
**Lessons
from
Resilience**

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Foreword

A couple of years ago I decided to launch a women’s leadership incubator in Silicon Valley. I saw it as a way to advocate for women who had developed their expertise and deserved recognition for it. Women experience an uneven playing field and are underrepresented at every level of the corporate pipeline.¹

The incubator also became a natural vehicle for women with diverse backgrounds, professions, perspectives and experiences to champion each other and inspire their broader networks.

When a cohort of highly successful women first gathers, everyone has the appearance of an easy path to success. They have significant accomplishments, speak with the confidence of their expertise, and have a list of accolades. Over time, as the groups get to know each other, there’s a fascinating shift: the stories of adversity start to emerge.

There’s so much to learn from our setbacks. For the women who endure them, acknowledging difficult situations and pausing to appreciate their own perseverance crystallizes life lessons. For onlookers, knowing that their

¹ Women in the Workplace 2016, LeanIn.org and McKinsey & Company.

role models have overcome significant challenges puts their own struggles in perspective.

It’s not often that successful women openly share their setbacks, so that’s exactly what this modest publication aims to do. The personal stories in these chapters describe a variety of challenges—personal and professional—and how these exceptional women persevered.

We’re embracing resilience and powering ahead. We hope you do too.

— Laraine McKinnon
 Founder of the CLUB
 Incubator Program



The CLUB Incubator recognizes the meaningful contributions to the program by Kristi Royse, Executive Coach & CEO, KLR Consulting and Mindy Morton, Partner, Procopio Hargreaves & Savitch, LLP.

Chapter 1: The Power of Resilience

As a woman in STEM, and as a leader, I have found resilience to be one of the most valuable skills I could develop.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back when you have a setback, or when life, or work, surprises you with the unexpected. Resilience requires that you have faith that things will work out or that a solution will be found even when it doesn't seem like it. You have to have the tenacity and determination to keep going, even when all your instincts tell you it's hopeless.

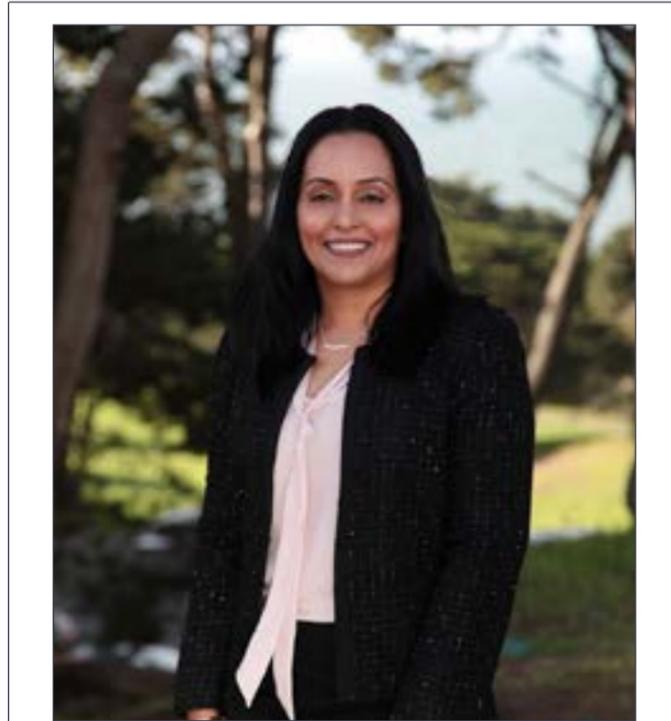
Leaders are faced with these kinds of challenges constantly, and the ones who have developed resilience are the ones who succeed.

This is a lesson I started learning early.

Dreams of Being a Leader

When I was growing up in India, it was my dream to be a leader. I was shy, but I wanted to do big, innovative things and make a difference.

Even in my more cosmopolitan city, though, girls just didn't have big dreams. They were expected to be housewives and mothers, not scientists or engineers, and especially not leaders. My father was different. My mother, uneducated and shy, worried about my ambitions and was afraid that I would get hurt in a big, fast-paced world. My father, on the other hand, thought that I could do whatever I want-



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ed and encouraged me to try different things. He was himself an example of triumphing over the odds. Raised a farmer's son, he dreamed of becoming a lawyer. He persevered, doggedly following his dream even when his parents wanted him to come back to the farm.

I remember him working long hours so that we would have a better life, and sometimes he would take me to his office so that I could see what he did, and see how his educa-

tion provided greater opportunity. His work ethic and his ability to stick with it, even when things were hard, made a definite impression on me and contributed to my own resilience.

Building Resilience, and Defiance, in India

When I moved from my all-girls school to a coed high school, I made a conscious decision to be more outgoing and participatory, no matter how uncomfortable it might be. I had noticed that the outgoing, confident types were the ones who succeeded, and realized that I need to be more actively involved if I was ever going to be the leader I dreamed of being.

I started out by campaigning to be a class captain in 9th grade. To my surprise, I won it. I went on to help the teachers with grading, and went out for every competition I could find—sports, academics, anything. I lost a lot, but my teachers praised my persistence. In my senior year, I ran for school president, and was certain that I was going to win. Everyone was saying that they supported me and that I was going to win. To my chagrin, I lost, and it was a huge blow because I had really believed that people were supporting me.

As hard as it was to lose many competitions and find the courage to stand right back up and try again, the treatment from my male classmates was worse. Even though it was coed, there were still about forty-five boys to only five girls in this school, and because I was

strong and smart and didn't hide it, I dealt with hurtful, demeaning, sexist comments from the boys on a regular basis. It was painful, and at times I would go home in tears, but I refused to let their cruel words get me down permanently.

In retrospect, this experience gave me an advantage when it came to working in the mostly male world of engineering.

Going to college was another bold move for me, and everyone said that if I really wanted to continue my studies I should major in HomeEc—and get married, of course. But those were the last things I wanted to do. My father believed in me, trusted me and supported me when I chose to go against what was expected, what was considered normal.

I opted for an engineering major because it was different, challenging and I had a passion for it. For a while I wasn't sure what specialty to choose within engineering, but I knew I wanted something more challenging than computer science. I finally graduated with my bachelor's degree in communications and electronics because it was hard enough to keep my interest and provided broad work options.

My early life, in India, was fraught with adversity and challenges, but I was going to keep moving towards my goal of being a leader. I had gone from a shy girl to a determined, confident young woman who had made strong choices and hadn't let anything keep me down, so when others around me started talking about going to the United States to get grad-

uate degrees, I knew that would be my next challenge.

However, as I moved to the United States for graduate school and a career, my resilience and determination were about to be tested to the breaking point.

How Much Can I Take? Resilience Under Fire

Getting my Master's degree in the U.S. was a challenge, and a way to expand my opportunities. I loved the work and landed a job right out of school with Lucent Technologies.

There were a lot of big, new experiences for me at this time. In addition to a new job I was also a newlywed, and my husband and I had just purchased a house. Then, we discovered that I was pregnant. Within 6 months of starting a new job I was going out on maternity leave.

And then the dot-com bubble burst.

