SHE LEADS

With

CONSCIOUS BALANCE

23 accomplished women leaders share how they've built lives of conscious balance - through intentional habits and thoughtful choices that help them show up as their best

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Introduction

The Power of Conscious Balance

Bhavna Toor

CEO & Founder, Shenomics



What does it really mean to live a balanced life? It isn't a perfectly color-coded calendar. It isn't doing it all, and doing it all well, without ever dropping a ball. Conscious balance is something deeper. It's about designing your life around habits that let you show up as your best - and having the permission to set boundaries when something doesn't serve that.

This Book brings you the stories of 23 remarkable women leaders who've done just that. Across industries and cultures, they've stopped chasing the myth of "having it all" and instead built lives around what's truly aligned for them. This wasn't about doing less - it was about choosing with intention.

Each story is a window into what it looks like to lead a grounded life. These women have learned to set boundaries without guilt, to protect their energy, and to redefine success on their own terms.

As you turn each page, may you feel the quiet strength it takes to say no to what doesn't serve you, and yes to what does. This book is both a source of inspiration and a guide to living and leading, with more balance.

Thank you to each woman leader who contributed her voice. Your stories are a powerful reminder that success doesn't require sacrificing yourself to get there. And a heartfelt thank you to Charu Mathur, the

curator of this collection. Your care and attention made this book possible.

Let this not just be a book you read, but a permission slip you carry forward. Because a balanced life begins with a conscious choice.

With gratitude,

Bhavna

CHAPTER 01

Deepshikha Kumar Anand

Founder and CEO, SpeakIn



Often counted among the most networked entrepreneurs in Asia, Deepshikha is one of the region's most respected women leaders, known for building meaningful connections that translate into real impact. She is the recipient of the 2021 Economic Times Most Promising Women Leaders Award, the 2020 Google Digital Women Award in Leadership, the 2020 Top 100 Women Entrepreneurs recognition by the Government of India, and the 2019 and 2017 Asia Women Icon Award, Singapore. As the founder of SpeakIn, Asia's largest digital platform for professional learning, Deepshikha has created a powerful ecosystem that connects over 18,000 global CEOs, speakers, business experts, and thought leaders across eight countries. Her work is driven by a strong belief in making knowledge more accessible and creating spaces where learning is not limited by hierarchy or geography. Deepshikha's journey reflects a deeply intentional approach to building impact while staying anchored in what truly matters.

Conscious balance has different meanings at different phases of one's life. In the early years, it is often about making the most of where you are, seeking opportunities, learning actively, and allowing exposure to shape your thinking. When I look back at my own journey, it has been a bit of all of this.

I studied engineering in New Delhi and later pursued my Master of Business Administration (MBA) at the Indian School of Business (ISB), Hyderabad. That experience expanded my worldview significantly, opening doors to new opportunities and giving me a deeper perspective on how businesses and leaders operate globally. My career then took me across Europe, the United States, and different parts of Asia.

Over time, this exposure evolved into a more intentional way of living. My choices became increasingly guided by what truly mattered to me. About six years into my corporate career, I felt a strong pull to build something of my own. That instinct eventually led to the creation of SpeakIn nearly a decade ago.

I have always been uncomfortable with rigid hierarchies, especially when they decide who gets access to knowledge and who does not. I strongly believe that if someone has the intent, curiosity, and willingness to learn, they should be able to access the wisdom of those who have walked the path before them. This belief became the foundation of SpeakIn.

Through SpeakIn, we bring together leaders from diverse domains such as corporate, business, government, and academia to create meaningful spaces for connection, shared learning, and the exchange of perspectives. Over time, it has grown into Asia's largest thought leadership platform for leaders across business, bureaucracy, governance, academia and beyond. The platform offers one-on-one coaching, curated speaker sessions, and access to global CXOs and experts.

At this stage, I began to see conscious balance as focusing on what truly matters to me across the essential pillars of life such as family, health, work, financial stability, and meaningful relationships. It is also about being fully present with whichever pillar matters most in a given phase, while trusting that the others will find their space in time.

I have seen this happen in my own life!

My work is extremely important to me and is a natural extension of who I am. This is not just because of its demands, but because it genuinely

energizes me. It serves as a strong anchor for my emotional well-being, creating a deep sense of fulfilment and stability.

This connection allows me to give far more of myself in terms of energy, time, and intent, without feeling constantly depleted.

When you are engaged in work that gives you energy and joy, it changes how you show up. You begin to move beyond individual milestones and focus on the larger impact you are creating. What we have built through SpeakIn reflects this. We have created meaningful access by bringing together people who would never ordinarily find themselves in the same room. Young individuals at the start of their journeys are able to interact with accomplished leaders, entrepreneurs, and professionals they would otherwise only see from a distance. This sense of conscious balance that comes from my work, enables me to take on greater responsibilities and push myself further.

When it comes to integrating conscious balance into my life, I have realized that you don't arrive at it one day and hold it steady forever. It is something you work towards, every single day. Over time, I have stopped chasing the idea of perfect balance. Instead, I have learned to accept that there is balance even within imbalance. Life does not operate in neat, equal parts. Some days demand more of you at work, while on others, your family needs you more. Weekends may be for friends, or simply for yourself. The proportions keep shifting, and that is not a failure. That is life.

This shift from seeking perfection to accepting fluidity has been incredibly freeing.

I also do not follow a perfectly defined roadmap. I have never had absolute clarity on every step ahead, and over time, I have come to see that as a strength. What I do have is a strong sense of what I am working towards, even if the exact path keeps evolving. That allows me to keep moving forward and adapting as I go. For me, conscious balance lies in holding that duality. It is about being deeply anchored in what matters to you, while remaining open to how the journey unfolds.

In my daily life, I stay anchored to my priorities and give my best within those spaces. At the same time, I make it a point to enjoy what I do while

I am doing it. Increasingly, I have also started paying more attention to my physical well-being. I have always considered myself an active person, but I realized that being generally active is not the same as consciously investing in physical health.

Over time, my own journey has shown me that conscious balance looks very different for women at different stages of life. Organizations, therefore, have a significant role to play in genuinely supporting the well-being of the women in their workforce. In the early phase, women need opportunity, confidence, and reassurance that it is okay to not have everything figured out. In the next stage, often around marriage and partnership, they need flexibility and support as they navigate shared decisions and shifting priorities. And later, especially in their 40s and beyond, they need recognition, understanding, and encouragement to value their experience and show up as their full selves.

Support, therefore, cannot be generic. It must be thoughtful, contextual, and aligned to where a woman is in her life journey. Because while we speak about equal opportunity, we must also acknowledge that women's lives come with inherent stages and responsibilities that cannot simply be wished away.

In the end, conscious balance is not about getting everything right, but about staying aware, aligned, and present as life continues to evolve.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Your journey is not linear

Conscious balance begins with self-acceptance. At every stage of life, your priorities, energy, and circumstances will shift. Instead of resisting these changes or holding yourself to a fixed path, recognize that your journey will naturally evolve. When you learn to accept yourself at each stage, you build a more lasting and meaningful way of living.

2. Acknowledge and prepare for your life stage changes

Conscious balance requires awareness of the physical, mental and even hormonal shifts that come with different life stages. Too often, realities like menopause, postpartum, and fertility challenges are not openly

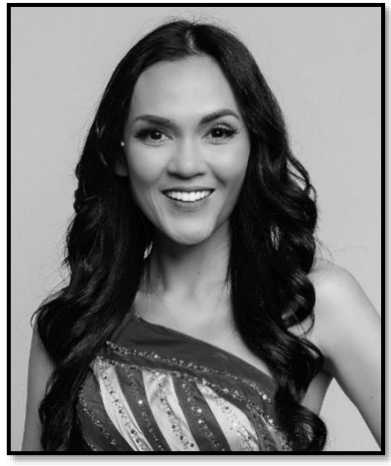
discussed, leaving women unprepared. Recognizing and understanding these changes allows you to navigate them with greater clarity, support, and self-compassion.

3. Align your work with what truly matters to you

When your work feels meaningful and energizing, it creates deeper fulfilment and enables you to sustain impact over the long term.

CHAPTER 02

Dona Amelia



Co-Founder and Managing Director, EGN Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia

Dona Amelia is a leader shaped by resilience, purpose, and transformation. Born in a small village in Indonesia and raised in extreme poverty, her upbringing instilled in her a deep sense of determination and clarity of purpose. From competing on reality TV show and performing in many events to becoming an award-winning TV presenter, actress, and singer, Dona built a multifaceted career before transitioning into leadership, where she now works closely with senior executives across Asia. Today, Dona is the Co-Founder and Managing Director of Executive Global Network (EGN) across Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, a confidential peer network and leadership ecosystem for senior executives, CEOs, and business owners. She is also a global motivational speaker, leadership trainer, and coach who empowers individuals to rise above adversity, lead with intention, and create meaningful impact. Her journey is a powerful reflection of conscious balance, living with purpose while nurturing growth across every dimension of life.

I was born in a bamboo house in Banten, Indonesia, with no electricity, a dirt floor, and no clean water. We didn't have much, but I had something powerful: a clear sense of purpose. From a very young age, I wanted to make my parents happy and lift them out of poverty. That purpose became my anchor. It guided my decisions, shaped my

ambition, and gave meaning to every step I took. Looking back, this is where my journey of conscious balance began.

For me, conscious balance means staying anchored in a clear purpose while intentionally taking care of every part of your life. Your work, health, relationships, and inner well-being. It is not about doing everything at once, but about staying aligned with what truly matters at each stage of life.

My father was a high school teacher, and my mother ran a small food stall in the market. Life was not easy. We didn't even have money for milk, so I drank the starchy water from rice. But what I witnessed growing up shaped me deeply.

In a patriarchal environment, I saw that while men were expected to lead, women carried equal responsibility at home. Watching my mother contribute so actively instilled in me a belief that women must step forward, take ownership, and create their own paths.

When I was 15, my father discovered my talent for singing and encouraged me to pursue it. From that point on, my life became a rhythm of studying, excelling academically, and singing. I sang at weddings, events, and anywhere I could. It was never about fame. It was about creating opportunities to change my family's life.

While still in university, I was able to build a house for my parents, buy them a car, and even take them for Hajj. For me, that was more than success. It was the fulfilment of a purpose I had carried since childhood.

After graduating, I moved to Jakarta and entered the entertainment industry fully. I worked as a TV presenter, actress, and singer, often appearing on television daily. My schedule was intense, with late-night shoots followed by early mornings. There were constant pressure and frequent rejection. Every opportunity required multiple auditions, and nothing was guaranteed.

I didn't have formal training. What I had was the belief of my parents and the discipline to keep showing up.

That phase of my life taught me something important. No matter where you are — whether on a stage or in a boardroom, you have to show up

and give your best every single time. At that point, I was achieving a lot, and once again, it was not just about ambition. My journey was deeply rooted in my purpose to become financially independent so that I could support my family and myself.

In January 2018, my husband and I moved to Singapore, and that marked a major turning point in my life.

My purpose began to evolve. It expanded beyond achieving success for myself and my family into serving others through leadership, impact, and transformation. I wanted to help people grow, especially senior leaders who often carry immense responsibility in isolation.

This led me to become the Co-Founder and Managing Director of Executive Global Network (EGN) across Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, together with my husband Nick Jonsson. EGN is a confidential peer network and leadership ecosystem where senior executives, CEOs, and business owners come together to share challenges, gain trusted peer intelligence, and grow together. Through EGN, I work closely with leaders across industries, helping create spaces where meaningful conversations, strategic thinking, and authentic leadership can thrive.

At the same time, I also began building my path as a global speaker, leadership trainer, and coach. Today, I speak on resilience, conscious balance, leadership, women empowerment, and personal transformation, sharing my story and lessons with audiences across different countries and organizations. Whether I am speaking on stage, facilitating leadership workshops, moderating executive conversations, or coaching leaders, my mission remains the same: to inspire people to rise above adversity and become the best version of themselves.

Through this work, my understanding of conscious balance deepened even further, and I often extend it to the idea of the “Wheel of Life.” There are several key areas in life that all need attention and balance, including career, finances, health, spirituality, personal growth, relationships, and fun and recreation. When one area becomes dominant and others are neglected, imbalance slowly builds. Conscious balance is

about intentional living across all dimensions of life. I learned this lesson in the most difficult way.

In May 2025, at the peak of my career, while leading EGN across the region, speaking internationally, and supporting senior executives through leadership challenges, I was also trying to become a mother.

I underwent In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) treatment while continuing to travel, speak, facilitate leadership sessions, and work at full intensity. I believed I was strong. I believed I could manage everything.

But I was not in balance.

The IVF journey did not succeed, and I lost six embryos. That experience was one of the most painful moments of my life. It forced me to pause and confront a difficult truth: being strong externally does not always mean you are balanced internally.

Conscious balance is not about pushing through everything. It is about knowing when to slow down, when to heal, and when to give yourself space and compassion. Some seasons of life require achievement. Other seasons require presence.

That experience changed me deeply, not only as a woman, but also as a leader, speaker, and human being.

Today, I practice well-being daily by being intentional about my physical and mental health. Every morning starts with prayer. Right after that, I go for a run that gives me the oxygen and energy I need to take on the day ahead. When I run, my leadership mind is also active. It helps me think clearly, make better decisions, and show up fully in everything I do.

I also believe organizations play a critical role in supporting this journey for women. Women go through different life stages, such as motherhood, which require understanding and flexibility. Organizations must do more to truly see and support women through these transitions.

At the same time, women need to step forward, build visibility, and actively network, both online and in person, for their growth and overall well-being. Organizations must create environments that support this by

providing platforms for women to grow and shine. Encouragement from leaders, even in small ways, can make a meaningful difference.

My sense of purpose is what continues to keep me consciously balanced. It reminds me that success is not only about what I achieve, but also about how I live, how I feel, and the impact I create along the way.

