

According to management thought leader Herminia Ibarra, the only way to grow is by stretching the limits of who you are. Leading figures from a variety of fields describe the transition that had the strongest impact on their leadership identity.



“I had to face my fears and trust others to help us get to where we wanted to go.”

Blake Mycoskie,
Founder and Chief Shoe Giver, TOMS

Today, the idea of a social entrepreneur is generally defined and understood. But when I started TOMS, this definition and career path actually didn't exist. For me, a transition clearly happened when I changed my way of thinking about business as solely a way to earn money and profits, and instead starting thinking about giving and mission. And how incorporating giving into business would actually make that business stronger in the long term. This did not happen overnight, and it did not come easy. I had to face my fears and trust so many others to help us get to where we wanted to go. But I realize now that it helped shape my identity not only as the Chief Shoe Giver at TOMS, but as a person who hopefully can have a positive influence on business for many years to come.

TOMS

While visiting Argentina in 2006, entrepreneur Blake Mycoskie, born 1976, witnessed intense poverty and what it really meant to be shoeless. He then created Shoes For A Better Tomorrow, later shortened to TOMS and the “One for One” business model: for every pair of shoes sold, his company would donate a pair of shoes for those in need. Today TOMS shoes are sold globally in more than 1,000 stores. In 2011, TOMS added eyeglasses to its “One for One” offering. Since 2014, TOMS Roasting has been selling coffee and in return donating fresh water to people in supplier countries.

Having been in motorsports since the age of eight, and always been in the minority as a female, there have been many stages of my professional career which have impacted on my identity. However, the move from racing for Mercedes-Benz in the German Touring Car Championship to Formula One in 2012 has had the strongest effect by far. F1 is one of the most competitive and lucrative sports in the world, and is also male-dominated. Since transitioning to F1 I have stretched the limits of who I am – both physically and mentally. I found my own way in a tough sport and stayed true to myself. I focus on performance, train extremely hard to be the best I can be and support the team. Gender continues to be a debate in Formula One, but my mantra is “we are all defined by our strengths and character, not by our gender” and I will continue to stand by this.

Susie Wolff

is one of the few women who have graduated to the top level of motor racing in Formula One. As a child, Wolff, who comes from Scotland, would accompany her father to races and began her own career in kart racing. She made her debut in Formula motor sport back in 2000, before racing touring cars for Mercedes-Benz from 2006 to 2012. She became Formula One test driver for Williams in 2012 and when she took part in free practice sessions at the 2014 British and German grands prix she became the first woman to drive in F1 for 22 years.



“We are all defined by our strengths and character, not by our gender.”

Susie Wolff,
Formula One racing driver

“Probably the most important source of personal development is ‘overextension.’”

Andrea Illy,
President and CEO, illycaffè



Competition changes markets. So in order to survive, companies need to continuously adapt, by changing what they do and how they do it. Something similar happened to me and my company 25 years ago when we decided to completely rethink our quality management principles and supply chain. Another aspect to be taken into consideration is the exponential growth of complexity in the socio-economic environment. This puts a lot of pressure on delivering and requires a special attitude, known as ‘overextension.’ It means working beyond one’s own capacities and is probably the most important source of personal development. And last but not least: how to get this done by thousands of people? The answer is leadership. But can you really learn leadership? I rather think that one pursues leadership, like a utopia. You’ll never reach it but you keep trying harder. Every day.

illycaffè

was founded in 1933 by Francesco Illy as a small coffee roasting enterprise in Trieste. Andrea Illy, born 1964, now represents the third generation at the helm of the family firm. Today, illy sells a single top-quality blend of espresso to 140 countries around the world, although the company’s portfolio also includes coffee machines, designer cups and accessories. Worldwide distribution is supported not least by a franchise chain comprising over 200 coffee bars and a network of top international baristi. illycaffè takes a strong stand on sustainability and purchases its raw materials direct from local coffee farmers in South America, Africa and Asia.

The transition that had the strongest impact on me came in 2007, in the form of a painful wakeup call. Sleep-deprived and exhausted, I fainted, hit my head on my desk, and broke my cheekbone. In the wake of my collapse, I found myself going from doctor to doctor, to find out if there was any underlying medical problem beyond exhaustion. There wasn’t, but doctors’ waiting rooms were good places for me to ask myself a lot of questions about the kind of life I was living. I had other times when I should have woken up but didn’t. This time I really did and made many changes in the way I live, including adopting daily practices to keep me on track. The result is a more fulfilling life, one that gives me breathing spaces and a deeper perspective. And as a leader, I’m much better equipped to transcend upsets and setbacks.

Arianna Huffington

is an author and journalist with Greek roots. In 2005 together with Kenneth Lerer she founded the online newspaper *Huffington Post*, since when she has been widely considered one of the world’s most influential writers. Her political influence on US public opinion has won her the moniker *Citizen Huff*. Moving on from the more Republican views she expressed in the 1980s, today she considers herself a progressive populist and in 2003 ran as an independent candidate for governor of California against Arnold Schwarzenegger.



“Doctors’ waiting rooms were good places to ask myself a lot of questions about the kind of life I was living.”

Arianna Huffington,
Co-founder and Editor-in-Chief, *The Huffington Post*