I returned from maternity leave to find a strangely empty office. Nearly the entire office had been let go, but no one had bothered to tell me. I wandered around a ghostly office for most of the day before I was finally told that I was laid off, too.

Now I was a new mother, with a new mortgage, less than six months work experience, and I was out of work in an economy where jobs were disappearing. My husband's company was also doing regular layoffs, and, although he did not lose his job, the threat of the constant layoffs was ever-present.

I was devastated, and though I tried desperately to find work nothing was happening. I cried a lot, and sank into depression. For me the only way out of feeling hopeless and helpless is to get busy doing something, so I pulled myself together and decided to go back to school to get my PhD.

Focusing on my studies helped keep me together, and it also helped to keep my knowledge relevant and current, so that when a job opportunity did finally come along I could show that I had kept up with the world of engineering, in spite of only having about six months actual work experience.

I did finally get hired as an Intern at Sun Microsystems and then got a full time Engineering job at Manhattan Associates, and I have gone on to work with other companies in roles that include management and leadership.

The Courage to Be Resilient

As a leader, you deal with all sorts of changes and unexpected events that can throw your team off balance and make getting to your goal more difficult.

Leaders have to deal with things like: (1) losing people from the team or the company, (2) jobs that keep changing their description or focus, (3) team projects getting cancelled, and (4) your company getting acquired by another company that already has plenty of teams doing what your team does.

But when you are resilient, you bounce back and deal with it. You get angry, but then

come back and evaluate what this means and look at what your options are. Without this attitude it becomes a downward spiral, and your ability to lead disappears. I've experienced everything on the above list, and I've made it through because I have the faith that my team and I can find a solution, even when it looks like we've reached our darkest hour.

I make a point of continuing to learn and grow as a leader, and my desire to make a difference is still a strong thread running through everything I do. It informs how I lead my teams, and my dedication to that purpose helps me to stay resilient.

It takes courage to be resilient. Resilience is hard, but it is one of the best skills to develop if you want to be a leader, and in my experience it gets easier over time and the more you use it.

The Incubator Effect

For a very long time I had no mentors. Like many women, I just kept my head down and worked hard. But a year or so ago I realized that if I was going to stay on the leadership path I needed mentors and I needed to define and refine my leadership style. Among other things, I joined the CLUB and applied to, and was accepted for, their Incubator program.

Being an Incubee has been an amazing experience! I am seeing firsthand the good women do for each other when they work together, and that has shifted my perspective on asking for help, something I was never comfortable

with.

Kristi and Laraine and the rest of the Incubator contributors have taught me so much, like defining my personal mission and vision, then creating long- and short-term goals that support that mission. They have encouraged me to think about my style of leadership and to ask for feedback from friends, family and colleagues. This was so awesome, because I got a wide range of responses, from things I knew to things I hadn't recognized, and I was able to take that feedback and refine the qualities that work and reduce the ones that don't. The Incubator program has really helped me to grow as a leader and consciously shape my own destiny.

Giving Back

As a woman who has succeeded in STEM I feel strongly about giving girls opportunities to explore these fields and letting them see examples of women flourishing in tech, so I make a point of volunteering my time and expertise when I can. I also bring in other women in related fields to talk to the girls about what they do so that the girls can see a broad range of how women contribute in technology.

[Girls Who Code](#): I taught JavaScript for middle school girls a few years back. This is to encourage more girls to choose Computer Science as their college major.

Technovation Challenge: I mentored and coached 3 teams of high school girls. I helped them come up with an idea and develop that into an Android application through the whole process of coding, market space, competition analysis and revenue model.

First Lego League: I'm mentoring a junior Lego league team.

I also have volunteered multiple times through Shutterfly for KaBoom! (play space advocates) and Collective Roots (Palo Alto's community-based food system).



Some of the Incubees posing together inbetween headshots. *From left to right: Anu Gali, Heather Jerrehian, Laura Fechete, Laraine McKinnon, Leedjia Svec and Olga V. Mack.*

Chapter 2: My Second Act

First Act

I strolled confidently into the elevator of the Merrill Lynch building in downtown Boston. I was only twenty-six. I had the world on a string, as I had just been promoted to Regional Director with Wells Fargo and had been relocated to open the New England region for the bank's mutual fund company. I didn't dare reveal my nerves, yet my palms were sweating and I had butterflies in my stomach. My old-school briefcase was stocked full of marketing collateral for the presentation I was giving to several hundred institutional and retail investment brokers. I pushed the button to the correct floor, and the elevator began to ascend.

I had only visited the East Coast once before, several years earlier. It was now January. I had just driven across town in a blinding snowstorm, from my new, sparse apartment in Brookline. The roads were winding and difficult to navigate, so I pulled into a garage and hailed a cab to go the remaining distance to the building a few blocks away. I vividly remember the bitter chill and awkward feeling of ice against my ankles from trudging through a foot of snow in my navy blue high heels and nylons. I was a young, professionally-driven California girl breaking into a new territory in the investment industry in the Northeast. This was no easy feat—Wells Fargo was a west coast bank and Boston was the mutual fund capital



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of the world—and simply getting the meeting lined up had been an accomplishment.

It's true what they say—the investment industry was the ultimate old boys network. Today, it's all about the rise of the female executive, but it wasn't like that then. No one was talking about women in leadership. Frankly, I didn't think about gender bias. I had never heard of ageism. I love a good challenge, and simply saw this opportunity as an amazing test to try to break into a notoriously tight-knit, old school community and build a business from scratch. In some ways, I think I surprised my-

self most of all when it worked.

When the conference room began to fill, I spanned the room and everyone looked like my dad—white men, many twice my age. This was true for the investment industry as a whole at the time, but especially in this region. I knew I needed to be smart, engaging and, most importantly, establish credibility upfront in order to be taken seriously. I took a deep breath, forced a smile, and began the pitch I had rehearsed a gazillion times. I gave my absolute best presentation that day—and this was the moment I knew I could do anything in my career.

Opt Out

After several exciting years of wholesaling in the Northeast, I made the hard decision to leave Wells Fargo to start a family. My heart was in raising my kids full time. So in 1995 I chose to ‘opt out’ of my career to go on the mommy track. I stayed active in the community, chairing large-scale events, leading significant fundraising efforts, and I sat on multiple boards. I lived Greenwich, Connecticut at the time and most of the women I worked with came out of careers in New York. I used to joke that some of the committees I worked on in nonprofits could plan the Battle of Normandy. In all seriousness, many of these women could easily run a company.

In fact, many of my defining leadership roles were in my “opt out” years. Chairing large-scale projects with nothing but volun-

teers, who cannot be fired, is no easy task.

But, during the Great Recession, my world was rocked. It’s a common story. I found myself crushed financially throughout the melt-down of the economy, my long-term marriage was unraveling, I was jobless, and I had three amazing kids to care for. I was surrounded by extreme wealth in Greenwich, living as poor as it is possible to be in modern America without being homeless. I had to do something. While it had been many years, I always loved my career and loved working—but, also, there was no choice.

Let’s start by saying a lot can be accomplished when your back is up against the wall.