In everything I do, whether it is singing, performing, speaking, coaching, or working with leaders — I am guided by that purpose: to make people feel valued, uplifted, and inspired to become the best version of themselves.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Create your personal grounding framework

Build a simple set of guiding principles for yourself — like I have with Dreams, Opportunities, Never Give Up, and Action (D.O.N.A.), to stay aligned with your purpose. Define what each element means in your life, write it down, and use it as a compass to make decisions and maintain balance and direction.

2. Practice the 4PE Method

Pray, Prepare, Practice, Perform, and Evaluate. This is the framework I use to stay grounded and continuously improve. Pray to stay connected to purpose and gratitude. Prepare thoughtfully before opportunities. Practice consistently to build confidence and mastery. Perform with full presence and energy. Evaluate honestly afterward to learn, grow, and become even better for the next challenge.

3. Slow down when life demands it

You cannot do everything at once. Listen to your body and your life. The most important moments require presence, not just performance.

CHAPTER 03

Edina Szabo



Director, People & Culture, South-East Asia Pacific, Radisson Hotel Group

With a 14-year career shaped across Europe and the Southeast Asia Pacific region, Edina leads the people strategy across 13 countries for the Radisson Hotel Group. In 2024, she was recognized as one of Asia's Top 50 HR Leaders, and in 2026, Radisson Hotel Group was a winner in the Gold and Silver categories at the Employee Happiness Awards Singapore & Malaysia under her leadership. Through her own experiences with ambition, burnout, and rediscovering balance, Edina has come to believe that when people truly thrive, organizations flourish. She is passionate about building cultures where performance and well-being co-exist. Grounded in her own practice of conscious balance prioritizing clarity of mind, emotional well-being, meaningful relationships, and continuous growth, she leads with both purpose and authenticity.

I originally come from Hungary, but I have lived most of my life in Spain and studied in Denmark. I studied adult education management and later completed my master's degree in cognitive psychology and communication. My education and exposure to multicultural environments have played a defining role in shaping me as an individual.

Over time, I've come to realize that taking care of myself and protecting all the parts that make me who I am - emotionally, physically, and mentally, is not a compromise or a luxury. Balancing all aspects of my well-being is essential to sustaining my ambition and the life I want to build.

Conscious balance is something I truly understood only in the past seven years. In that sense, I would say I was a late learner in my 14-year career. I was born in the Year of the Dragon, something many people in Asia understand well, and ambition has always been part of my nature.

For a long time, I did not realize that constantly pushing beyond my limits was not actually helping anyone, least of all myself. I assumed that balance meant making difficult trade-offs between career ambitions, building a fulfilling personal life, and creating financial independence. In constantly deciding what to prioritize, my own well-being quietly slipped to the bottom of the list.

Looking back, I can clearly see how close I came to burnout many times. There was even a period when I truly hit rock bottom. It was not just physical exhaustion or mental strain, it was both! I remember constantly feeling deeply sad and completely drained. The only thing I looked forward to was the weekend, not to enjoy it, but simply to stay in bed. I had no energy or desire to meet anyone or do anything. I was so exhausted that it felt as though I was resting all weekend just to gather enough strength to get out of bed on Monday and return to work. I was simply too tired to live. And that is not the life I wished for myself!

That phase forced me to pause and rethink everything. When I finally began integrating conscious balance into my life, I learned an important lesson. When you take care of your well-being and feel happier within yourself, you build the strength to sustain your ambitions and keep growing in your career. It is not about blaming people, companies, bosses, or processes. The real change has to begin within yourself and by taking responsibility for your own well-being.

This shift toward well-being has also helped me build continuity in my career. I have now been with the Radisson Hotel Group for seven years,

growing within the organization, moving across roles and continents, and stepping into senior leadership.

Three years ago, I moved to Singapore to take on the role of Head of People and Culture for Southeast Asia Pacific at Radisson Hotel Group, overseeing thirteen countries across the region. In this role, I help create cultures where diversity, inclusion, and balance are part of everyday work. It is a large and complex responsibility, but the alignment between my work and conscious balance is what supports me.

For me, conscious balance is about pausing to check in with myself instead of moving through life on autopilot. It means asking honest questions like, "How do I feel?" and "How does this situation make me feel?" and having the courage to listen to the answers, even when they are uncomfortable. That simple act of stopping and listening has been key to finding my balance.

This awareness has transformed how I show up as a leader, making my approach more conscious and intentional. Practicing conscious balance has enabled me to lead with greater clarity, compassion, and purpose. When my peers and team see that it's okay to make mistakes, to admit you're tired, and to enjoy moments of fun, it brings a human side to my leadership and makes me far more approachable.

When I found my own sense of balance, I was able to channel that energy into creating more meaningful impact around me. One example close to my heart is the Lean-In Circle we have built at Radisson. It brings together women from 36 hotels across different countries, departments, and levels, with one member hosting a monthly call and choosing a topic.

These conversations range from relocation to leadership challenges and learning new processes. It is about learning from those who have already navigated similar transitions or walked through similar roles and experiences. This initiative is a strong reminder that when you are grounded and balanced within yourself, you can create spaces where others feel supported.

At an organizational level, I strongly believe that companies need to take real accountability. This means putting clear processes and metrics in

place, addressing issues like pay gaps, and actively measuring well-being outcomes. Without strengthening these foundations, everything else will remain superficial.

Organizations also need to genuinely support women's growth. Too often, women are evaluated differently than men. Men are sometimes promoted for potential, while women are promoted only after they have already proven themselves. Leaders must consciously recognize and challenge this bias.

Another area that needs attention is modernizing health benefits for women. While conversations around menopause and reproductive health have started, they need to be fully integrated into benefits packages. Traditional benefits like parental leave should also be expanded and refined, because women's health needs are still not fully understood or supported.

In my personal life, there are three key practices that have played an important role in shaping my overall well-being and how I live each day.

The first is financial well-being. I am not naturally a numbers person, but I decided to take ownership of my finances and start investing in my future. That shift gave me a sense of confidence and control.

The second is meditation, which I was introduced to while living in Asia. It has helped me slow down, reflect, and stay grounded.

The third is volunteering, which has given me a sense of well-being I had never experienced before. Every month, I spend time at a soup kitchen in Singapore, preparing meals for underserved communities. The people we serve include refugee children, young adults, elderly individuals, and single mothers. This experience grounds me and connects me to something larger than myself. It has also introduced me to a meaningful network of like-minded individuals.

Conscious balance is something I practice every day, in small and intentional ways.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Take time to check in with yourself

Ask simple questions like how do I feel, and how does this situation make me feel. As women, we often define ourselves through roles like mother or wife rather than as individuals. Understanding yourself is the first step to making better choices.

2. Choose progress over perfection

The 80–20 approach works far better in the long run. You don't need to give 200% to everything all the time. Focus on what truly matters and allow yourself to be "good enough" in the rest.

3. Reconnect with what brings you joy

Return to activities you truly enjoy whether it is baking, gardening, running, or riding horses. When you are fully immersed, nothing else occupies your mind. That sense of flow naturally creates balance and brings joy back into your life.

CHAPTER 04

Gayatheri Silvakumer



Vice President, People & Culture, Star Alliance

Gayatheri has more than 25 years of international experience across aviation, transportation, infrastructure, engineering and media, leading people and transformation agendas at Star Alliance, Rolls-Royce, Bombardier, VICE Media and McCann Worldgroup. Raised in a modest family in Malaysia, she learnt early that quietly observing people and understanding what drives them. Those experiences shaped a leadership philosophy rooted in awareness, empathy and intentionality. Having built her career across Malaysia, India, the United Kingdom and Singapore while raising her son as a single mother, she believes conscious balance is not about perfect equilibrium, but about making intentional choices, adapting to each season of life and creating the conditions for people to thrive.

When you are born into survival, you do not really have the luxury of dreaming. From a very young age, my focus was simply on getting through each day. I grew up in Malaysia in a family with very little. My parents worked as laborers, and as the second child and eldest daughter in a family of seven, responsibility came early. Contributing to the family wasn't a choice; it was simply how life worked.

School assistance provided my books and other supports. I loved learning, but I never felt I belonged. My classmates talked about

holidays and experiences that were completely unfamiliar to me, so I stayed quiet.

By the time I was fifteen, that quietness had become observation. I watched how people communicated, built relationships, and influenced others. I believed being quiet and introverted would hold me back. Instead, I learned to turn my ability to observe into a strength to understand people before trying to influence them.

At the time, I had no idea those years were shaping me for a life that would repeatedly challenge me to leave my comfort zone, rebuild in unfamiliar countries, earn credibility in unfamiliar rooms and keep moving through uncertainty. The greatest skill I developed wasn't resilience alone. It was awareness.

Conscious balance is about making intentional choices about where I invest my energy, the decisions I make and what I prioritize. Every stage, from building a career to being a single mother, asked something different of me.

Learning to embrace those seasons rather than fight them built an adaptability that helped me find my footing through change and a resilience that deepened with every challenge.

I started my career as a receptionist, excited not because I had a grand plan, but because I could earn while continuing to learn. Learning has always mattered more to me than titles.

In my free time, I sat with a colleague who managed payroll using handwritten ledgers. I enjoyed accounting in school, so I asked him to teach me. When he fell sick, I stepped in. It was my first experience of being trusted beyond my role, and it showed me that opportunity can arrive simply as a responsibility someone needs you to take on.

Around that time, the CEO for Asia noticed me. As the company prepared to open a new call center, he asked me what I wanted to do. No one had ever asked me that before. I spent two days thinking about it. If I'm being completely honest, there wasn't a sophisticated career strategy behind my decision.

Back then, Human Resources (HR) seemed like the most exciting place to be. Everyone was always saying, “You have to ask HR,” or “HR interviews people and decides who gets hired.” To my younger self, they seemed to know everyone and somehow be involved in everything. I remember thinking, “That sounds exciting!” Looking back, it's funny how one naïve decision, driven purely by curiosity, ended up shaping the next 25 years of my life.

I started in payroll, but my curiosity kept taking me to new areas of HR. From recruitment to compensation and benefits, I eventually found my place in HR business partnering.

I entered HR business partnering confident in my expertise, but reality quickly humbled me. I was assigned to support a sales team, and at my very first leadership meeting, the sales head stopped me at the door. Even after explaining that my manager had asked me to attend, I was not allowed in.

Instead of forcing my way in, I chose another path. I built a relationship with one of his direct reports and used lunches and short conversations to understand the business. When I was eventually invited into leadership meetings, I spoke very little. I observed how decisions were made, what leaders cared about and where I could genuinely contribute.

The sales team was under immense pressure to deliver ambitious growth targets but lacked the right people. Rather than treating it as a recruitment challenge, I approached it as a business problem. Drawing on workforce planning, recruitment, compensation and budgeting, I built a hiring strategy that translated commercial goals into a practical people plan.

The Sales Director had little interest in HR. After considerable persistence, he finally gave me five minutes during one of his cigarette breaks. I knew it might be the only opportunity I would get.

I walked him through the numbers, the workforce implications and how the right hiring strategy could help his team achieve its sales targets. That five-minute conversation completely changed our relationship. From that day onwards, I was no longer seen as someone from HR. I had become a trusted business partner. That experience shaped how I have

approached HR ever since: credibility comes from understanding the business well enough to solve its problems through people.

As my career progressed, so did my responsibilities at work and at home. Every experience required new choices, and my understanding of conscious balance deepened.

When I moved to Mumbai, my son was a toddler. I dropped him at daycare, visited during lunch, picked him up in the evening, cared for him and then worked late into the night. I kept going because I believed I had to.

Then one night, my son suddenly became critically ill. I rushed him to the nearest hospital in an auto-rickshaw, and moments later he went into convulsions. For six minutes, I truly believed I had lost him. They were the longest six minutes of my life. By God's grace, a doctor arrived and saved him.

Two days later, I was back at work as though nothing had happened. I told no one because I didn't want to be seen as vulnerable or incapable. At the same time, I was navigating unfamiliar cultural norms, earning trust in a predominantly male environment and raising my two-year-old son alone, far from home. It was one of the most defining seasons of my life.

There was no space for me to fall apart. I focused on the next meeting, the next challenge and making sure my son was safe. Without realizing it, I built a protective shield around myself.

I convinced myself that showing vulnerability meant I wasn't coping and might therefore be seen as less capable. So, I kept delivering, moving and carrying what life placed on me.

Looking back, I realized that same shield which helped me survive also kept me from processing what I had experienced or allowing others to support me. I had become incredibly good at carrying everything alone because, for so many years, I believed that was what strength looked like.

Years later, I allowed a leader to see a more vulnerable side of me, something I would rarely have done before. His response stayed with me: “It takes courage to be vulnerable.”

That challenged a belief I had carried for years. I understood that vulnerability did not diminish capability or strength. What mattered was having the emotional maturity to know when to show it, why and with whom.

It changed how I led. I became more accepting of vulnerability in others and more conscious of creating space for people to express what they were experiencing. It changed me as a mother too. I wanted my son to know he never had to wear the protective shield I had worn for years. Strength could also mean feeling safe enough to say, "I'm struggling," "I don't know," or "I need help."

As women, we all move through different seasons of life including building, caring, rebuilding, growing and rediscovering ourselves. Each season changes what we need, what we value and what success means to us.

Through every one of those seasons, I believe we should never lose the freedom to be ourselves. That doesn't mean sharing everything with everyone. It means having the wisdom to know when vulnerability serves us, what we choose to share, how we share it and who has earned the right to hear it.

That same intentionality should guide our words, decisions and how we show up for others. I've learnt that trust, credibility and influence are built quietly through consistent actions, sound choices and respect for the people around us.

For years, survival taught me that saying "yes" was the safest option. I believed resilience meant taking on more, pushing harder and finding a way. Eventually, I realized that wasn't resilience. It was survival.

Conscious leadership taught me something different. Leadership isn't measured by how much we carry, but by how intentionally we choose where our time, energy and attention can create the greatest impact.

