

# Women in Leadership – Motivation and Purpose

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Mahatma Gandhi once said: Be the change you want to see in the world.

This famous phrase was Gandhi's way of telling us to take actions that embody the values and changes we want to see in society. Instead of waiting for others to initiate change, this motivational statement urges us to take personal responsibility and lead by example in promoting positive changes in our community and beyond.

So, you've all heard of Gandhi. How many of you have heard of Cynthia Erivo?

Cynthia Erivo is a highly acclaimed British actress, singer, and songwriter known for her powerful voice and emotive performances.

Cynthia started her career in music, and eventually transitioned to acting, gaining fame and notoriety for her work on Broadway, notably with her award-winning performance in "The Colour Purple."

Cynthia is motivated by a desire to bring to light the stories of the underrepresented and to showcase the complex beauty of women through her work [1].

Her purpose? To create and be part of projects that provide a voice to those often left unheard, emphasising inclusivity and the celebration of diverse narratives within the entertainment industry.

Now a celebrated figure with Emmy, Grammy, and Tony wins, and Oscar nods, Erivo's success is not just in her accolades but in her commitment to inclusivity and joy in the arts. Her path demonstrates a powerful blend of talent and purpose, leading by example and changing narratives in the entertainment world.

This is one of many examples of a successful, inspirational woman motivated to lead and share their purpose to make the world a better place.

Today, we won't just be talking about why it's important for women to be in leadership roles; we'll be exploring the heart of what drives women to these positions and how they're making a positive impact on their organisations and society at large.

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Many women leaders share a common trait: a strong sense of purpose and a desire to make a positive impact [2].

Take, for instance, the story of Kelly, a woman who climbed the ranks in a leading, male-dominated tech company. Kelly began her career as a software developer and she was great at her job right from the start. She continued to excel, gaining promotion after promotion, and eventually worked her way into the role of Chief Technology Officer, providing her company with the strategic vision needed to manage all of the technical functions at the organisation.

Kelly earned this role thanks to many years of hard work and dedication, but thinking back, Kelly will tell you that what motivated her wasn't the title or the paycheck but the opportunity to mentor younger women in the tech field, providing them with the support and guidance she wished she had received early on in her career.

Her motivation stems from a desire to change the industry for the better, making it more inclusive and welcoming for the next generation.

Another powerful motivation for women seeking leadership roles is the chance to lead change.

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Let's talk about Anna. Anna was a semi-retired barrister who returned to the UK after spending a year travelling through Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, where she saw first-hand the devastating effect that climate change is having on many of these island nations.

Anna founded a non-profit organisation focused on environmental conservation. Witnessing the effects of climate change motivated her to take action, using her leadership role as a high-powered, well-connected lawyer to advocate for sustainable practices and policies. Her purpose was clear: to leave the world better than she found it, inspiring others to join her cause.

Women in leadership positions are often motivated by the opportunity to align their roles with their personal values and purpose. For example, a woman leading

a major healthcare organisation could be motivated by her own experiences with healthcare disparities.

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Take Lucy's story as an example. As a student, Lucy began experiencing persistent stomach pain. Despite numerous visits to healthcare professionals, her complaints were often minimised, attributing them to stress or minor issues.

Despite being brushed off time and time again, Lucy knew something was wrong, and it was clear to her that no one was going to advocate for her other than herself. Lucy realised the profound impact of advocacy in healthcare, especially for women whose medical concerns are frequently overlooked. This realisation ignited a spark in Lucy – she needed to be the change she wanted to see in the healthcare system.

Lucy is completely dedicated to healthcare. In her leadership role, Lucy champions policies and training programs aimed at ensuring patients are heard and accurately diagnosed from their initial visits. Lucy's mission was clear: to transform the healthcare experience so that no woman would have to endure the struggles she faced.

Lucy's journey from patient to healthcare leader exemplifies how personal adversity can be transformed into a catalyst for systemic improvement, ensuring a more compassionate and responsive system for all.

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So, how can we use personal purpose and motivation for leadership that helps others? Consider these tips:

- Identify your passion: Understand what drives you and how it can serve others.
- Seek feedback: Listen to the experiences of those you aim to help to tailor your leadership effectively.
- Educate yourself: Gain knowledge in your area of interest to advocate for change confidently.
- Network: Connect with like-minded individuals and mentors for support and collaboration.
- Start small: Initiate change within your immediate environment before scaling your efforts.
- Be resilient: Expect challenges and be prepared to persevere through setbacks.

- Communicate effectively: Articulate your vision clearly to inspire and mobilise others.

By focusing on these actionable steps, women can leverage their unique motivations to become impactful leaders [3].

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Today, we've explored the diverse motivations that drive women to seek leadership positions and the impact they make when their roles align with their purpose. From mentoring the next generation to advocating for change, women leaders are reshaping industries and communities [4].

Let's each commit to one action that will support women in leadership within our organisations. It could be as simple as starting a conversation about gender diversity, advocating for flexible work policies, or mentoring an aspiring leader. Together, we can create an environment where women are encouraged to lead, motivated by their purpose, and empowered to make a difference.

Thank you for joining today's session. Let's continue to empower women to leverage their motivation to make positive change.

[1] Cynthia Erivo on How She Learned to Tell Stories That Hollywood Has Overlooked, Cynthia Eviro (2021)  
<https://variety.com/2021/tv/news/cynthia-erivo-genius-aretha-franklin-harriet-tubman-1234908626/>

[2] What Motivates Women to be Leaders, Joan Michelson, Forbes (2020)  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanmichelson2/2020/09/30/brand-new-study-identifies-top-motivations-of-high-achieving-women/?sh=26d1b2abe8c2>

[3] *Power with Purpose: How Women's Leadership Boosts the Economy and Society*, Lynn Taliento and Anu Madgavkar, McKinsey Global Institute (2016)  
<https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/overview/in-the-news/power-with-purpose>

[4] Five Successful Women Share What Drives Them. Harpers Bazaar (2020)  
<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/fashion/jewellery-watches/a32800225/five-successful-women-share-what-drives-them/>