Second Act

The funny thing about aging is you don’t feel different. At least I don’t. I still believe I can do anything I put my mind to. That’s why it came as a shock to me when I couldn’t find a job.

Roughly 20 years after that day in Boston, I found myself back in California. I finally relocated back home after spending two decades on the East Coast. Once again, I strolled confidently into the elevator of an old office building, but this time in downtown San Francisco. The sun was shining, and the sound of a cable car bell could be heard in the distance. I didn’t dare reveal my nerves, yet my palms were sweating and I had butterflies in my stomach. I found this opportunity on AngelList, and I was excited to be asked back to give a presentation.

I pushed the button to the correct floor, and the elevator began to ascend.

As I went to reenter the workforce—the quality of my work was strong and I knew it—and wanted to be compensated for it—I built out an impressive resume of my leadership and fundraising successes. I put out several resumes and found, the hard way, that all this nonprofit work had to come off my resume.

The lack of current professional experience, nonprofit work—especially anything pertaining to schools or PTA—just made my career gap more glaring. It wasn’t until I took all my nonprofit work off my resume that I started to get potential employers to return my calls. A recent study found that a job applicant with “PTA coordinator” on her resume was 79% less likely to be recommended for hire compared to an equally qualified woman without children.¹ I found this to be true, and spent the previous three years rebuilding my resume.

I got off at the correct floor, crossed the foyer, and knocked on an unassuming door. The door opened and I stepped into the open warehouse-style office space. The exposed brick walls and large glass windows gave character to the high, unfinished ceilings. The space was modern and cool, with a full country kitchen and several lounge-style seating areas. There were numerous small conference rooms, one with a ping pong table centered prominently and a mini-fridge in the corner.

¹ (Source: LeanIn)

I spanned the office full of desks and people quietly working, many with headphones on.

This was technology in San Francisco—and simply getting the meeting lined up had been an accomplishment.

It’s true what they say, the technology industry is for the young. It’s the ultimate hoodie culture. But, somehow, this company seemed open to more diversity. Could it be a fit? I was escorted into the largest conference room to prep for my presentation.

Six people entered the conference room and introduced themselves. One by one, they each opened their MacBook Air computers. I followed suit. I knew I needed to be smart, engaging and, most importantly, establish credibility upfront in order to be taken seriously. I took a deep breath, forced a smile, and fired up the PowerPoint presentation I had prepared over the weekend. I may not have given my best presentation that day, but it was enough to land the job—and this was the moment I knew I had relaunched my career.

Chapter 3: How I Lost My Identity and Found My Way Back

Do you remember 2009? It certainly was not the euphoric ode in Prince’s iconic song 1999, in fact, the theme song for that year could have been Linkin Park’s Burn It Down. The financial collapse in the United States sent a ripple effect around the globe, leaving devastation and destruction in its path. It was an interesting time best characterized as challenging, tumultuous, and exhausting. For me, it was the worst year of my life. Period.

Executing the Trifecta

My business partner and I had just sold “our baby,” The ProportionofBlu, a premium denim jean company that we built from the ground up. The company had grown rapidly, garnering a cult following, and selling around the world in over 200 of the best specialty and department stores—Barneys NY, Jeffrey, Holt Renfrew, Harvey Nichols, Podium, Mitsukoshi, United Arrows, Joyce to name a few—and post financial collapse, I was not able to raise the funds we needed to continue the expansion. We sold the company to our manufacturer, who I knew would not be able to sustain the business, however, it was the best option for the future of the brand at the time. Sadly, the manufacturer closed the company a year later, crushing what had literally been blood, sweat, and tears in the building of it.



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To add insult to injury, I finalized my divorce in 2009, crashing all of my dreams of living happily ever after—no white picket fence and no children because we had been too busy working to get ahead—and for what? He was my college sweetheart and best friend, spending twenty years together, but differences grew with age that would not sustain the relationship. It was a long drawn out “uncoupling” as Gwyneth Paltrow coined—a three-year separation, to be exact—because I didn’t have the courage to pull the trigger on the di-

vorce paperwork and lived in the fantasy that we might still work things out, even though I knew in my heart that divorce was the right decision. So, we amicably divorced that year and went our separate ways.

One bright spot in 2009, which truly felt like divine intervention, was the opportunity to move to Westchester County, New York and live in a beautiful house in the country and help build a startup organic farm. In the moment this opportunity came forward, I simply surrendered and said “yes” without thinking about it. Just said “yes,” which was wildly out of character for someone like me, who planned and orchestrated every detail of her life. At the time, my life felt like it was over, so what did I have to lose? Besides, fashion and farming have some similarities, I told myself. I rationalized that both are consumer goods—in fashion you have your raw materials which go to the manufacturer and come out the other side a package product, and with farming you have your livestock which go to the slaughterhouse and come out a package product—and both have similar distribution with wholesale and retail sales channels. This is obviously an over simplification, but I knew how to take ideas and build them into global consumer brands, so I’m qualified for this, right? Actually, in the moment I honestly didn’t care and went for it because I truly had nothing more to lose—my pride and ego were already totally deflated at this point.

So, in 2009, I did what most people

say not to do—the trifecta—I changed jobs, moved, and got divorced. Needless to say, it was the deepest and darkest year of my life, providing the perfect storm to manifest life altering personal growth. It still takes my breath away thinking about it!

As I’ve gotten older, I realize that opportunities for personal growth are like stepping stones that the universe provides for you in the exact order and magnitude that it believes you can handle. There are no short cuts, or if you take them, the opportunities will simply continue to present themselves until you decide to learn whatever it is that you are suppose to learn. Fighting the change is similar to a Chinese finger trap, the more you pull and struggle, the tighter the hold. It’s not until you relax and lean into it that things start to loosen up and shift. So, it’s in those moments when we are most vulnerable and share our pain with another person and ask for help, that we can learn and gain insights from each other’s experiences. Who knew that being vulnerable could be such a powerful catalyst for change.

Building a Network

After spending three years in the countryside of New York, I felt the deep sadness lift and a new life emerge. Filled with a newfound sense of confidence and hope, spurred from a lot of deep reflection and growth, I felt ready to go back to the Bay Area. The farm was up and running successfully, experiencing exponential growth, so my commitment to the

project was complete. I was ready for my next big challenge and eager for what awaited!

It was Valentine's Day 2012 and I had landed back in the Bay Area, the place I was born and raised, feeling like I had returned and all would be waiting with open arms. It didn't take long before my expectations were smashed with the reality that many of my friends and business network resided in Los Angeles—where I based the denim company, worked as a buyer, and went to college—as well as New York—because of the farm and corporate offices of the fashion brands I previously worked for. I felt so confident in my decision to return back to the Bay Area, and yet the universe once again intervened with another “growth” opportunity, and I fell flat on my face. No job miraculously appeared and I didn't have a network to lean on, and in fact, I realized that much of the network and people I knew were from my ex-husband's network. After all, he was the one in the tech industry, not me. And, like we hear so often about men, my ex-husband was a master networker, whereas I was so busy working hard to get ahead, I had not invested in building a professional network—actually, I never got the message of how important this would be for my career. To this point, I went from one opportunity to the next seamlessly, not having to rely on anyone for a job, so I had no idea what I was in for, and in the Silicon Valley, it truly is all about who you know. All I could think was, here's Heather—she has no husband, no job, and no network—I had com-

pletely lost my identity!