That lesson became even more real at Star Alliance when we relocated our headquarters from Frankfurt to Singapore after twenty-six years. It wasn't simply an office move. We were rebuilding an organization, shaping a new culture, redefining leadership expectations and establishing new ways of working. Everything felt important.

I realized that trying to do everything would dilute my impact. Instead, I asked what would create the greatest long-term value for the organization. That became my filter, helping me focus where it mattered most, trust others to lead and accept that some things could wait. Conscious balance isn't about doing less. It's about creating more value through greater clarity.

The same principle applies to how organizations support women.

I believe organizations sometimes begin with the wrong question. Instead of asking, "How do we support women?" perhaps we should first ask, "Do we truly understand what success means to each woman?"

Too often, we assume every woman is striving for the same goal. She isn't. Some aspire to leadership, others to deep expertise, flexibility, caregiving, rebuilding after setbacks, or simply meaningful work. None of these aspirations is more valuable than another.

When organizations recognize only one pathway to success, everything else can begin to feel less valuable. We have become too focused on identifying future leaders and not focused enough on recognizing the many ways people create value.

I've worked with extraordinary individuals whose greatest contribution wasn't becoming the next executive, but being the trusted expert, mentor or steady presence, an organization could rely on during change. Recognizing different paths to success strengthens confidence, belonging and wellbeing. Not everyone needs to become a leader of people to become a leader of impact.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Awareness changes everything

Understanding myself, recognizing what each season required, reading the people around me and appreciating the context behind their actions changed how I made decisions. Before we lead others well, we need the awareness to understand ourselves and the world we are operating in.

2. Not every opportunity deserves a "yes"

One of the biggest shifts in my leadership journey was realizing that success isn't measured by how much we carry, but by the quality of our choices. Awareness gives us perspective, perspective gives us discernment, and discernment helps us decide where our energy will create the greatest value.

3. Measure your impact by the people you elevate

Titles and achievements may change, but the impact we have on people lasts. Help others grow, leave them stronger than you found them and create an environment where they feel understood and valued. Success is measured not only by what we achieve, but by the opportunities we create for others.

CHAPTER 05

Georgette Yousef



Group Chief Human Resources Officer, Al Ansari Financial Services

Georgette, brings over two decades of experience in human resources (HR) leadership across complex and highly regulated environments. Born and raised in Australia with North Africa origin. She moved to the UAE in 2008 and has since built a career defined by resilience, self-belief and a deep commitment to people. Today, she leads enterprise-wide, multi entity wide HR strategy across workforce planning, governance, organizational transformation, talent and succession planning, executive remuneration and employee relations. She leads a team of 45 HR professionals in the UAE and 22 HR professionals regionally overseeing HR operations across the UAE, India, Bahrain and Kuwait, supporting a diverse workforce of 7,000 employees. Georgette is passionate about building high-performing teams while advancing internal customer excellence, employee well-being and opportunities for women. Her leadership is grounded in empathy, active listening and strong boundaries.

Born and raised in Australia, I grew up with a strong sense of independence and personal conviction. I have always believed that our response to adversity is shaped more by our own mindset than by external circumstances. For me, self-belief has always been the foundation of confidence, resilience, and success.

Whether life is challenging or everything is falling into place, conscious balance is not a destination you eventually reach. Conscious balance is a daily practice rooted in that self-belief, trusting yourself to know what you need, what your triggers are and having the strength to make intentional choices about wellbeing which is what matters most, especially when climbing the corporate ladder.

That self-belief fueled my ambition to move to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and build a better future. My plan was to come here, work hard for a couple of years, and return to Australia. I didn't imagine that l would be here 18 years on.

I arrived in Abu Dhabi on 4th July 2008 with no network and only a suitcase. I had never visited the country before, not even for a holiday. I had no friends, nor family and thought 'what do l have to lose?' I told myself if it doesn't work out, l will just pack up and go home. If I don't try, l will never know and will live with regret of the unknown. The first 12 months of relocating were extremely hard. There were many moments when I was home sick, lonely and wondered if I should simply pack up and go home.

Just three months after relocating, the global financial crisis struck. In October, I was made redundant under a straightforward "last in, first out" policy. The timing could not have been worse. I had passed my probation one week earlier and had just signed the lease on my first apartment. Having recently moved my entire life overseas, the news was devastating.

Despite the setback, I was determined not to let it define my future. I had left Australia with a mission to start a new life, had set new financial goals. I knew that success would require persistence and adaptability. Failure simply was not an option; it never was for me.

I immediately contacted every recruiter and head-hunter I could possibly find and made it clear that I was ready to move quickly. Within three weeks, I secured a new opportunity in Dubai. The challenge then became exiting a lease I had only recently signed as l had no intention of

commuting between the two Emirates, l barely knew how to get around where google maps was non-existent.

Looking back, that experience taught me some of the most important lessons in life. It reinforced the value of resilience, resourcefulness, and maintaining confidence during uncertain times. Every challenge strengthened my belief that obstacles can be overcome with determination and a willingness to adapt. Uncertain times through the global crisis resulting in my role releasing over 450 employees, which was far from what I expected. I practiced empathy and balance by leaving my work day behind, with the mindset the redundancies were due to the Global Crisis, it was rather heavy on the best of days.

Working in the region has also taught me that determination is about emotional maturity. Standing your ground is important, but how you communicate and influence others is equally critical.

I realized that gaining support required framing the conversation in a communication style that aligned with business priorities. Wellness Programs were strategically initiated based on facts, sick leave and Employment satisfaction Surveys that were backed by actual numbers.

Currently l lead a Wellness Program that delivers over 50 Initiatives annually both locally and regionally. It's been extremely rewarding to witness employee wellness evolve and employee engagement flourish.

As my career progressed, I also came to understand that sustained high performance starts with taking care of yourself. Continuous learning is one way to do it. I am naturally curious, and learning keeps my mind active, gives me fresh perspectives and makes me a better leader.

I am a Chartered member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), something I am very proud of because it reflects my commitment to the people profession. I have also been part of the leadership programme at Heriot-Watt University in the UAE and continue to invest in coaching. Coaching becomes particularly valuable as you move into senior leadership and lead larger teams.

The world of work never stops evolving, and neither should we.

Alongside a commitment to lifelong learning, I find strength in regular self-reflection. Taking time to pause, reflect, and reconnect with my values enables me to navigate challenges with clarity, purpose, and resilience.

The higher you climb, the lonelier leadership can become, so those quiet moments have become increasingly important. I find many of my answers in silence. When everything becomes quiet, my thinking becomes clearer and my focus sharper.

At the end of each day, I reflect: *What could I have handled better? Could I have approached a conversation differently?* It helps me process the day and put things into their proper compartments, rather than carrying the weight to the next day. And every morning, I begin again with the same mindset: *Today is going to be a great day.*

When work consumes so much of your time and energy, it can leave you feeling depleted, especially when family is far away. Having someone I can truly lean on matters enormously. For me, that person is my favorite human 'my sister' who resides in Australia. Despite the distance, we have remained deeply connected, and for the past 18 years, she has been a constant source of strength and support, our relationship is priceless.

Managing an organization of this scale and diversity is both complex and rewarding. Every market brings its own culture, expectations, communication styles, and ways of working. Success requires not only a strong understanding of people and business, but also the ability to lead with empathy, adaptability, and cultural awareness.

I bring conscious balance into my leadership with a few essentials: patience, acceptance, active listening and boundaries.

Not everyone will share your mindset, work ethic, values or approach, and I have learned to accept that. As a leader, you cannot react every time someone thinks or behaves differently. You must listen, understand and make space for those differences.

Nevertheless, listening to people and their concerns can consume high levels of energy. I have learnt that I can be present and supportive without carrying everything people bring to me. That means knowing

where to draw boundaries to protect my own energy and well-being, and also knowing when to let go.

I have learnt to pick my battles. I may want something done a certain way, while someone else may take a different approach. I can make my case and share my point of view, but then I have to step back and allow others to decide. You can control what you do and how you hold yourself and react, however you cannot control what others do, that's theirs to carry.

I am equally passionate about creating workplaces where women have the support they need to thrive. Meaningful support goes beyond policies and good intentions. It requires embedding flexibility into the way we work. Many women balance demanding careers alongside responsibilities such as marriage, motherhood, and caregiving. If organizations genuinely want to attract, retain, and advance more women in the workforce, flexibility must be more than a talking point. It needs to be a fundamental part of workplace culture, enabling women to succeed without having to choose between their professional ambitions and personal commitments.

That means offering real options, such as flexible hours, part-time roles, or working three or four days a week. I practise this with my own team. We have arrangements where someone may work five days a week for six hours per day. There is still structure and discipline, but this flexibility gives women the space to manage the 'many hats they wear'. With the unwavering support of our Senior Management, it has worked very well for us as a business model.

Organizations need to invest in women's growth through education, learning academies and sponsorship. I feel strongly about this because I am the only woman that sits on the C Suite team, it is empowering and most definitely a responsibility l do not take for granted.

After all these years, I remain as ambitious and determined as ever. What has changed, though, is my understanding of the conscious balance needed to sustain that ambition in a healthy way across every aspect of my life.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Make time for self-reflection

Look inward and be honest about what you can do, what you cannot and what truly matters. That honesty creates clarity and helps you decide where your energy needs to go next.

2. Make movement a daily practice

What we do for our bodies today affects us tomorrow. For me, physical activity is both exercise and reflection. It gives me space to think, reset and come back to myself.

3. Stay grounded in gratitude

It is easy to ask, “Why has this happened to me?” But when you look at what is around you and remember that someone else may be worse off, your perspective shifts. I believe gratitude attracts good things, but more importantly, it keeps you grounded.

CHAPTER 06

Helen Snowball



Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO), Thai Union Group

Helen is an internationally experienced leader who has worked across geographies and high-growth organizations, including PropertyGuru, JLL Asia Pacific, Kraft Foods UK, and Coca-Cola Amatil Australia as she is currently the Chief Human Resources Officer at Thai Union Group in Bangkok. Helen's career brings together a unique blend of business management, sales leadership, and human resources, enabling her to align talent strategies with measurable business outcomes. Her leadership philosophy is grounded in conscious balance, with a strong belief that sustainable performance comes from managing energy, not just capability. She is deeply committed to building cultures where people can thrive, leading by example on well-being, and shaping future-ready workforces grounded in empathy, purpose, and impact.

The first decade of my career was firmly rooted in sales leadership. I worked closely with customer accounts, managed profit and loss responsibilities, and led sales teams. In those years, I threw myself completely into work because I felt a constant need to establish myself in a demanding, largely male orientated business environment. I transitioned into HR 15 years ago, and once again, I worked even harder to prove myself as an effective leader without the stereotypical years of HR experience.

In hindsight, I am not proud to admit that for the first 20 years of my career, I had no real sense of balance.

Those years of working relentlessly left me with little time for my personal relationships or my own health. In recent years I have undergone a couple of major surgeries. Those experiences forced me to confront how I was living my life. I had to ask myself whether I was truly spending my time in a way that mattered. I had pushed my well-being so far into the background in pursuit of my career that something had to change. If I wanted to sustain any kind of future, I needed to take care of myself before it was too late.

That realization marked the beginning of my conscious balance journey. I knew then that I no longer wanted my work to define me.

In 2021, I made a very intentional decision, guided by my own growth and personal values, to complete a master's degree in counselling. At that time, we were also going through COVID, and it became increasingly clear to me that well-being would only become more central to the workplace. Studying counselling broadened my perspective and influenced how I understand well-being across people, leadership, the workplace, and my own personal life.

Conscious balance, is about being intentional in how I manage the competing priorities in my life. It means balancing work with my personal life, while giving equal importance to relationships, family, friendships, and my own well-being.

The higher you go in your career, the more important it becomes to take care of yourself, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Only then can you show up with the clarity and resilience that is needed to make the right decisions. When you do this well, you are able to take on greater responsibilities and create more meaningful impact. A conscious and grounded approach to leadership also naturally opens the door to bigger opportunities.

And for me, this is not just a belief, it is something I practice every day to bring conscious balance to life. There are two simple mantras that guide how I live it.

The first is this: work is what I do, not who I am. I give my best and hold myself to a high standard, but I do not give all of myself to work. That boundary is non-negotiable. Whenever I feel myself slipping, I pause and remind myself that work does not get all of me.

The second mantra is what I call energy for performance. When I feel like I do not have time to exercise or take care of myself, I remind myself that these are not optional. Taking care of my physical and mental well-being is what allows me to perform at my best in every aspect of my life.

As the only female on the executive team in my organization, I am deeply aware of the role I play beyond my title. I see myself as both a culture carrier and a role model. If I do not demonstrate the importance of well-being, I cannot expect others to do so. The reality is that there are still not enough leaders who actively model what conscious balance truly looks like.

At its core, I have a simple philosophy to stay grounded. I believe in focusing on what I can control. The world will continue to move around you, but how you respond is always your choice.

That perspective also shapes how I view conscious balance at an organizational level. I do not approach it through a gender lens. Well-being matters for everyone, and truly balanced workplaces require supporting both women and men.

What matters most is simple: you have to care. Not just about the professional, but the person behind the role. When you understand what is happening in people's lives beyond work, you create an environment where people feel safe to be open and ask for support. That is where you see both better balance and better performance.

An open and two-way communication becomes even more important in today's environment, where there is no longer a clear divide between work and life. It is all one life. As leaders, our role is to make this reality feel less overwhelming by setting clear boundaries around work and availability. Often, it comes down to simple choices, like not sending mails late night, not expecting teams to work over weekends, and simply giving people the space to manage their lives.

At the same time, there are life stages that women experience differently, like stepping away for children, menopause, and later, caring for aging parents. Organizations need to acknowledge these realities, not just through policies, but through empathy and understanding. That is what truly enables women to navigate their careers and thrive.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Choose to live fully

Do not let your personal life become secondary to your profession. For me, this shows up in the boundaries I set and how I allocate time to the things I enjoy every day. I try not to work on weekends unless there is an absolute emergency, and I always take my annual leave.

