment to learning, right from the start. “When I was coming up in my two careers I had to seek out mentors, ask my supervisors unending questions and read everything I could to expand my knowledge. Without being so proactive I would not have advanced in my careers and ultimately wouldn’t have been able to start my

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own marketing business," she shared. Even if you don't have entrepreneurial goals (just yet, anyway), you can apply this mindset to fully immersing yourself in your industry to strengthen your skill set and expand your network.

## Be willing to negotiate.

Even if you prefer to be behind the scenes instead of center stage — when it comes to your career, your title, your salary, the managing partner and co-leader of Witt/Kieffer's Healthcare practice, Donna Padilla says it's up to you to shine. After all, if you don't stand up for what you deserve, you'll never earn it. "It is to the benefit of the individual woman and the entire company when a female leader is a strong negotiator. If you have the skills to negotiate successfully for yourself, you will also be able to advocate well for the company that you lead," she says.

## Don't be in a hurry to find success.

Though instant gratification is an enticing pipe dream, it's one that won't fulfill you quite as much as all of the grit and hard work that's actually required for success. As Kylie Carlson, the CEO of the Academy of Wedding and Event Planning reminds, no businesses — or careers — are built overnight. "Remember it is a marathon and not a sprint and the chance of instant success is unlikely, so slow and steady does it. Be ready to work harder than you've ever worked before. And remember failure can be your best friend. Some of my best successes have come on the heels of failure, so learn from it, dust yourself off and carry on," she shares.