I am a very private person who takes great pride in being self-sufficient. “I've got this” was my motto, even if I didn't know what I was doing, because who wants to appear weak when I know I will figure it out? It was not until this point that I realized how many missed opportunities I had in my life, to learn and gain valuable wisdom and advice from others, yet I had completely brushed them off. So, here I was, stripped of all the things that I valued as part of my identity, and had to go out as my “naked” self and ask for help.

I turned to my dear friend Paula, who knew me well, and was privy to what had been going on the last few years. She was a soft pillow to land on and so kind in helping me. She introduced me to Sharon, who coincidentally moved back to SF a few years earlier from London and realized she needed a whole new set of friends. We immediately connected, and having built a very large and powerful network, Sharon was generous in making some key introductions and that's how I met Anne. I bonded with Anne immediately because she too had recently moved to SF, giving up a very active work and social life in NYC, to be with her now husband. When I met Anne, she was just starting Parlay House as a way for her and other women to connect. It was an organic effort, starting with a very small group of us, and each of us pulling another woman forward to be part of this special community. It was not about where we worked or whom we

knew, it was about exploring intellectual and cultural curiosities that would allow us to learn and grow and thrive in each other's company. It was truly the place where I learned how to show up as my “naked” self, realizing that my identity was not all the superficial things I thought were of value, it was simply being present and showing up as my authentic self. It allowed me to meet so many amazing women, including Julie, who is another super connector, like Anne and Sharon, who helped me build the robust network that I have today.

It was not an overnight journey and one hard fought to finding my way back. Going from a sense of not belonging to feeling at home with myself took a lot of courage and perseverance. I had to show up when I didn't feel like it or felt like the worst person on this earth. I had to face rejection and failure, only to get up and try it again. Building my network took a very concentrated effort of saying, “yes” to events, coffees, conferences across many different groups as well as the willingness to give my time and help others. It has been a long-term investment where I am now able to share the dividends of this experience with so many others.

Today, as an advocate for women in leadership, I mentor a lot of women and encourage them to step into their greatness. We all have something special to offer, and one of my gifts is seeing the potential in others and sharing what I see until they believe it in themselves. It took me a long time to learn this, so if I can

share the Cliffs Notes, it is pure joy for me. The time I dedicate to networking and my active involvement in women's leadership organizations has been so rewarding. I have the honor of knowing a very diverse group of women across industries and roles and I absolutely love connecting them to provide insights, support, and encouragement to one another. Like the women who modeled this for me, I am a connector who is helping to propel women forward, and what a gift that has been in my life.

I am profoundly grateful for all the women who have helped me along the way and for the deep and very meaningful relationships I have cultivated. If our net worth is based on the quality and depth of our relationships, then I am a rich and very lucky woman, who is singing like it's 1999!



On Left: *Anu Gali.*

Below: *Heather Jerrehian.*



Above: *Elizabeth DiGaetano.*

On Right: *Olga V. Mack.*



On Far Right:
Leedjia Svec.

On Right (from left
to right):
*Olga V. Mack and
Elizabeth DiGaetano.*



Above (from left to right): *Leedjia Svec, Anu Gali, Laura Fechete, Heather Jerrehian, and Olga V. Mack.*

On Left (from left to right):
Laraine McKinnon and Olga V. Mack

Chapter 4: Reflections of a Rocket Scientist

I am an engineer, which means I get to solve problems in my career. It's a good choice for me, as I am a creative person and problem solving is creative. This keeps me interested and engaged.

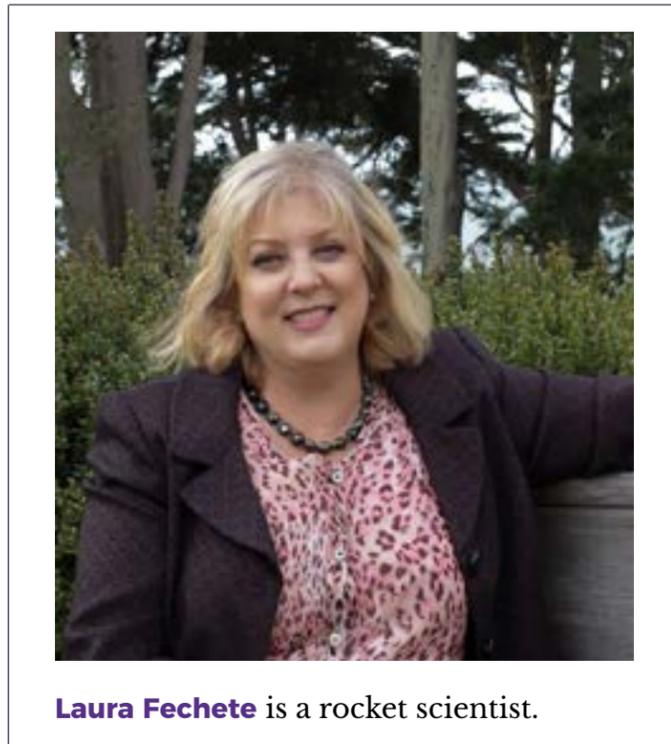
I have spent the majority of my career in the aerospace industry, using satellite technology. I get to solve super cool, totally intriguing space, launch, and satellite survival problems. I am a rocket scientist!

During my career I have experienced several key circumstances where colleagues have helped me or tried to help me, and such assistance always made the difference in what I did and what I learned.

My first lesson was difficult, but with a little help from friends, ultimately comical.

Having Your Credibility Challenged

Early in my career, I had assignments where I built computer finite element models of satellite parts and ran analysis load cases to verify the parts were strong enough to survive launching on a rocket into space. Some parts might get tested before being assembled into a satellite. Testing could be a dynamic test, basically shaking the part, or a static test, pulling on the part to prove it wouldn't break. Testing is a fun but stressful job because so much is riding on a positive outcome. Fun because you get to see the hardware up close. Stressful be-



cause if something goes wrong it means extra time and effort to figure out what might be wrong and work to fix it on a very tight schedule.

I had been working on static tests with the main test engineer for several big tests, learning and being trained. Now it was my turn, my first big test as the lead test engineer, not merely assisting. My first 'solo' test!

The test was for a large graphite composite part, often used in satellites because it could be lighter but stronger than a metallic part. Composite parts can have a great diversity of material properties depending on workman-

ship and how they are built. For this static test, I had performed analysis on the part and extracted test loads from the finite element model. Test loads were documented in a test procedure, outlining how the test would be conducted. The procedure included checks and processes for a successful test. In this test, a quality representative would review the final test set-up, and sign-off on the procedure before the test began. This was standard practice.

On this particular day, the quality representative came by and asked me who was in charge of the test. I said I was. He then said, "No, I mean who is running the test?"

"I am," I replied.

"No," he kept on, "I want the engineer that did the analysis, came up with the loads, and will be responsible for the loading during the test."