2. Make conscious balance non-negotiable

Treat conscious balance as a priority, not an afterthought. Build structured practices into your day, just as you would for any important project. As part of how I manage my energy, I block my time from 12 to 1 pm without meetings to recharge and aim to finish work by 5 pm as much as possible. These are simple structures, but they have made a meaningful difference.

3. Anchor in gratitude

I take a moment each day, in the morning and at night, to reflect on what I am grateful for and what I am proud of, even on difficult days. This simple habit keeps me grounded and helps me reconnect with my larger purpose by focusing on the impact I create beyond my role, in making people's lives better, supporting the career growth of the next generation, and bringing more joy into the workplace.

CHAPTER 07

Jeslin Lim



Director, People and Culture, Cycle & Carriage

Jeslin Lim is Head of Human Resources (HR) at Cycle & Carriage Singapore, where she has spent more than 18 years building the organization, leading transformation, and shaping employee experience. She partners closely with business leaders and has guided more than 1,000 employees through M&A transitions and integrations, while contributing to a workplace recognized consistently for employee experience - including an 11-year Platinum Best Companies to Work award holder and a 2024 Certified Happiest Workplace. Her leadership is rooted in fairness, curiosity, trust, and a strong belief in possibilities. Jeslin is especially interested in how everyday leadership behaviors influence performance, self-esteem, and career growth. More recently, she has been exploring how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can strengthen HR decision making, amplify learning, and automate operational workflows. Her own journey toward conscious balance has deepened her focus on intentional choices, clearer boundaries, honest conversations, and creating space for people to thrive at different stages of life.

When I was eight years old, I already had a dream. I wanted to be a police officer. It came up when I was asked to write a composition about what I wanted to be when I grew up. I proudly shared my choice with my parents, and naturally, their first question was, “Why?”

My answer was simple. I wanted to catch the bad guys and restore justice to the world. Looking back, my belief that good will triumph evil and justice will prevail was simple and of innocence

I grew up in government rented housing in Singapore, surrounded by people from all walks of life, including gangsters, gamblers, and alcoholics. As a little girl, I saw a very different side of Singapore. I also played a little bit of a vigilante in my neighborhood.

There was once I spotted a vacated unit in my neighborhood that suddenly had unfamiliar people hanging around in that unit. They stayed in that unit, unfurnished and all. The little gut in me said something was off here. I tipped off a police officer who was on patrol. I was only nine years old then. The officer did not disregard me because I was a child. He went to check. Later, the police told me, "That unit really had guys who shouldn't be there. We caught them."

Growing up in that environment, I saw things that were not contributing positive energy to society. I wanted to do something about it, and becoming a police officer seemed like the way.

I never became one, but perhaps the instinct behind that childhood ambition never left me. I continued to notice what was happening around me, care deeply about fairness, and feel compelled to act when something did not seem right. Years later, that instinct found a very different home in HR.

I studied business in Singapore, and when it was time to specialize, my choices were marketing, international business, or HR. I landed in HR almost by elimination. But once I made that choice, I told myself, "Give it my best. Give it my all."

People often describe me as a person of possibilities. I can be blindly optimistic. When I see a problem, I look for possibilities. I find the nooks and crannies and figure out a way through. Even with setbacks, my instinct is to make the best of the situation.

Perhaps that is also why the idea of balance has never sat easily with me. The word suggests a trade-off. In the past, I would have defined it as

juggling work, family, and personal commitments without letting anything tip. I do not see it that way anymore.

Today, conscious balance is not about giving equal time to everything. It is about intentionally choosing where to invest my time and energy, knowing that not everything will carry the same outcome or fulfil the same desire.

Intentionality matters because life has different seasons, and some cannot be repeated. We may not always have a choice about what happens to us. The situation is going to happen anyway. But we can choose how we respond and what we do with it. That is where intention comes in.

The turning point came when my dad passed away unexpectedly three years ago. I realized I could not turn back the clock. I also looked at my daughter and saw how much I had missed on her growing up years and how many dinners I have missed with my husband.

Before my dad passed away, I often worked late. He would ask me to come by, and I would arrive after eight in the evening when he was really hoping for seven, just to have some time together. I could not relive the time I had missed with him or with my husband and daughter. But I could choose how I spent my time from then on, and I made some conscious changes.

I learned to draw boundaries. Now, I make it a point to be home for dinner on most nights. There are no mobile devices at the table. As a family, we share the highlights and lowlights of our day. It is a simple ritual, but it gives us time to be present, and laugh, and round robin updates to talk about ‘what happened to my day’.

I am bringing the same intentionality into my workplace and leadership style. I believe strongly in learning and a growth mindset, both for my own well-being and that of my team.

I often challenge my team, “What you do from nine to five is important, but what you do from five to nine is also important.” I wish for them to keep learning. And when they tell me they do not have enough time, I now listen differently.

Instead of pushing them to find the time, I ask, "You seem quite stretched. What can I help you deprioritize?" Being stretched may mean the work has piled up or there is not enough clarity. As a leader, my role is to reduce that ambiguity, create clarity, and help people focus on things that matter most.

I have learned to apply the same thinking to myself. Working in a fast-paced and volatile environment can be challenging.

The old Jeslin would have tried to meet expectations by working late and over the weekends. Today, I handle it differently. Recently, when faced with competing priorities, I brought the stakeholders together and put the two situations on the table. We first agreed that both priorities were important, then discussed how we could best use our resources without sacrificing the outcome for one or the other.

That conversation led to an approach that the stakeholders supported, including what we could deprioritize. Instead of simply working longer and harder, I created clarity around what really needed to be done.

I also have a simple practice that keeps me intentional and grounded at work. In HR, difficult conversations often come with strong emotions, and it is easy to get triggered when someone else's emotions are running high. So, I have written three words on the whiteboard in my office: *Calm. Intent. Integrity.*

When a conversation gets difficult, I look at those words. They remind me to stay calm, understand the intent, and always act with integrity. They guide both the decisions I make and how I choose to respond.

As I mentioned earlier, positivity is an important part of how I stay energized and well. I can be blindly optimistic, and I tend to focus on possibilities rather than barriers.

Recently, while planning a Gen AI series for the company, my team suggested targeting 20 participants. I said, "No, let's aim for 50." They thought it was impossible, but my response was, "Never mind, let's try our best." Within 30 minutes of putting out the call out for registration, 60 people had signed up. That optimism gives me energy. If we never try, we never know what we can achieve.

I genuinely applaud organizations that invest in flexible work, wellness programs, and employee support. And I have increasingly realized that well-being is experienced through everyday leadership behaviors.

It comes down to clarity of expectations, meaningful work, and honest conversations about career opportunities and life stages. An opportunity may look right on paper, but does it fit what the person wants at that stage of life? What might the trade-offs be, if any?

Putting the employee at the center of that conversation creates clarity and alignment. To me, that is also well-being.

One thing my organization has done well is remain agnostic to gender on career growth and opportunities. I have seen female leaders rise, just as I have seen male leaders choose different paths based on their stage of life. The culture creates space for these honest conversations and individual choices.

I have spent more than 18 years with Cycle & Carriage, and I sometimes relate to this as my "Discovery Channel." It is a fast paced, dynamic environment with constant opportunities to contribute and make the business better. My role can be as exciting as I consciously choose to make it.

I have also been fortunate to work in an ecosystem where I can propose ideas and openly bounce them off stakeholders. That freedom to ask questions, speak openly, and explore possibilities respectfully creates a sense of psychological safety across the organization.

An important part of conscious balance is taking the time to build relationships and trust. Those connections create a sense of support and well-being, both for me and for the people I work with.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Seek to understand first

Taking time to listen and see the situation from another person's perspective allows you to respond with greater clarity and intention. First, choose to understand before making a judgement.

2. Be fully present

Give your full attention to where you are and who you are with. Being all in allows you to make the most of the moment rather than being pulled in different directions. Like for me being present means creating moments and making my daughter laugh every day.

3. Know what you stand for

Know what matters to you and don't bend, even under pressure. Some seasons of life happen only once, so make choices you can live with without regret.

CHAPTER 08

Kameshwari Rao



Global Chief People Officer, Publicis Sapient

With more than three decades of experience spanning finance and human resources (HR), Kameshwari has spent the last 25 years helping shape Publicis Sapient into a future-ready, people-centric organization. A lifelong learner and passionate advocate for innovation, inclusion, and leadership development, she believes organizations thrive when their people do.

Her journey, however, has been far from linear. From missing her dream of becoming a doctor by just a few marks, to navigating career pivots, motherhood, and leadership across geographies and cultures, every chapter of her life has been shaped by intentional choices. She believes purpose is her 'North Star', guiding every decision she makes, and that conscious balance is not about having it all but about making thoughtful choices that align with what matters most.

Looking back, I realize my life has been shaped not by circumstances but by the conscious choices I made about what truly mattered and where I chose to invest my time, energy, and commitment.

I was always a diligent student, someone who genuinely enjoyed studying. Throughout school, right up to Grade 12, I consistently ranked at the top of my class. Growing up, I had only one aspiration and that was to become a doctor. But the cut-off for medical school was exceptionally high, and I missed it by just a couple of marks. That was

the first major turning point in my life. At the time, it felt devastating. I slipped into what I can only describe as one of the lowest phases of my life.

With that dream no longer within reach, I committed myself to a Bachelor's degree in Science. It wasn't the future I had imagined, but I resolved to make the most of it. Over the next three years, I rebuilt my confidence and graduated with a renewed belief in myself.

After completing my degree, I enrolled in the MBA programme at the University of Mumbai. When it was time to specialize, I gravitated towards finance. Many of my peers were drawn to marketing, but I knew my strengths lay in logical analysis and numbers. At that stage, I was less confident as a communicator, so finance felt like the right fit.

I spent the next ten years in the financial sector, working in investment banking and related roles. Joining the Tata Group as a management trainee, marked the true beginning of my professional journey. Within just six months, I was asked to lead a team. I was only 23 years old, and some of the people reporting to me had over fifteen years of experience. The gap was impossible to ignore. Even though I was intimidated, I made a conscious decision to stay the course, to learn and earn their trust.

At this early stage of my career, I was fortunate to have an exceptional mentor - an HR leader in the company who gave me the confidence to trust my own choices. I still remember walking into his office one day in tears after a difficult experience with my team. He didn't rush to reassure me or step in to fix the situation. Instead, he quietly gave me the space to gather myself.

When I was ready, he simply said, "Go back and deal with it. You can." Only years later did I realize he wasn't solving my problems; he was showing me that I always had a choice: to step back or step up.

As my career gathered momentum, my personal life was evolving as well. We welcomed our first child and moved between Mumbai and Bangalore because of my husband's work. I was offered the opportunity to set up a new office in Bangalore. It was an exciting challenge, and I chose to build a new team in an unfamiliar environment while raising a young child in a new city.

Life, however, had other plans. My father-in-law became critically ill, and was diagnosed with cancer. Watching the way siblings stood by one another, through that difficult period, changed the way I thought about family. Until then, we had resolved to have just one child. That experience prompted my husband and me to rethink our plans, and we decided to welcome a second baby.

After my younger son was born, I imagined taking a long career break. I adored being with my children, but I realized I wasn't content to be a stay-at-home mother. I missed being intellectually engaged, solving problems, and being part of something larger than my immediate world. To my own surprise, I started to look for opportunities that would stimulate me mentally and connect me with people outside my home.

Around that time, I met someone in direct marketing, and it led me down an unexpected path of selling books door to door. The experience changed me in ways I never anticipated. Every doorbell I rang came with the possibility of rejection. Some people shut the door before I finished my first sentence. Others listened patiently before saying a polite no.

Slowly, I stopped taking rejection personally. Selling wasn't really just about the books. It was about courage. It taught me humility, resilience, and the confidence to persuade strangers in ways no corporate training program ever could.

After about a year, I joined *Headhunters*, a leading executive search firm, and my career took an unexpected turn from finance to sales and now into HR. Working closely with the founder, I helped build the executive search business, launch a dot-com venture, and raise funds.

The role gave me both purpose and opportunity, but the salary wasn't the best and the commute was demanding. The days were long, and I often reached home only by eight in the evening. I had to wrestle with the sense of guilt, while making my way back into a corporate career.

It is important to remember that our decisions never affect only us. They ripple through our families, our relationships, and the people who support us. That's why intentional decisions also require conscious conversations and a shared commitment from those who walk the journey with us. My choice to keep going on the career path, was exactly

that – an acknowledgement that the time was right and the opportunity was good and my family was committed to support my journey.

Conscious balance is about making conscious decisions that are aligned with your purpose. My purpose is my North Star, helping me stay clear about what really matters. Once I know that, it becomes much easier to decide where to invest my time, energy, and effort. This is true when making personal choices or professional moves.

At work today, my North Star is the 20,000 people I feel responsible for at my organization. I constantly ask myself: How do I help them thrive? How do I help them grow? How do I create an environment where they can succeed—not just today, but in the future?

For me, conscious balance at work means bringing a people lens to every business decision. Delivering results is important, but so is understanding how those results shape people, culture, and the future of the organization.

I saw this come to life at a recent AI Expo organized by our marketing team to showcase innovations across the company. While planning the event, I saw an opportunity to add a people focus to this technology initiative. I suggested we ask different questions; not just what people had built, but what they had learnt, what they had to unlearn, how they had grown through the process, and how they had taken their clients along on that journey.

Those questions changed the conversation. Instead of celebrating technology alone, we began having a conversation on curiosity, adaptability, continuous learning, and client-centricity—the very capabilities our people will need in the future. Since only a small number of people were directly involved in the Expo, their stories also became a way to inspire thousands of others to embrace AI with confidence.