"That would be me," I said.

He then said something along the lines of "no it can't be you," so I walked away. I couldn't quite believe the conversation had actually happened. This wasn't the dark ages, this was the nineties! I went outside to collect myself, and then went back to continue working the test preparations. In the few minutes I was gone, a more senior engineer had stopped by to check the set-up, since this was my first solo test. He was talking with the quality representative as I came closer.

"Laura is in charge," I heard him say. "She did the analysis, came up with the loads, and will be the test engineer, here to review the

data and complete the test. Any questions can be answered by her, but otherwise you should sign off and she can continue the test preps and start the test tomorrow." The quality representative did sign his portion of the test procedure.

The next day at work, the test technicians had made several paper buttons that they were wearing, as well as one for me to wear. Their paper buttons read, "Who's the BOSS?" My paper button read, "That would be ME." Periodically during the test they would yell out "Who's the boss?" and turn and point to me.

That day is one of my all-time favorite memories of work. I still remember the senior engineer and those technicians very, very fondly. The quality representative, not so fondly. That was one of my first experiences working with a great team, proving to me how important colleagues are to success.

Learning from colleagues wasn't always a natural thing, and accepting 'help' from senior colleagues was another learning point.

The Power of a Mentor

A few years into my job, a director thought I had potential beyond my current assignment. He was a champion of women in the company and at least three other women got a start in leadership positions because of his assignment of stretch tasks, special assignments, and other projects, allowing us to showcase our skills and abilities.

He assigned me a mentor, telling me

when he was at a similar point in his career, he had a mentor and it made a great impact on his growth as a leader. When he first spoke about mentorship I had hoped he would be my mentor, but the name he supplied was not his. I was disappointed. I don't remember if he gave a reason, but I remember thinking it must be because he had recently been promoted to vice president and mentoring someone could seem like favoritism.

He assigned me someone he said he liked and respected from a sister organization, which in hindsight was a very good match as a mentor. I made the phone call and went to speak with my new "mentor" -- once. It was fine, and I was warming up to the idea of a mentor, any mentor. Then my new mentor left the company before I even had time to schedule a second meeting. I did not take it personally, but I was too inexperienced to go back to the Vice President and ask for another name. So for another decade, I had no mentor. I understood the importance of a mentor and worked to be one for young women engineers, but I didn't find a replacement for my first assigned mentor.

I offered myself as mentor to young women engineers and was actively involved in recruiting at colleges so young women engineers could see me, a female engineer, a female manager, a highly technical female engineer manager. A Rocket Scientist. I found this rewarding and thought of it as paying it forward. I enjoyed the conversations I had with my

mentees, it felt good to help them see their options, and thrilling when they succeeded. But it felt like my career had stalled. I was still enjoying my work, getting special assignments and tasks, but I kept seeing my male colleagues get promoted after they finished a special assignment, while I would get another special assignment on top of my current responsibilities. In hindsight, a good mentor could have helped me see this sooner than I did, and help navigate the next assignment to negotiate something for myself instead of only more work.

About a decade later, I 'found' another mentor, by myself, no assignment necessary. I discovered the nuances and benefits of having a mentor, including great advice on advocating and getting positive notice. Finally! I truly understood what a gift the original director had tried to bestow. My biggest career regret is not going back to him at the time to ask for another mentor, to take better advantage of getting help from a colleague.

Now that I have a friend and colleague as a mentor, I make sure he knows how much I appreciate his time and advice, and always let him know the outcome when I use the advice. My professional life is better having him as a sounding board. I am grateful for this and also for advice from friends and colleagues.

A Coalition of Women

A final lesson on how important friends and colleagues are comes from my membership in a women's leadership network,

The CLUB, an incubator of women leaders. Through The CLUB, I have been able to focus on learning and positive experiences during my career. I've also learned about many other organizations for professional women by interacting with the diverse members of The CLUB.

One such organization is Girl Geek Dinners, which hosted a panel discussion at a large Internet company event. The panel consisted of a vice president, a technical individual contributor, and a founder of a small company recently acquired by the large company -- all women, all leaders, all with very interesting stories. At the Q&A portion, an audience member asked the founder a question, "How has being a women hindered your career?" The

founder's answer really resonated with me. She said she gets asked that so many times that she no longer answers it. Instead, she replies that being a women in tech has helped her succeed in her career. She urged us to also reframe the question in our own careers.

The CLUB helps reframe questions, and at each event I am surrounded by many talented, interesting, and questioning women. Yes, there are set-backs, but The CLUB is a great support system, our own "Gals" network for our own war stories, making it easy to reframe the question to, "How has being a woman helped in your career." As a member of The CLUB, I am helping friends and colleagues as I was helped to become a better engineer, a better leader, and a better Rocket Scientist!



Posing in front of the Golden Gate Bridge. *From left to right: Leedjia Svec, Olga V. Mack, Anu Gali, Heather Jerrehian, Laura Fechete, and Laraine McKinnon.*

Chapter 5: Finding My Voice and Paying it Forward

“Why don’t you go and ask where you should register?” my father repeatedly insisted as we walked into the giant white building of Washington High, affectionately known as “Wash.” Wash, nestled in San Francisco’s Richmond District, looked every bit like the classic urban American public school. Behind the modern metal doors were a dark hallway, steep black marble stairwell and, finally, the lobby decorated with aged murals depicting the life and times of George Washington. The picturesque lobby was illuminated by sharp sunlight from large windows showcasing a panoramic view of the Golden Gate Bridge.

I later learned that Maya Angelou, the American poet, civil rights activist, and Pulitzer Prize nominee, attended Wash. In her book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, she writes about the power of the human voice: “Words mean more than what is set down on paper, it takes the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning.” As I first walked into Wash, I didn’t notice the murals, the panoramic view, or the photographs of Maya Angelou and, at that particular moment, I was distinctly aware of not having a voice—literally.

“But I don’t speak English!” I protested. At home in Ukraine, I spoke freely and boldly. In the English-speaking world, however, I found



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myself suddenly without a voice. I was acutely aware I didn’t fit the typical American public school student “look” of sagging jeans, tight tops, bare midriffs, and flashy makeup. Revealing my broken English would only alienate me more. Yet my father insisted: “Of course you do! It is only English, a very easy language! You speak Russian, a much harder language to master. Just go. Talk to them. They will understand you.” He said this with so much conviction, I didn’t dare question his logic.

Surely he is crazy, I thought. *He has to know I’ve spent the past three years learning German.* Since Ukraine borders Germany, I naturally believed we were more likely to visit Germany than any English-speaking country. I had no reason to visit the English-speaking world, let alone live there. Even though I spent more time socializing rather than studying in my German classes, my German was still better than my nearly non-existent English.

“It is all in your head,” my father insisted, distinctly pointing to his head to emphasize his point. “Just go and speak. Speak away. They will get it if they want to get it. Your English is fine. You know enough English to achieve anything.” I still wasn’t convinced. *Since when is “absolutely none” enough?!* And yet he had so much conviction. *He must be right*, I thought hesitantly. *Besides, even if he’s delusional, it’s not my place to tell him—I’m only thirteen.*

Throughout my career at Wash and even during my college years, my father repeated the “it is all in your head” speech at every opportunity. Speaking English was never an easy task for me to master. Throughout high school and the majority of college I lived what I used to call a “dog life”—understanding everything around me without the ability to participate or reply. Yet I never questioned my dad’s logic, not because I am particularly agreeable, but because I wanted him to be right. More than anything in the world, I wanted my limitations to, indeed, be “all in my head.”

And so, to everyone’s surprise (except for

my parents), during my freshman year of high school I decided to become an attorney. If my inability to speak English was all in my head, why not choose a profession where a mastery of the English language is paramount? Whenever someone asked me about my graduation plans I declared—in broken English but with strong conviction—that I was going to become an attorney and be amazing at it. “I will earn my living by speaking, writing, and arguing in English,” I told teachers, classmates, and anyone who would listen.

Although this declaration was met with mixed reactions of ridicule, polite silence, encouragement, and everything else in between, it gave me something powerful: a goal to work toward. I started recognizing and celebrating milestones on my journey. I began caring less about what others thought and focused my energy on doing everything I could to achieve my long-term goal. Others would often imply or even directly tell me that because of my broken English or distinct accent they couldn’t imagine me being a successful lawyer. I perfected the art of biting my tongue, even though inside I was thinking, *If you worked as hard as I do, you could improve your clearly limited imagination!* I just smiled politely at my skeptics and kept working toward my next milestone.

I reached one of the most memorable milestones in my junior year of college: I finally regained my voice. I finally left my “dog years” years behind and started speaking,

replying, challenging, and participating. Once I hit this milestone, nothing was going to stop me. Having a voice made me feel alive. I loved using my new voice so much that not even my introversion or fear of public speaking stopped me from agreeing to speak at my UC Berkeley graduation. There's nothing like an audience of over 10,000 people to make you feel that you have a voice! Somewhere in the middle of my speech, I realized that my dad was right. It was all in my head.

After I gained my voice, graduated from law school, and began helping several clients, I realized that my voice is even more powerful than I ever expected. My fellow Wash was right: my voice was a tool to infuse words with meaning, reach out, develop relationships, and communicate on a deeper level. I was eager to share it with others and even help them find their own voices.

As a Silicon Valley in-house counsel, I'm surrounded by amazing legal and business talent, with access to people that may not be in everyone's reach. To pay it forward, I started using my voice to tell the stories of other women who are in-house lawyers with high leadership potential – those who do amazing things, stay true to themselves, and transform the legal landscape one person, company, and industry at a time. My goals are simple: inspire students and new professionals, highlight up-and-coming in-house counsel, and learn a few things in the process.

I found that the stories I tell have often

become these women's national profiles. They built courage, became their jumping boards to greater leadership opportunities, and gave them a voice. In retrospect, it all makes sense. As Maya Angelou wrote, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." And I know from experience the agony of being unable to tell your own story, as well as the joy of finally finding your voice. All I can add is that there is no greater gift than being trusted to tell another person's story as they refine their professional voice.

Even years later, my father is right. It is all in our heads—the limitations, the insecurities, the doubt. We each have a voice and it is the most powerful tool we have, because the stories we tell about ourselves define us; they can shape our identities, our dreams, and our destinies. After years of silence, I know that the only way to live life is with a true, authentic voice. Now that I've established my voice, I'm dedicated to helping others find theirs.

Chapter 6: My Career in a Network Cloud

What's best about one's network is that it is a living, breathing amalgamation of the energy of you and your contacts and friends as you move together through your careers and your lives. You can picture these connections like constellations moving from company to company, location to location, sometimes shifting together as colleagues re-group at a new organization, sometimes spinning out to pursue new solo activities.

This network has been the backbone of my career success. In fact, the last time I applied for a job from an advert was in 1983, which was when I experienced a strong urge to leave my home town of Bristol, to set up base in London. 30-odd years later, every job since has come through a personal connection in the form of an introduction or referral.

A few years ago engineers at LinkedIn developed a charting tool took all of your contacts and mapped them, color-coded, into an infographic. My map had significant clusters for my connections from Apple, Adobe, Macromedia, and, of course, those master connectors: The PayPal mafia! Smaller nodes mapped out connected expatriate friends, who, like me, had hopped from country to country. And then, one of the smallest but most intense areas of activity and connection, my Book Club.

I've just discovered that an organization called [Socilab](#) offers a similar free mapping



Judith Coley is a marketing genius.

Photo by Iona Wolff.

service if you allow them access to your LinkedIn network—have fun geeking out with this tool!

Be Strategic—Know What You Want

If and when people offer to help you, it's important to know what you want, and be able to package your requests into simple 'asks.' Make it easy and quick for people to help you, and most importantly do thank them afterwards and let them know what happened—it's the most gratifying thing to learn when an introduction has borne fruit.

Find Your People

As social animals, humans love to gather—

and a shared interest or culture is one of the most relaxed ways to meet people. I met one of my closest friends at a Mac User Group in Singapore, we were fish out of water compared to the programmers but forged a fast friendship that still prevails. Think about all of your interests and experiences and see how you can plug back into some of them—for the joy of rediscovering that hobby as well as the fun of meeting those birds of a feather.

Listen and Connect—Wherever You Are

Most people pick up on the fact that I am an extrovert interested in others. Pretty much anywhere you go, but particularly if you are outside your normal places and routines, you are bound to meet people. Why not strike up a conversation? You'll sense if someone doesn't want to engage; but you'll be pleasantly surprised how open most people are. At business networking events this is precisely why you are present, so take business cards and if you are with friends, please split up. You can swap notes later, but you'll miss out if you are already joined at the hip with someone you already know. Conversational openers don't have to be complicated, but I would also caution you not to try to 'close' the conversation too fast, or at all, on the first meeting. For now, just map out some general areas of mutual interest and have fun. You never know what you will learn from these conversations and how a mutual connection may serve you both in the future. Please don't ignore those younger, old-

er, or different from you—everyone has value.

Learn from Expats

Expats in general are good at business and social networking because they have to land and expand wherever they are, and if their overseas assignment is brief, they want to be established as fast as possible to make the most of their time. Ask a friendly expat how they connected locally when they moved, there may be some ideas for you there.

In 1993 I left my corporate job at Apple UK and joined the ranks of expat wives living in Singapore, it was easy to feel isolated as my then husband was away more than half the time, and for the first time since college I was not working.

However, my social and professional life kicked off, when through various international connections, the Swedish wife of an American guy working at HP, heard about me, and faxed my home office with a list of doctors, sporting clubs and a women's network group Prime-Time—and this was all before I had met her face to face! With this fax clutched in hand, within a few weeks I had some great social events to attend, an intro to a job and some freelance work for Apple South Asia. She also became a delightful friend.

The “Don'ts” of Networking

There are a few situations where it may be better to cut your losses and throw in the towel for the night: A few years ago I was at a big

advertising industry party in New Delhi. It was a noisy, dark, crowded space where business cards were pushed into recipient's hands and any introductions could barely be heard above the din. I've been to events in the States where the introductions are more akin to speed dating and you leave not feeling like you had a single authentic conversation, it's never good when you sense peoples' eyes are grazing the room behind you.