That's how conscious balance shows up in my leadership. My responsibility is to ensure that the people and culture perspective is part of every conversation, not an afterthought.

One very simple thing we've done is that we have created a WhatsApp group for leaders. People share stories about what they're working on, moments they're proud of, and even moments of uncertainty. It took people time to adopt this initiative, but today it's a space where leaders celebrate successes, ask for help, and learn from one another. It is a space where people feel safe being themselves.

The same thinking applies to the conversations we create across the organization. What always strikes me is how often someone realizes that another person is going through exactly the same experience. Sometimes, simply creating a space for those conversations helps build community, reduces the sense of isolation, and reminds people that they're not alone. Whether it is the Parents groups, or the conversations on menopause – each one of these is about creating space for dialogue and sharing.

Finally, I no longer measure my life by the roles I've held or the titles I've earned.

I remember the girl who missed medical school by two marks. I remember the young manager who cried in her mentor's office. I remember the mother who chose to return to work, the salesperson knocking on strangers' doors, and the leader learning that people always come before process.

Every chapter of my life asked me to choose. That, to me, is conscious balance.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Know what you stand for

Be clear about who you are and what you stand for. Your values become the foundation for the choices you make. When you're anchored in what truly matters to you, it's easier to navigate competing priorities and stay true to your decisions.

2. Make your choices with intention

Every choice has multiple dimensions. With every decision comes a consequence or trade-off. Recognize those trade-offs, make your choices intentionally, and be prepared to own the outcomes that follow.

3. Don't forget to have fun

Life doesn't have to be serious all the time. Make time for the things that bring you joy, whether it's travelling, trying something new, or simply spending time with people you enjoy. Work hard, stay disciplined, but don't lose sight of having fun. It gives you energy, keeps you curious, and makes the journey worthwhile.

CHAPTER 09

Melissa Park

Senior Director Human Resources, Asia Pacific, Medical Diagnostics organization



Melissa is a seasoned Human Resources (HR) leader, executive coach, and founder with more than 20 years of experience across geographies and industries including retail, logistics, supply chain, and consumer goods. She is known for driving cultural and organizational transformation, shaping talent strategies, and building coaching cultures that help leaders and teams thrive.

Born in the Philippines and raised in Canada after immigrating with her family at age 11, Melissa's journey has been shaped by resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to growth. While her career achievements have been significant, it was her experience with burnout that transformed her perspective on success and leadership. Through therapy, mindfulness, and self-reflection, she discovered that lasting fulfillment comes not from achievement alone, but from living with authenticity, self-awareness, and alignment. Today, she is passionate about helping individuals and organizations cultivate conscious balance and create more human-centric workplaces.

For much of my life, I believed that if I worked hard, took responsibility, and kept growing, fulfillment would naturally follow. It took me some years to realize that true well-being comes from living with intention and alignment, not success alone.

I am the eldest of three sisters, and when I was 11, my family immigrated from the Philippines to Canada. Like many immigrant families, my parents had to start over. They took whatever work they could find to build a new life for us. As the eldest child in an Asian family, I grew up with an unspoken responsibility to care for others and contribute to the family.

Those early years taught me that well-being is not only about caring for oneself, but also about feeling connected to something larger. Supporting my family gave me a sense of purpose, while becoming a high achiever in my new Canadian environment became a personal mission. I wanted to prove myself, honor my parents' sacrifices, and make the most of the opportunities they had created for us. In my mind, success was a measure of a life well lived. Looking back, that was the beginning of the growth mindset that shaped my journey.

After graduating, I had the opportunity to take on an HR internship in Singapore. I had no background in HR and knew very little about the country. Yet something about the opportunity sparked my curiosity. The possibilities it offered were too exciting to ignore, so I took the leap.

What was meant to be a one-year internship became the foundation of my career. Singapore was a great place to be, and I think it gave me the courage to say, "Okay, this is where I can start building my career. I first joined a logistics organization and later worked across manufacturing plants and distribution centers, partnering closely with leaders and employees on the ground.

About 15 years ago, I joined a global sports retail organization based in Singapore. The role gave me the chance to work across multiple countries and cultures. It was the perfect opportunity to explore new places, immerse myself in different environments, and continue to learn and grow.

My role soon opened the door to an opportunity to move to Bangalore in India with the organization What began as a three-month assignment turned into a two-year chapter.

My husband and I had only recently married, and the original plan was simple: I would spend a few months in India and return. Instead, I found myself falling in love with the city and the experience.

I was stepping into leadership for the first time and working alongside leaders who were much more experienced than I was. Yet I was welcomed warmly. I built friendships quickly and found myself growing in unexpected ways.

One of the most significant experiences during that period was attending a coaching programme that introduced me to mindfulness, well-being, and a more holistic understanding of personal development. I also began exploring spirituality more deeply. For the first time, balance became more than responsibility or ambition; it became connected to inner awareness. At the time, however, I had not fully absorbed that lesson.

When I returned to Singapore, I got promoted into a director role and entered one of the most demanding periods of my career. We were integrating multiple markets, including India, and the responsibility was immense. Once again, the pressure I put on myself to succeed was high.

But after nearly two decades of constantly pushing myself, the strain finally caught up with me. I experienced burnout. The signs appeared both physically and emotionally. I became sick more frequently, experienced recurring health issues, and carried a constant heaviness in my body. From the outside, everything appeared normal. Internally, I was struggling. I was constantly exhausted and eventually, I hit a deep overwhelming wall. And even if I didn't know it back then, now I know it was burnout.

For a few years after, and through the COVID pandemic, I convinced myself that I simply needed to push harder. That had always been my strategy. However, I finally reached a point where pretending everything was fine was no longer sustainable. I made the difficult decision to leave an organization that I loved without another job waiting for me—stepping into the unknown to finally begin the process of finding myself again.

During that period, I intentionally built a system to support me- working with an executive coach, seeking mentors and going to therapy, Therapy

became an integral part of my healing and remains a valuable part of my life today not because something is always wrong, but because self-awareness is an ongoing practice.

Before my burnout, I spent so much energy trying to be who I thought I needed to be. In recovery, I learned that I had to start showing up differently—not to meet external expectations, but to protect my own well-being.

Since then, my focus has been on deep self-discovery: understanding my core values, identifying my triggers, and learning how to protect my peace. In the workplace, this means being authentic and vulnerable while maintaining clear boundaries. When I am grounded in who I truly am, I create a sense of calm and balance not just for myself, but for the teams and people around me.

Conscious balance, I've realized, begins from within—it's about honoring your truth so you can show up fully without losing yourself. Conscious balance begins with self-awareness. It means understanding where my energy is going and listening to what my body, mind, and emotions are telling me. Today, I make more intentional choices based on that awareness. Well-being is about recognizing when something is out of alignment and having the courage to make a change.

These days, conscious balance for me shows up in simple but deliberate practices.

One of the biggest lessons I have learned is the importance of rest. I now view balance through the lens of energy management. When I take leave, I make a genuine effort to disconnect and recharge. I may spend 5-10 minutes checking emails if needed, but then I step away and allow myself to disconnect. I do not get it right every time, but I have created personal boundaries and systems that help protect my time.

Reading is another practice that keeps me grounded. I often have several books on the go at once, ranging from fiction to personal development. Reading reminds me that learning does not always need to serve a professional purpose. Sometimes it is simply about curiosity and joy.

The lessons I've learned about balance and well-being have deeply shaped how I think about supporting women at work. Organizations often treat careers as a linear path, expecting us to operate the same way at every stage. But the reality is that our needs, priorities, and lives naturally shift over time. A 28-year-old navigating the return from maternity leave is in a completely different chapter than a 48-year-old leader moving through perimenopause or menopause.

What I have seen make the greatest difference is creating environments where women can speak openly about the life transitions that shape their personal and professional journeys. Whether it's new motherhood, heavy caregiving responsibilities, or hormonal shifts, these experiences shape how we show up every day. When we acknowledge these realities with empathy and real support, women no longer have to carry them in silence or feel like they're navigating them all on their own.

I still have moments when I overextend myself. But now I know how to notice the signs and pause when needed. For me, conscious balance is not about perfection; it is about continually returning to who I truly am.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Start with self-awareness

Pay attention to what energizes and drains you, and learn to recognize the signals your body, mind, and emotions are sending you. Too often, we ignore these cues in the pursuit of achievement until they become impossible to overlook. True balance begins with the courage to be honest with yourself about what is working, what is not, and what you need in this season of your life.

2. Ask for help before you reach breaking point

Whether it is a therapist, coach, spouse, friend, or mentor, support is a strength, not a weakness. You do not have to carry everything alone.

3. Pause and reconnect through your breath

One of the simplest yet most powerful practices I have adopted is being mindful of my breathing. On particularly chaotic days, I pause for a moment and remind myself: I am here, I am alive, and I am breathing. That single conscious breath helps me reconnect with myself and regain a sense of balance.

CHAPTER 10

Mellener Anne Coelho



Senior Vice President, Regional Inclusion Manager, APAC Northern Trust

Mellener is a respected industry leader and advocate for Inclusion with over 20 years of experience across Northern Trust, AXA and Infosys. She has held a wide variety of leadership roles across geographies while remaining deeply committed to well-being and building cultures where people can truly thrive. She has spoken at global platforms, and has contributed to several pieces of research on Inclusion.

Behind her achievements lies a personal journey toward conscious balance. A period of significant stress led her to deep reflection and meaningful changes. Prioritization and moderation, now shape her approach to life and leadership. She believes that focusing on well-being not only provides the energy to do more, but also strengthens the quality of work, because when you are balanced, you give your best consistently.

I have always been intrinsically motivated driven by a deep sense of purpose to make a difference and help advance a culture where people can truly thrive and bring joy into the workplace and our communities. This has led me to take on several additional initiatives, both at work and in my personal space even while managing high-pressure roles in HR and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) across different geographies and cultures.

As an industry leader and advocate for Inclusion, I have spoken at conferences in India and globally. In 2018, I spoke at the United Nations Women Gender Focal Point Meeting in Geneva. Since 2020, I have been associated with the Future Talent Council (FTC), speaking at several of its summits, including the 2023 in person summit in Stockholm, Sweden. I also served on the Community Business Diversity and Inclusion Asia Network task force, contributing to the development of several piece of research for the India and Asia market.

A few years ago, I experienced an extended period of high stress brought on by years of unresolved trauma and high expectations I have set for myself. What I once saw as meaningful and energizing slowly became overwhelming. I began experiencing periods of intense anxiety. I realized I could no longer keep stretching myself endlessly. During this phase, I began to reflect on what balance truly meant for my own well-being.

I came to define Conscious Balance in three words, prioritization, intentional presence and moderation. It is about managing my time, energy and relationships in ways that allows me to feel fulfilled both personally and professionally.

My journey towards well-being has not been dramatic or instant. It has been a journey of progressive realization, with a fine balance of consistent daily habits with meaningful shifts in my mindset.

To bring conscious balance into my life, I began by grounding myself spiritually. I am not overly ritualistic, but I believe in a higher power and in paying attention to the signs the universe sends us. I remind myself never to take more than I give. Every night, I spend ten minutes in meditation before I sleep. It helps me reset and close the day with intention. I also started practicing positive affirmations. The way I speak to myself, shapes how I show up in the world.

I made deliberate changes to my health. I shifted to eating smaller meals through the day and choosing more nourishing foods, leaning towards an alkaline diet. I love to exercise and have been doing resistance training for many years and it has made a world of difference to my health and wellbeing.

Structure became an essential part of my transformation. I try and follow a routine and maintaining a schedule that helps me manage my work, rest and personal time with intention.

I became more intentional about my relationships. I nurture connections with friends and family, even if it is through a simple call to check in and say hello. I choose to surround myself with people who lift me up and make my heart smile. At the same time, I have learned to step back from relationships that consistently take more than they give.

I have been truly blessed to have a pet cat Pixie whom I often refer to as my work from home partner., She showers me with unconditional love and reminds me to pause and focus on the present "pawsitive" moment. By managing my energy intentionally, I have also made space for interests such as travelling, and volunteer work with an NGO and playing the piano.

Over time, all these changes began to reflect clearly in my overall well-being. I noticed a significant improvement in my physical and mental wellbeing

My self-esteem grew steadily. I became more comfortable being respectfully candid. I learned to establish healthy boundaries by saying no when necessary and accepting when others say no.

Today, I have developed a stronger mindset of gratitude.

In recent years, living with balance has enabled me to take on more work that truly adds joy and aligns with my purpose. I volunteer as a mentor with a not-for-profit organization that supports girls from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in completing their college education.

I truly believe that my focus on well-being has not only given me the energy to do all that I do, but has also strengthened the quality of my work. When you are balanced, you are able to give your best consistently.

I believe that my commitment to my conscious balance is also reflected in the recognition I have received. I was recognized under the category "Highly Commended Most Inspiring HR Leader of the Year at the THIS CAN HAPPEN Awards in the United Kingdom in 2022. I was also

named Best D&I Head of the Year in 2020 by the Women in Leadership Asia Forum and won the D&I Champion of Change Award by Community Business Asia in 2019.

For me, these accolades are not just professional milestones. They are a reminder that when your inner stability supports your outer work, you lead with greater clarity, consistency and impact.

Organizations need to bring attention to the important role of women especially senior leaders supporting other women at the workplace. Women are in a powerful place to leverage their own experience of dealing with the invisible tax to advocate for well-being policies and practices for women at work.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Start small and do the inner work

It is never too late to make small changes in your life. You may not see immediate results, but over time you will experience a healthier and happier version of yourself. Begin with simple shifts such as improving your diet, consciously prioritizing your professional and personal commitments and addressing your insecurities.

2. Build and protect your boundaries

Develop clear physical, emotional, material and time boundaries, both at work and in personal relationships. This will protect your personal space and preserve what truly matters. Pay attention to your instincts, as the body often senses discomfort before the mind fully understands it. Boundaries are not barriers, they are protection.

3. Find your purpose and pursue it with intention

Having a clear purpose keeps you motivated and grounded. Identify how you want to use your talents, influence and resources in a way that contributes to something larger than yourself. Engaging in meaningful initiatives not only creates impact, but also brings joy, learning and hope.

CHAPTER 11

Neeti Mahajan



Former Global Head and Asia, ME Head of GCOO Transformation Services, HSBC

Neeti is a seasoned global business leader whose 25-year career at HSBC spans large-scale transformation, operational excellence, and strategic growth across multinational organizations. Having managed budgets exceeding US$100 million and led teams of more than 3,200 employees, she has built a reputation for delivering impactful business outcomes in complex, matrixed environments. A former Board Member of HSBC Malaysia Global Service Centre and a passionate advocate for diversity and inclusion, she is known for combining strong commercial acumen with people-centric leadership. Behind her professional achievements lies a personal journey that taught her that sustainable success is not built through constant acceleration alone. It is built through conscious balance — the ability to lead with clarity, stay connected to one's identity, and create space for both ambition and well-being.

For much of my early career, I measured my success through my achievements. I believed that if I worked harder, prepared better, and held myself to extremely high standards, success would naturally follow. And in many ways, it did.

I graduated from Punjab Engineering College in 1997 and started my career through a campus placement at Risk Management Solutions Inc.

(RMSI). At the time, digitization and mapping were becoming increasingly important across industries, and I worked extensively with satellite imagery and geographical information systems (GIS). Within a short time, I grew into a senior GIS engineering role.

After two years, I moved to GE Capital, where I worked on flood zone mapping. It was deeply technical work, but also highly impactful. The role gave me exposure to global teams and multiple opportunities to travel to the US, which was extremely exciting. More importantly, GE introduced me to Lean and Six Sigma methodologies that are focused on improving quality in work processes. These tools instilled in me a structured and analytical mindset, enabling me to approach challenges with greater clarity and precision throughout my career.

GE also gave me something equally valuable: confidence. We were empowered to figure things out, ask questions, and never fear what we did not know. That culture gave me the confidence to pursue opportunities and embrace the unknown.

When I moved to HSBC in 2001, I had the confidence and curiosity to explore a completely new domain. I started in the Payments function, which was one of the most fast-paced and high-pressure environments imaginable. In payments, even a five-minute delay could impact customers directly. The stakes were always high.

At the same time, HSBC was aggressively building offshore operations in Hyderabad. I was sent to the US for almost a year to learn the processes, build stakeholder confidence, and create a proof of concept for the offshore model. There was significant skepticism about whether critical banking operations could really be managed from Hyderabad. The pressure to deliver was immense.

The project became a huge success. What started as a seven-member team quickly scaled to over 120 people. Within a short span, I received two promotions. Professionally, I was moving at incredible speed.

Personally, life was changing just as rapidly. I got married in 2000 and became a mother in 2003. Looking back, those years felt as though life was moving in fast forward. My career was expanding, even as I was navigating entirely new personal roles and responsibilities at home.

As I took on motherhood, I witnessed a fundamental shift. Being a mother started to change how I approached the balance in my life. Every moment with my daughter felt precious, and I became deeply protective of how I spent my time and energy. By the time she turned three, I had already stepped into a Vice President role, leading nearly 1,100 people across six countries payment businesses.

There were phases when work demanded more from me, and others when I needed to be present for my daughter's school events, sick days and the ordinary moments that children remember for a lifetime. Yet one thing remained unwavering: I never saw giving up my career as an option. I was completely clear about my identity beyond motherhood. I was an individual with my own aspirations, ambitions, and sense of purpose.

For me, conscious balance is less about dividing my time evenly and more about being fully present in the role that needs me most at a given moment. I have learned that life moves in seasons. There are times when work demands more of me and times when family takes center stage. What matters is that the choices I make reflect what is most important to me in that moment.

I could not have navigated the demands of career and family without the unwavering support of my husband. We always saw ourselves as a team. When we moved to London with our four-year-old daughter, away from family support, balance became a daily exercise in co-ordinating work, travel, and parenting responsibilities.

What made all the difference was that my husband embraced parenting as fully as I did. He cooked, managed school runs, and shared responsibilities without hesitation. Conscious balance is deeply influenced by the ecosystem of support, respect, and partnership around you.

Over the last decade, I have held several Managing Director roles at the bank. These positions have been immensely rewarding, but they have also come with significant demands of leading critical projects, complex stakeholder relationships, board level reporting, and working across regions and time zones.

One insight from Marshall Goldsmith, one of the world's leading executive coaches, has guided me through many demanding phases of leadership, “When you are tired, you rest. You don’t quit.”

It helped me recognize signs of emotional and physical exhaustion and, more importantly, to honor the need for rest. Sometimes, all I need to recharge is a spa weekend, a walk in nature, or take a pause for a few quiet moments to myself.

As part of my daily routine, I make time to walk, meditate, and journal, even if it is only fifteen minutes while travelling. Over time, this practice of conscious balance has transformed the way I lead, helping me stay calmer, more intuitive, and grounded during uncertainty.

I experienced this very clearly during the early days of COVID-19. In 2020, I was leading a customer center with nearly 3,000 employees. In February, while many people believed the crisis would remain confined to China, my instinct told me otherwise. Just a few weeks later, when lockdowns were announced, we transitioned critical operations to remote working with remarkable speed and stability.

At senior leadership levels, I believe the conversation must go beyond representation numbers and policies that support women's well-being in an organization. Equal opportunity is not just about how many women have a seat at the table; it is also about evaluating women by the same standards as men.

I have seen strong, outspoken, and courageous women leaders being labelled "difficult," "bossy," or "aggressive" for behaviors that are often celebrated in men. As a result, many women find themselves constantly editing and managing how they come across. Even something as simple as writing an email can require extra thought because we are expected to soften the tone as a “woman leader”. It is a subtle but persistent pressure that many women in leadership including myself carry every day.

I strongly believe that, for the well-being of women, we need to challenge the assumptions and double standards that shape how women are perceived and rewarded.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Never lose yourself while fulfilling other roles

As women, we often become so invested in being mothers, wives, caregivers, or leaders that we forget to nurture ourselves. Hold on to your own ambitions, financial independence, friendships, and well-being. And when life feels overwhelming, remember: rest when you are exhausted, but do not quit.

2. Protect your boundaries

Conscious balance requires clear boundaries. I can handle demanding workdays, but I avoid scheduling late-night calls more than two days in a row and reserve weekends for family and recovery. Even during busy periods, I follow a simple rule: unless there is a genuine crisis, work ends at 7 p.m.

3. Don't let a bad day become a bad story

When something goes wrong, resist the urge to react immediately. I always create some space between the problem and myself. Give yourself time to process, reflect, and regain perspective. Setbacks are inevitable, but they should never be allowed to linger long enough to undermine your confidence.

CHAPTER 12

Nicole Quiogue Golloso-Kazemi

Director of Human Resources and Corporate Communications, SG & HK, McCann



Nicole is an award-winning leader with over a decade of experience across HR, marketing, and academia. Recognized among Asia's Top 50 HR Leaders and a Women of the Future Awards 2024 finalist, she is known for her modern, creative, and deeply people-centric approach. Rooted in her personal journey with mental health, Nicole brings a rare blend of empathy and intention to her work, championing resilience, wellbeing, and psychological safety while redefining what conscious balance looks like in leadership and life.

I'm originally from the Philippines, where I pursued my bachelor's degree in Psychology. I initially chose Psychology as a pre-law course, following my uncle's advice to take something I was genuinely interested in, so I would have a fallback in case I changed my mind about law. From a young age, I've always been curious about people—how they think, behave, and interact—so Psychology felt like the right fit.

However, after university, my parents encouraged me to try working in the corporate world first, so I could experience earning my own money before committing to law school. I agreed, thinking it would just be a short detour. I entered Human Resources, as it seemed like the closest alternative to clinical practice at the time. But somewhere along the way, that "temporary" path became permanent—I ended up building my

career in HR and eventually pursued a master's degree in Industrial-Organizational Psychology instead.

Very quickly, HR became much more than just a practical choice. I genuinely fell in love with the work. Over the past 13 years, I've had the opportunity to explore multiple facets of HR, from talent acquisition and talent management to employee development, engagement, organizational development, compensation and benefits, and labor relations. These experiences have allowed me to grow in ways I never could have imagined.

Looking back, I can see that every step, whether planned or unexpected, has consistently aligned with my core purpose: to help people. From choosing Psychology to building a career in HR, each experience became a different way of understanding, supporting, and empowering others. More than anything, this journey has shaped what conscious balance means to me today.

Conscious balance is a combination of self-awareness, intentionality, and well-being. It is about understanding who you are at your core - your strengths, limits, and needs, and then making deliberate choices that align how you live, work, and connect with others.

Conscious balance has also been an integral part of my mental well-being. For the longest time, I believed that perfection defined who I was. I thought success meant excelling in one area without showing cracks in another. But my healing journey taught me otherwise. I realized that life cannot be one-sided. I cannot thrive professionally while neglecting my well-being, my relationships, or myself. Everything is interconnected, and that is something you will see clearly as my story unfolds further.

For over a decade, I struggled with depression. It started when I was just 13 years old. I carried it quietly for years because I had this image to maintain, the perfect daughter, the perfect student, always smiling and high-functioning. I did not want to be seen as weak.

I only asked for help in my early twenties. By then, I had already gone through three suicide attempts and engaged in self-harm. For many years, no one knew.

During my last suicide attempt in December 2017, something powerful happened. As I was about to take my life, I remember hearing a voice repeatedly telling me not to do it. In that moment, my life flashed before me, not in the way people often describe it, but in fragments of people I had supported, students, colleagues, and friends. I remembered conversations where I had listened, encouraged, and helped them choose to stay and live their lives. I even remembered a friend I had convinced not to jump from a hotel building.

And suddenly, I realized something. If I ended my life, I would not just be hurting myself. I would be breaking something bigger, a chain of hope I had unknowingly created. That was my wake-up call.

From that moment, I made a conscious decision. Even if I was not fully healed, I would no longer hurt myself, and I would dedicate my life to helping others.

Through that journey, conscious balance became deeply personal to me. It also taught me the importance of intentionality in how I approach my career, my relationships, my time, and even the conversations I have with myself.

As a leader, I approach my role with deep intention, always grounding myself in the understanding that every decision I make affects real people. That awareness pushes me to show up with empathy, especially during difficult conversations.

I make a conscious effort to truly know my people, not just in terms of their roles and performance, but as individuals. I check in regularly and create space for honest conversations. I also adapt my communication style depending on who I am speaking to, because I recognize that each person experiences and processes things differently.

At the core of my leadership are three guiding principles: kindness, respect, and empathy. These are not just values I believe in, but ones I practice consistently.

For me, being human is the foundation of leadership, and leading with conscious balance means never losing sight of that.

This is where organizations also need to become more intentional and, above all, more human, especially when it comes to supporting women in the workforce.

Culture cannot be dictated through policies or statements alone. It must be built through small, consistent actions, everyday decisions, and the way employees are treated in moments that truly matter. Organizations need to create environments where people feel psychologically and emotionally safe, where they have the confidence to speak up and the freedom to simply be themselves.

At McCann, we have introduced initiatives such as an unlimited leave policy called "Time Well Taken," which enables employees to take breaks for what truly matters, whether that is caring for their mental health, processing grief, or simply taking time to rest and reset when needed.

On a personal level, I practice conscious balance through simple yet meaningful habits that help me stay connected to myself and by surrounding myself with people who genuinely love and support me, including my husband, my family, and close friends.

Faith has played a significant role in my healing and sense of balance. After my last suicide attempt in 2017, it took me over a year to recover. During that time, I prayed daily for clarity, strength, and relief from the pain. Even now, before difficult conversations, I pause for a quiet prayer. I may not consider myself deeply religious, but I believe there is guidance from a higher being in our lives and that things happen for a reason even when we do not fully understand how.

I also turn to dance and music to stay connected to myself. Dancing gives me a sense of freedom. On the dance floor, I can be whoever I want to be. I practice various dance styles but have focused on Latin dance in the recent years, including cha-cha, rumba, jive, and samba, and singing continues to be a core part of who I am.

Nature keeps me grounded. Living on the island of Siargao before moving to Singapore shifted my perspective in a profound way. Watching sunsets and letting go of the need for constant validation helped me reconnect with what truly matters.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Build self-awareness

Develop a clear understanding of who you are, your patterns, your triggers, and your impact on others. Self-awareness is the foundation that shapes both personal growth and effective leadership.

2. Choose progress over perfection

Trust that every experience, even the difficult ones, is shaping you. Allow yourself to make mistakes and focus on growing, rather than trying to get everything right.

3. Pause before you break

Listen to your body, heart and mind. Rest and recalibrate when you need to, and do not wait until burnout forces you to stop. Most importantly, be open to asking for help, because no one thrives alone.

CHAPTER 13

Peck Kem Low



President of SHRI and WFPMA

Peck Kem Low is a seasoned and highly respected Human Resources (HR) leader known for blending business acumen with deep people insight. With a career that began in engineering and evolved into global HR leadership, she brings a unique ability to balance data-driven strategy with human understanding. She is widely regarded as an authentic and courageous leader who is both strategic and operationally strong, unafraid to take tough decisions while driving organizational transformation and national HR agendas. Passionate about shaping the future of work, Peck Kem actively contributes to the HR community through her leadership and pro bono roles, mentoring and guiding leaders across Asia Pacific. At the core of her leadership is conscious balance, which gives her the inner strength and clarity to navigate complexity, lead with authenticity, and create meaningful, high-performing workplaces.

I have never been drawn to the obvious path. Even as a young woman in Singapore, I chose to study electrical and electronics engineering in 1986 at Nanyang Technological University, a space few women entered at the time. I was curious about how things worked, how different parts fit together, and how to make sense of complex problems.