Offer to Help—and Pay it Forward

At the CLUB we have a nice custom of encouraging everyone to “make the ask,” and it's great if you can offer timely ways to help. Like author Stephen Covey (7 Habits of Highly Effective People) I like to think that all my relationships are like bank accounts—you want to have a healthy credit with individual people before you think about ‘drawing’ on that connection's account. You don't want the other person to be thinking Janet Jackson's line ‘What have you done for me lately?’ So ensure you've got the backs of your closest connections, pay it forward to new folks and keep the strongest connections fresh by coming up with new ways to connect.

What's the Future of Business Networking?

Online there's also the risk that LinkedIn may have ‘jumped the shark’. I get requests to connect every day from people I have never spoken with and with whom I have little to

nothing in common, and they offer no context or common ground. On that note it's now a common sales tactic to invite a target to connect directly via LinkedIn rather than making an effort to take the time to build a relationship. Now that LinkedIn has been bought by Microsoft, it's going to be interesting to see whether it holds its dominant position or whether Facebook or some yet-to-be launched social network will supplant it.

My Network Today

In the meantime, I cherish and support my thriving, busy, inspiring network of colleagues and friends—we map our movements via LinkedIn, but connect and celebrate via Facebook. Some of the top connectors in my network are also my closest friends, they are the people I trust for a candid opinion and for honest feedback about my latest goals and projects. They are solid gold. Let's connect soon!

Chapter 7: A Letter to My Younger Self

Dear Younger Self,

I am so grateful to share my experiences with you. I hope you will learn from them, and not make these mistakes. I know some things you need to learn on your own, perhaps this will give you guidance when you reach those rocky, or celebratory, points. I have clustered my advice under headings, with the experience that leads to that advice expanded upon. I wish you the best in your journey and cannot wait to see where you go!

If Someone Says You Can't, Show Them Otherwise

I believe a great deal of what makes a success so enjoyable is the challenge. My most favorite accomplishments were the things people told me I could not do. In the beginning of high school, we were given a project to make a model of the digestive system. I wanted mine to be 3D and asked if I could make it that way and was told no, meaning they didn't think I was capable. I made my 3D model and it became the model for future classes. Later in high school, I decided I wanted to play soccer, but we didn't have a women's soccer team. A few other girls and I decided we would start one. We were told we couldn't do it and wouldn't succeed. The other girls all dropped off but I persisted, being told no was fuel for me to find every reason for them to say yes.



Leedjia Svec, Ph.D. is a US military officer, scientist, instructor, and facilitator.

I polled the community, found a volunteer coach, got recycled uniforms, and combed through legal documentation. I will never forget going before the school board with my proposition, citing Title 9 that we had to be granted this opportunity. I will never forget the joy of being told yes, we could have our soccer team. I didn't know that this sort of activity fell in the realm of political science and activism but I loved it. I played my senior year as Co-Captain of the team and later received a Nike soccer coaching scholarship in college. The soccer team is now the pride of the school! Believing in myself and my dream has taken me very far; I got to and through both graduate school and the Navy despite

being told I shouldn't or couldn't and even that I had nothing to offer. To all the younger selves out there, never doubt your selves and your dreams, and to those who may think time has passed them by, it is never too late to be what you might have been.

The Mountain is Always Steepest at the Top

When I was younger I never understood those folks who quit so close to the conclusion of a major accomplishment. It just did not make sense, but as I neared the end of my Ph.D., I started to understand. I pushed myself in every way to complete my degree- sleeping 3 hours a night on average, eating poorly, studying nonstop, skipping major holidays. It was brutal. Though completion was near, it felt like an eternity away. My grandmother sent me a card that had this image of a mountain top with the above quote on it and it reminded me not to give in, give up, or forget that I was just around the corner of success. Thankfully, I did complete it! I am proud of what I accomplished and I had a great celebration. I think of that when things are challenging, I know the view will be worth it and to keep going.

Things Can Make You Better or Bitter: Choose to be Better

In graduate school, I experienced sexism, assault, and inappropriate behaviors from professors, ranging from physical to emotional. I

lost my beloved grandmother, and I was not in the best state of mind or health. I thought at one point I was done with graduate school and figured it was only a matter of time before I was a grad school dropout. Though I felt lost, I could not leave school, so I took fun classes, joined support groups, and spent more time with fellow female graduate students. In this process, I discovered I had a choice, I could let things make me bitter or better. I put my experiences through the lens of time and asked myself, what would the impact be in 1, 5, or 10 years? I could run away or I could grow, however painful, and succeed. I knew that some of the experiences would never leave me, (I might always be a statistic), but they didn't have to define me. I chose to be better. To my surprise, taking the fun classes aided and expanded my education and kept me going; I was not asked to leave school. I regained my spirit, found my path, and even though I didn't see the mountain top, I had faith it was still there. This was literally shown to me when I had taken a trip out of the area via plane and went from flying in a clear sunny sky above the clouds to landing in bleak gray stormy weather. Even in the dark, the sun is always shining. I knew then that I was not about to let anyone or anything derail me from my goals. Through the people who believed in me more than I could at the time, I persevered and completed my Ph.D. It is one of my most favorite things I have done, and it is something no one can take away.

The Habits That Serve You Now May Hinder You Later

As related above, I had a tough outer shell. It got me through sexism, and other negative experiences, but it did not serve me when I joined the military. I learned that not every adaptation, skill, or way of being is useful for every situation. There are different types of leaders for example, and they have different strengths and weaknesses that lend themselves to be successful in different situations. My independence was an asset when I was younger, but a challenge when I was older. True skill is in knowing when to do what, and being willing to let go when it no longer serves you. Over time I have learned that education and emotional intelligence is how I can improve my habits, and with effort, my situation. We have inherited baggage that is literally and figuratively engrained in our history, and we can learn techniques to influence others, but ultimately, we can only control ourselves. I have discovered that the more positive, flexible, adaptable, and patient I am, the more successful I am likely to be. I also believe, the earlier you start building good habits, the easier and stronger they will be!

Zero Zero

I have given a great number of speeches, talks, lectures, and the like. At one institute where I worked, I regularly taught classes and gave lectures, which were always rated. In one instance, I applied new techniques that I

thought were sure to make me a better public speaker. Instead, they backfired! I had the worst reviews I have ever gotten in my life; I was told that I had no business speaking, that I should never lecture again, that I was the worst instructor ever, and more negative comments. It was truly the worst talk I had ever given and I had to face the same crowd again in a week! I weighed the different options; I could get someone else to give the second lecture, cancel the class, call in sick, go back to a crowd that hated me... all I did know was that I did not want to face them again. During that week of deliberation, I watched a movie where a soccer team had fallen behind and had given up. The coach said to them, "Go out there like you are not already beaten and running behind. Go out there like the score is zero, zero!". In the movie, the team rallied together and left the game with dignity. This movie made me think, what if I went back to the crowd like I had never spoken to them before? What if I pretended they did not find me the worst speaker ever? I pondered this possibility and re-examined how they perceived me so poorly. I prepared my next lecture incorporating constructive feedback and ignored the useless mean comments. I decided to go back to that lecture as if they were brand new and had never seen me before. It was scary but I gave it my best shot and at the end of the lecture, they all applauded! My ratings had improved and the comments were positive. This was a powerful lesson for me, and it also illustrated that some-

times a spectacular failure sets the stage for a spectacular comeback.