The instinct to step into the unknown has always defined my life. Over time, I have learned that certainty is rare, especially when you choose the path less travelled. What has guided me instead is conscious balance,

anchoring myself in my values and priorities. It allows me to balance logic with instinct and make decisions with clarity rather than fear. Even when outcomes are uncertain, I trust my choices because they are intentional.

I began my career with Tandon Singapore as a Quality Engineer and progressed to become an Assistant Production Manager with Western Digital. I later joined Hewlett Packard, where an unexpected opportunity shifted the direction of my career.

I was offered a role as an HR Business Partner for the Semiconductor business. It was a significant shift from engineering but one that felt instinctively right. It aligned with my growing interest in people, systems, and how organizations function. I went on to handle recruitment for HP Singapore and later took on the role of Compensation and Benefits Manager for Southeast Asia, while also pursuing a Master's degree in Human Resource Management (MScHRM) with Rutgers University in 1994.

As the business evolved, I took on broader HR leadership roles across multiple countries, eventually stepping into a regional leadership position for Asia Pacific.

Throughout this journey, my engineering background has remained a strong foundation. It has enabled me to understand business realities deeply and apply people strategies with clarity. I have always seen myself as both an 'architect' of the work environment and an 'engineer' of people's careers, focused on building not just strong organizations but meaningful and high performing workplaces.

While some people view HR as a purely people-focused or emotional function, I see it as a discipline grounded in data that builds trust and drives meaningful outcomes for both the organization and its people.

My sense of conscious balance gives me the inner strength and well-being to confidently take a different approach to HR and lead with authenticity.

Conscious balance is about building inner strength and a clear sense of values. It gives you the confidence to make your own choices, to

be comfortable with who you are, and to accept difficult moments while still fully owning your journey.

In my personal life, there have been moments when I've had to make conscious choices between prioritizing my family and focusing on my career. One such moment came when I was offered a role based in Geneva which required my relocation from Singapore. It was an opportunity in a new environment and doing work I was passionate about. But my husband Mario had his career in Singapore, and my children were settled in school, so the decision was not straightforward.

What made it possible was the support of my family and the inner confidence to step into the unknown once again. Mario encouraged me to take the opportunity and said he would leave his job and join me a year later. My daughter, Ashley who was about 17 at the time, simply said, "Mummy, just do what your heart tells you. We'll be fine. Daddy is here, and we are old enough. Don't worry."

I have always believed that if you love what you do and find meaning in your work, then you never really feel like working is a chore. For me, that is fundamental to my well-being. I genuinely enjoy my work and find deep satisfaction in making a difference in people's lives.

I also make a conscious effort to keep learning and growing. Over the years, I have built new skills through a Master's in HR, coaching, and leadership programs. Beyond my role, I use my networks and influence to uplift HR capabilities across Singapore, Asia Pacific region and at a global stage. This gives me the energy and motivation to keep improving and to do more. I am elected and serve in pro bono roles such as President of Singapore Human Resources Institute (SHRI) and World Federation of People Management Associations (WFPMA). While these require time and effort, they are deeply fulfilling and worthwhile.

At the core of my life is a strong sense of values. They act as my north star, helping me prioritize what truly matters. My top priorities are my family, health, relationships, and friends.

I also make time for what brings me joy. I love baking and painting, and on weekends, I often bake or paint and share it with my colleagues. When they take home some bakes and share it with their families, and

send me videos of their shared happiness, it brings me immense joy. These simple acts of creating and sharing have helped me build meaningful connections over time. It is this thoughtfulness in sharing and bringing joy to others that grounds me and becomes a way of integrating conscious balance into my life.

Organizations have an important role in supporting the well-being of women. Leaders need to look beyond hours worked and create a supportive environment where women can contribute fully while managing their roles at home and at work. It is important to recognize that women and men bring different strengths and perspectives, and women should be developed as leaders without being expected to behave like men.

Women often carry an unfair share of emotional and caregiving burden, both at home and at work. While this may not always be fair, I believe in acknowledging it and choosing to turn it into a strength rather than being a victim of the circumstances.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Exercise and self-care

Make time for daily exercise and self-care. Build both physical and mental strength. Most importantly, invest in yourself. If red roses make you happy, go buy yourself a bunch. Do not wait for that special occasion or for someone else to do it for you.

2. Prioritize yourself and your happiness

Learn to let go and not sweat the small stuff. When something stresses you, ask if it is worth the grey hair. If it can be solved, act on it. If not, let it go. Focus only on what truly matters and do not lose sleep over the rest.

3. Keep learning

I always set aside time to learn, create, and grow. Whether it is reading, painting, baking, or trying something new, I keep my mind active. Growth is one of the most powerful ways to support well-being.

CHAPTER 14

Ramya Ganesh



Head of HR, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation Global Services (SMBC GS)

Ramya is a seasoned Human Resources (HR) leader with over two decades of global experience spanning talent, culture, leadership development, organizational transformation, coaching, diversity and inclusion, and people strategy. Having built her career across India, Singapore, the United States, and global leadership roles, she has partnered with diverse organizations to create high-performing, people-centric workplaces. A strong advocate of conscious balance, Ramya believes thriving at work begins with thriving as an individual. Her leadership is shaped by intentional choices, continuous learning, and the courage to adapt as life's priorities evolve. Passionate about developing leaders and fostering psychologically safe cultures, she champions well-being not as a HR initiative but as a leadership responsibility that enables both individual growth and sustainable business success.

Every stage of life asks for something different of us. I've learned that conscious balance is about recognizing what matters most in that season, giving it my wholehearted attention, and having the courage to adjust as life changes. This conscious approach has helped me thrive, both personally and professionally.

For me, balance has never meant giving equal time to everything. It means making deliberate choices about where I need to be, being fully

present in that choice, and accepting that sometimes choosing one thing means letting go of another**.** It has enabled me to make decisions that are true to myself and build a life that feels both meaningful and sustainable.

I started my career in Chennai with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), where I spent nearly a decade. It marked the beginning of a journey that took me from Chennai to Mumbai, then Bengaluru, and eventually to Singapore - those were my first opportunities to work overseas, learn and grow. Every two years, I took on a new role, with each assignment bringing a fresh challenge, a new team and a different perspective. Looking back, those experiences shaped not only my career but also the way I lead and make choices today.

I later joined Thales, where I spent the next eleven and a half years. During that time, the organization offered me the opportunity to relocate with my family from Singapore to California. Looking back, that move enriched my career, broadened my perspective and shaped me into a more confident, well-rounded leader.

Then came COVID and we lost someone very dear to our family in India. We couldn't travel home, and that sense of helplessness became a profound turning point for me. It sparked an inner reset. It was a reminder that life does not always wait for the “right time”, and that the choices we make about where and with whom we spend our time matter. We moved back to Singapore.

After returning to Thales Singapore, I was presented with an external opportunity to join Boston Scientific, a company in a different industry. It was a rewarding role with the best leadership values and work ethics. Yet, in a moment of haste, I chose to leave and join a mainland Chinese startup as its first employee in Singapore. It was a global role, supporting teams across Latin America, North America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. The work itself was incredibly exciting, giving me the opportunity to work with a high-performing team and collaborate with leaders from around the world. But over time, it became clear there was a seeking for a different organizational culture and ways of working. After two years, I knew it was time to move on. This became another important lesson of my career – not every opportunity needs to be

pursued, and sometimes the right decision is to slow down, listen to yourself and be clear about what truly aligns with your values and priorities.

I made the conscious decision to take a break then, before deciding what came next. It wasn't a pause born out of uncertainty, it was an intentional choice to create space, reflect and reset. It was the first real break I had taken in 22 years. Until then, I had moved from one role to the next without stopping. Even after my daughter was born, I was back at work within two months. For the first time, I gave myself permission to pause, reflect and think intentionally about what I wanted from the next chapter of my life and career.

During those five months, I travelled, caught up with friends and extended family, tried my hand at writing a children's book, learned to cook some of my daughter’s favorite dishes, reconnected with my professional network, appeared on a couple of podcasts and was recognized as one of Asia’s Top 50 HR Leaders by SpeakIn. I also made time for things I had long put aside, like dancing and simply getting my body moving again. More than anything, that period reminded me that stepping away does not mean stepping back. Sometimes it creates the clarity needed to move forward with greater purpose.

At the end of that break, I reconnected with one of my mentors, and through him came the opportunity to help build SMBC's Global Capability Centre in Chennai.

Today, I am temporarily based in Chennai and travel regularly to Singapore, where my family continues to live. Like many of us, I balance multiple roles, as a mother, a working professional, a wife, a daughter, a friend, and even a fur mom. Over time, I've come to realize that balance isn't about giving every role equal time. It's about being fully present wherever I choose to be. When I'm with my family, I'm truly with them. When I'm working, I give it my complete attention. The balance may shift from day to day, but the intention remains constant. And this intention about where I invest my time and energy has allowed me to be more fulfilled in both my personal and professional life.

Work is important to me, but it isn't my whole identity. I thrive just as much through my relationships and the connections I build with people. When I'm with my friends, work simply doesn't exist. Those moments are not an escape from work; they are part of what allows me to return to it with energy, perspective and purpose.

My daughter is now 16 and has just completed Grade 10. She writes, sings, plays the guitar, and loves the performing arts. Over the years, I've attended almost every one of her performances. Ironically, the ones she remembers are the two I missed. The most recent was a major high school drama production where she played five different characters. She was incredibly proud and wanted me there. But I had to stay back in Chennai for an important work commitment. Did it hurt? Absolutely.

Sometimes life forces you to choose between two things that matter deeply. Choosing one doesn't mean you value the other any less. It means making the best decision you can in that moment, accepting the trade-off, and not allowing guilt to take over.

Like every working mother, I still have moments when guilt surfaces. But I also feel immense pride. My daughter sees me making choices based on my own aspirations and values, while remaining deeply committed to the family. If that shows her that she can build a life on her own terms, then perhaps I've given her something even more valuable than my presence at a single performance.

That belief extends beyond my home and into the workplace. Well-being cannot be treated as an HR initiative or a culture program. It is a business imperative and, more importantly, a leadership responsibility. Policies alone do not create meaningful change. Leaders do. And cultures are shaped not by policies, but by people.

I saw this firsthand when we introduced a menstrual leave policy at SMBC Global Services. Months after the policy was launched, I noticed that hardly anyone was using it. That realization led me to an uncomfortable question: if employees weren't taking menstrual leave, why hadn't I taken it myself? That question changed my perspective. I recently applied for menstrual leave, informed my manager, my leadership team, and even set my out-of-office message to read, *"I'm on*

menstrual leave." Not sick leave. Menstrual leave. The point was not the leave itself. It was about role modelling and breaking down a taboo. Menstruation is a natural biological process, not something that needs to be hidden behind another label.

If we want people to feel comfortable prioritizing their health, leaders must first demonstrate that it's acceptable to do so. Real culture change happens when people see senior leaders using the same policies, speaking about them without discomfort, and creating an environment where employees do not have to explain or apologize for taking care of themselves.

The same principle applies during the most difficult moments of leadership. Supporting well-being isn't only about celebrating people when they're thriving; it's equally about how we stand by them when they're facing uncertainty or loss.

One of the hardest responsibilities a leader carries is managing exits. Losing a job is deeply personal, and in those moments, people deserve honesty, clarity and respect. Conversations that affect someone's aspirations and livelihood should never be reduced to an email or an impersonal message. How we deliver difficult news says as much about our leadership as the decision itself.

Empathy, emotional intelligence and psychological safety aren't soft skills, they are business enablers. When people feel safe to bring their authentic selves to work, they perform better. And when people know they will be treated with dignity even in difficult moments, trust becomes part of the culture rather than simply an organizational value.

Lesson for Conscious Balance

1. Trust yourself

Know when to stop analyzing and start acting. If you're clear about what you want and what helps you thrive, trust your instincts and take the step. More often than not, growth begins with saying yes.

2. Be fully present in the moment you're in

Conscious balance isn't always found in grand gestures; it's often built through small, everyday moments. Whether I'm laughing with my daughter, playing with my dog, or sharing a quiet cup of tea with my husband, I make a conscious effort to be completely present. Even if it's only ten minutes, letting go of work, and what's coming next gives my mind the reset it needs.

3. Create micro moments to reset

Well-being is built through small, intentional pauses. Like one practice I return to is scrolling through my phone, stopping at a random photograph, and taking a moment to relive it —remembering where I was, who I was with, and how I felt. That simple exercise reconnects me with positive emotions and shifts my mindset. Sometimes something as simple as a minute of mindful breathing, also helps me stay grounded, even on the busiest days.

CHAPTER 14

Ritu Sinha



Head of People and Culture, Flynas

Ritu is a seasoned Human Resources (HR) leader with over two decades of experience across aviation, startups, and large corporates. Her journey spans building Human Resource (HR) frameworks for new airlines to shaping people strategies in some of India's most iconic aviation brands including IndiGo, Vistara and Akasa. Known for navigating both startup chaos and the demands of a 24/7 industry, she believes that culture does not happen by accident, it is intentionally designed, lived, and led. For Ritu, HR goes beyond policies and processes. It is about creating workplaces where people and business grow together. Her approach is shaped by her philosophy of conscious balance, which she defines as making intentional choices for growth while staying aligned with personal values, without guilt. A lifelong learner at heart, she sees HR leaders as culture architects. The most meaningful feedback she has received reflects her core belief: creating workplaces that feel human, where talent does not just stay, but truly thrives.

My story begins as that of a small-town girl from Patna, Bihar in India, with big dreams and a quiet determination to build something beyond the expected path of graduation, marriage, and a predictable life. I was fortunate to have parents who believed in not settling for less. They encouraged me to aim higher and step beyond what was familiar. But despite that support, the younger me was a happy-go-lucky-person, simply moving with life as it came.