Sometimes a Spectacular Failure Sets the Stage for a Spectacular Comeback

As the above story illustrates, a truly awful failure can set the stage for a truly awesome comeback (and in time, makes for a more interesting story). When you have reached the lowest point, you can only go up. I recognize that not all failures are alike however, if you are going to laugh about it sooner or later, might as well be sooner rather than later! While mistakes take time to heal from, they do offer the chance for improvement if we let them.

It is Amazing What You Can Achieve Just By Asking

Dear younger self, there are so many more things to share with you but I am out of time and over my allotted word count (remember those habits!). I will leave you with this; seek and ask! I have been around the world, won awards, gone to the White House, and made a truly positive and lasting impact on literally thousands of others all because I looked to see what was there and asked to be a part of it (or started it!). I have asked if I could volunteer, make, create, help, measure, test and evaluate, speak, and more. Sometimes you must give away the very thing you need; a smile, some cash, time. It will come back to you, and it will take you places you did not know existed. It

will take you to outer reaches of your limits, your imagination, your world. Someday, you may even be asked to share how you got to be where you are, how you came to your successes. Sometimes, the most amazing things can happen, all because of a question. So what are you waiting for?

With love,
Me

Conclusion

We encourage you to reflect on your own career. What challenges have you encountered and how have you learned from them? Have you listened to that voice inside that demands that you become more? Do you see yourself in the stories of these women? Have you mindfully invested in yourself to build your brand, your network your power? The world desperately needs more women in leadership. We're proud to present the stories of the women of the 2016 Incubator as one small contribution to the women's leadership community.

About the CLUB: (www.theclubsv.org)

The CLUB is a diverse community of inspiring, professional women helping each other accelerate their leadership journeys. We provide a unique environment that offers the opportunity for women leaders across industries, and career stages, to connect in a supportive, and intellectually challenging, environment, as well as mentoring, leadership, and soft skills development programs. It's not just getting to the top, but having the skills and confidence to succeed once you have arrived.

Together, we are building a critical mass of women leaders in Silicon Valley, so that when a company needs to fill a leadership position, whether for a CEO, CIO, CTO, General Counsel, Director or a project leader, it need not look any further than the CLUB.

Membership in the CLUB is by application only. Women of all industries and career levels are encouraged to apply.

About The CLUB Incubator: (www.theclubsv.org/incubator-program)

The Incubator helps talented women propel their career growth and personal potential. Our annual program begins in January and brings participants ("Incubees") through a structured path of action steps that build purposefully. Key areas of work ("honeycombs") include: furthering your career development, refining your personal brand, expanding your public profile, building out your network, giving back to the community of professional women, and preparing to sit on boards.

Unlike a mentoring or coaching program, the Incubator designs actions on behalf of Incubees to enable recognition for their expertise and leadership. The Incubator inspires women to take their leadership to the next level, and to give back—within the CLUB community and across their own network - to strengthen the pipeline of women leaders.

Ideal candidates have developed their expertise, typically have 12+ years of experience, already serve as role models, and are eager to share their views and expertise publicly.

Biographies



Anu Gali is an exceptional Engineering Leader and a full-stack engineer who architects scalable solutions and empowers her teams to performant solutions cheaper, better, and on time.

Anu is Director of Engineering at Groupon and held leadership roles at Shutterfly, Adobe, and Yahoo. She earned her Masters in Computer Science at University of Illinois at Chicago. Anu is also CTO/Board Member for The CLUB Silicon Valley, a mentor/coach for Techovation Challenge, Gils Who Code, and the Anita Bog Institute. She won the Silicon Valley Business Journal 2017 Women of Influence Award.



Heather Jerrehian is an innovator and serial entrepreneur who takes ideas and builds them into successful global consumer brands. Heather is currently VP/GM Custom Products at Mass-

drop. She is the founder of two luxury brands The ProportionofBlu and JonJere, and advises several startups. Heather earned her BS from University of Southern California, Marshall School of Business. Heather is a "go-giver" who supports for-profit and non-profit endeavors advancing women and girls.



Elizabeth DiGaetano makes things happen. She is a top-producing sales executive who has known success in multiple industries. Elizabeth is currently a Senior Account

Manager at HelloSign, and previously held senior sales positions at iChip by LifeNexus, Putnam Investments, Wells Fargo and Franklin Funds. Elizabeth holds a BA from University of Colorado at Boulder, is a mom and philanthropist, and is a sought-after inspirational speaker on women relaunching their career.



Laura Fehete is a rocket scientist. Laura currently works as a senior manager of structural analysis at Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company and previously held roles at

SF Muni and SSL. Laura earned her MS in Materials Science and Engineering at UCLA, and Bachelors in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Maryland College Park. She serves as Vice President on the Board of the Palo Alto Players and is a past president of the Silicon Valley Engineering Council.



Olga V. Mack is a powerhouse: she's a startup advisor, nationally-recognized author, public speaker, award-winning general counsel, women's advocate, and entrepreneur. She currently serves as General Counsel at ClearSlide where she received the Watermark's "Make Your Mark" Impact, Corporate Counsel of the Year, and Women Leaders in Technology Law awards. Olga is also an adjunct professor at Berkeley Law, TEDxEmeraldGlenPark organizer, and founder of the Women Serve on Boards movement. Olga has held various legal roles at Visa, Zoosk, Pacific Art League, Wilson Sonsini, and Yahoo and earned both a B.A. and J.D. from UC Berkeley.



Leedjia Svec, Ph.D. is a US military officer, scientist, instructor, and facilitator. She is currently based at NASA Ames Research Center where she serves as Director of Military Programs fostering collaboration between NASA, the US Navy, and the US Department of Defense. She holds an MA and Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology from University of Nevada Reno, an MA in International Relations from St Mary's University and a BA in Psychology/Technology Engineering from University of the Pacific.



Judith Coley is regarded as a marketing genius—she pioneered new tech categories while working deep within top tech brands including Apple, Adobe, AOL and PayPal. Judith now runs PR and analyst relations for Genesys. Judith has an MBA from Golden Gate University, a Master from Chartered Institute of Marketing, and a diploma from The University of Wolverhampton. She is a literacy tutor and served on the Board of The CLUB Silicon Valley.



Laraine McKinnon is a strategist and influencer who approaches hard-to-solve problems with a blend of behavioral science, big data and practical implementation. She is a recognized retirement readiness expert, an advocate for women leaders and a designer of diversity & inclusion programs. Laraine is the founder of LMC17, LLC and held previous roles at BlackRock, BGI and WFNIA. Laraine is a graduate of Wellesley College and serves on the Board of The CLUB and the Advisory Board of Betterment for Business.

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