It was only after my college years were over that I was truly confronted with a reality about growth that no one prepares you for. At some point, there is no obvious "next." You have to decide. You have to become intentional. Looking back, that was my first real moment of conscious choice.

After my graduation I decided to pursue my MBA in HR from Symbiosis Pune, which led to my first job at a leading Indian petrochemicals company in Vadodara, Gujarat. On paper, it was perfect, with a stable job, a company-provided home, a comfortable routine, and a 5 pm sign-off every day. But comfort, I realized, can be deceptive.

After two years in the job, my learning plateaued. I could feel it. And somewhere inside, I knew that if I stayed, I would be choosing ease over learning in HR and growth in life. That thought began to disturb me. After reflecting on it deeply, I made a difficult decision. I left that comfort behind and moved to Gurgaon. The move wasn't easy, and I was genuinely scared. Gurgaon was a completely different world. It was faster, more competitive, and far less forgiving. I had to start from scratch, prove myself again, and face quite a few rejections in the interviews I had lined up. It took all my inner strength to ensure that I did not let those rejections define me.

And then came my breakthrough with IndiGo airlines. Joining IndiGo in 2006 marked my entry into aviation, and from there, something just clicked. I loved the pace, unpredictability and energy of the aviation industry. I stayed with IndiGo for ten years and that time gave me a strong foundation. But more importantly, it taught me something deeper, that growth requires movement, and movement requires choice.

Conscious balance is the ability to make intentional choices that support your growth and success while staying aligned with your values and what brings you joy. It is about making considered decisions, and moving forward without guilt.

In 2016, Vistara, a joint venture between the Tata Group and Singapore Airlines, was just starting out. So, when an opportunity came my way, I decided to move to Vistara. I spent the next six years there, continuing to grow into leadership roles. By 2022, I had spent nearly 17 years in

Gurgaon. It had become home. I had built my life there, and I had also turned down opportunities that required relocation. This was also the time when COVID had disrupted everything. The world felt uncertain and unstable.

But when the opportunity to work with Akasa came along, I felt a quiet urge for change. By this point, it had become evident that my growth mindset was a strong pillar of my well-being. Akasa was an opportunity to build an airline from scratch. It was exciting, but it also meant moving to Mumbai at a time when most people were holding on to familiarity. I remember asking myself a simple question: *What would truly support my growth right now?* And the answer was clear. So, I chose possibility over comfort. Those years at Akasa were intense, challenging, and deeply fulfilling.

After three years, I decided to move to Saudi Arabia to join Flynas. I remember people questioning me as to why would a single woman move there? But for me, it wasn't about what others thought. It was about choosing growth, even when it meant stepping into the unknown. That, for me, is conscious balance. It is about making decisions that feel right for you, even when they don't fit into your own plan or someone else's definition of success.

There have been phases in my career where I have worked relentlessly day and night. And for a long time, I believed that this was success. But over time, that constant drive can become exhausting. I have experienced burnout and had to stop and ask myself, "*Where am I in all of this?"* That question changes everything. I've said it myself many times, "I didn't even get time for lunch." And somewhere, we wear that as a badge of honor. But conscious balance challenges that thinking.

It tells you that taking a break is not a weakness, it is a choice. It is about blocking that one hour for yourself, even on the busiest day. It is about stepping away, having a quiet coffee, or simply breathing without guilt. Because guilt is what disrupts balance the most.

When you make a choice, whether it is to work harder or to pause you need to own it. That is where balance truly comes from. It also reflects in how we define success, especially as women. For a long time, society

has defined the “right” path for women as getting married at a certain age, having children, and managing both home and career seamlessly. But I questioned that. Why does success have to look the same for everyone? For me, the conscious choice was to stay single and focus on my career and myself.

Today, at an organizational level, I lead the effort to build a high-performing and engaged culture across a workforce of 4,000 employees. A big part of this is shifting the mindset that HR is not just about salaries, performance, and operations it is about the well-being of every employee.

While our senior leadership is completely aligned in principle, real impact comes when that commitment is visible in their actions. Specifically in the aviation industry, it is important to recognize the natural life stages of women and create policies and opportunities that support them. For example, providing sufficient ground roles for crew members who may be unable to fly after the first trimester of pregnancy is essential.

At the same time, for the overall well- being and performance of the organization, it is equally important to build and sustain a diverse workforce. Conscious balance must become a way of life, not something we turn to only in moments of imbalance.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Don’t confuse exhaustion with success

When I feel drained, I take it as a signal to pause, reflect, and make a more intentional choice. Give yourself that permission to take a break without any guilt and step back when needed.

2. Financial independence builds confidence

Financial independence is a powerful enabler of conscious balance. When you make the decision to be financially independent, it brings a sense of confidence into your decisions and strengthens your ability to choose what is right for you in every aspect of life.

3. Protect your energy, protect your growth

Protecting your energy is extremely important. It means being mindful of the people, environments, and situations that drain you and consciously choosing to stay away from them. Keeping your energy aligned and intact is essential to sustaining both your well-being and your ability to move forward.

CHAPTER 16

Rucha Sawant



Managing Director, GTM and Practices, Avanade, Australia

Rucha is a digital and cloud leader who has built her career at the intersection of technology, business transformation, and people. With leadership experience across Asia Pacific and Japan (APJ) and Latin America (LATAM), she has helped clients turn Microsoft technology into meaningful business outcomes while building long-term partnerships and sustainable growth. Leading distributed teams in a fast-moving industry, Rucha brings a distinctly human lens to leadership. She believes performance is strongest when people feel valued, keep learning, and have the space to grow without losing what energizes them. She has championed career pathways for women recognizing the qualitative contributions that often remain invisible at work. A self-described introvert and mother of two daughters, Rucha sees conscious balance as knowing where her energy matters most and choosing to invest it there. She measures success beyond roles and titles, through relationships, curiosity, presence, and bringing people along on the journey.

I was born and raised in Mumbai in very humble circumstances. We lived in a small, one-room home, often shared by 10 to 15 members of our extended family. It was crowded and close-knit, and opportunities could never be taken for granted.

My mother was one of seven children and had missed out on educational opportunities herself. In a traditional, male-dominated family, where my brother's education, career, and hobbies were often given greater priority, my mother quietly but firmly held her ground. When the expectation could easily have been, "Let's get her married," my mother insisted that I complete my education.

She was my anchor. Her determination to create opportunities for me laid the foundation for my well-being, giving me the confidence to learn, aspire, and keep moving forward. I am equally grateful to my father who fueled my passion for mathematics and science and built solid educational foundations. I became the first person in our family to complete a bachelor's degree, choosing computer science, a field still widely seen as a "boy's" pathway at the time.

My first opportunity came through a campus internship with a research division at IIT Bombay, where I worked on an ambitious program to build cancer-treatment machines locally in India. The work was challenging, meaningful, and deeply fulfilling.

So, when an Accenture recruiter approached me six months later, my instinct was to say no. I loved what I was doing, even though I was earning barely Rs 1,500 a month. But as the eldest in a large family, I also felt a responsibility to contribute financially. I was choosing between work I loved and an opportunity that could create greater possibilities for my family and me.

Eventually, I joined Accenture, becoming one of the first 100 people in its Mumbai office and stepping into the fast-paced world of consulting, which brought tremendous exposure and learning.

I did not have the language for it then, but that decision was an early lesson in what I now call conscious balance. It was not about perfectly balancing passion, ambition, and responsibility. It was about recognizing what mattered at that moment and consciously directing my energy toward it.

Over time, that instinct has evolved into a principle I live by: Conscious balance is energy management, not time management. It is about being intentional about what truly matters, directing your

energy where you can create the greatest impact, while creating the space and resilience to sustain what truly matters over time.

I have also learned that energy is not only something we manage for ourselves. We can invest it in others, and sometimes that investment can change someone's trajectory.

My career with Accenture took me from Mumbai to Singapore and then to the US. When my husband and I decided to move to Australia, a senior Avanade leader recommended me to the General Manager of Avanade Australia, the joint venture between Accenture and Microsoft. I was still a relatively junior engineer, near the bottom of the organizational pyramid, yet he saw potential and chose to advocate for me.

That recommendation opened the door to Avanade and became a defining moment. Someone had used his influence to create a possibility for me before I could fully see it myself. As I grew as a leader, I carried that lesson with me: if someone created space for me to grow, how could I create that space for others?

At Avanade, I have championed a career pathway that allows technologists to progress without leaving behind what they love. Traditionally, advancing in consulting can mean moving away from engineering toward sales, commercial responsibilities, and business management. Working with HR, we created a career journey where people can advance while deepening their technical expertise and staying close to innovation.

For me, that is conscious leadership, understanding what matters to people and using your energy and influence to help them thrive.

Sometimes, you see the impact years later. I once interviewed a graduate who eventually joined Avanade. Five years later, we met again at a town hall. He told me that hearing about my career journey had influenced his decision to join and then shared everything he had gone on to do in the organization.

Moments like these mean a great deal to me. Creating opportunities, connecting people, and knowing I may have played even a small part in someone's journey gives me a genuine sense of purpose.

That responsibility feels even more important today.

We are living through enormous technological change. With artificial intelligence (AI) accelerating so quickly, conversations about layoffs and job displacement are everywhere. We are not immune to that at Avanade. Psychological safety and well-being across my broader team have therefore become incredibly important.

I chose not to shut down those conversations, but to make space for them—asking my leadership team what we were hearing, what people were feeling, and what genuinely needed addressing beneath the noise. There will always be things we cannot control. We are a global organization and, even as leaders, some decisions come from elsewhere. But we can choose where we put our energy.

Instead of worrying about whether AI will replace jobs, we are asking: What capabilities will our people need in this new world? Which human skills will become more valuable? How do we strengthen critical thinking, consulting, and technology capabilities? I believe that even if the organization must one day make a difficult decision about someone's role, that person should leave better equipped and with greater market value than when they joined.

This thinking has shaped our internal transformation. One initiative is our "learning season": every Friday, we protect two hours exclusively for learning, combining structured content with the freedom for people to develop the skills that matter most to them.

This is truly another form of conscious energy management. We cannot remove uncertainty, but we can choose not to spend all our energy worrying about what we cannot control. As leaders, we can redirect that energy toward learning, capability building, and helping people see a better future.

The same principle shapes my personal life. I no longer think of balance as drawing neat lines between work and home. It is about knowing where my energy matters most in that moment and being fully there. If I am at my eldest daughter's swimming class, I want to be watching her, not the pings on my phone. I realized this the hard way, especially when I missed her winning "age championship" for the very first time at the

school swimming carnival because I was busy responding to work messages, instead of being fully present and cheering her on.

Being an introvert has also made me particularly conscious of this. My role requires me to be visible, meet people, and engage constantly. I enjoy it, but it can also drain me emotionally. Therefore, I deliberately create quiet spaces to reflect, reset, and reconnect with myself. I do this by blocking four hours on my calendar every Friday for myself.

I am also learning that protecting my energy sometimes means saying no. Empathy makes that difficult, but setting a boundary does not make me less committed.

And I keep learning. My five-year-old recently joined a netball team, and some of us moms help coach. I knew absolutely nothing about netball, so now I am learning alongside her. I love being the person who knows the least in the room. It keeps me grounded and humble and reminds me to remain a learner.

But managing energy cannot be left entirely to individuals. Organizations also need to examine where people's energy is going and whether that contribution is valued.

If organizations genuinely want to support women, they need to recognize the invisible load women often carry, not only personally but professionally. Women frequently take on what I call the "housework of the office": organizing events, bringing people together, championing communities, and becoming the glue that holds teams together. It may sit outside their day job, but they step up because they care and often because these are genuine strengths.

Performance cannot be measured only through quantitative metrics while overlooking the qualitative value people create. We are trying to be deliberate about recognizing these contributions when women choose to take them on.

My view is simple: if an organization expects people to do this work, put it on the scorecard and make it a real Key Performance Indicator (KPI). Otherwise, don't ask them to do it. When valuable work remains invisible, it is rarely rewarded and too often, it is not even noticed.

Well-being cannot sit on the sidelines of business performance either. It must be built intentionally into how organizations operate and how leaders make decisions. For me, the key word is *sustained*. Performance will always have peaks and troughs. What matters is creating the conditions that allow people to thrive and perform over time. Get that right, and organizations attract and retain great talent, strengthen diversity of thought, and create real competitive advantage.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Presence matters more than proximity

Whatever you are doing, be there. In a world of technology and AI, where our attention is constantly being pulled in different directions, consciously choosing where to place your attention and energy is becoming even more important. Presence is one of the most valuable gifts we can give to the people who matter most.

2. Invest in human relationships

Early in my career, I thought success meant earning the right certifications and building technical expertise. Over time, especially learning from my husband, I have realized that understanding people with regards to what matters to them, what motivates them, and how they see the world is equally important. I want my daughters to understand that success is not just about titles. One of my early clients in Australia is now one of my closest friends and the godmother of my younger daughter. Relationships like these remind me that a fulfilling career is also about the connections we build along the way.

3. Learn to lean back

I encourage women on my leadership team to stop trying to do ten things, whether visible or invisible. Instead, choose the two or three things where you can make the greatest impact and do them well. It is the 80–20 rule in practice and being intentional about where you invest your time and energy.

CHAPTER 17



Seetha Cristian Murugappan

Executive Director,
Treasury Liquidity Technology |
Author, "Women of Substance - From Worrier to Warrior" |
Speaker & Coach

Over a career spanning more than 25 years across banking, technology, and shipping, Seetha Cristian has led large-scale transformations spanning teams, functions, and geographies. Beyond her corporate role, Seetha is a passionate advocate for change leadership and women's advancement. She is the author of " Women of Substance - From Worrier to Warrior," a book born out of her own journey of reinvention, and she coaches leaders and speaks internationally on conscious leadership, sponsorship, and the future of work in the age of AI. Her philosophy of "conscious balance" is the belief that our greatest strength as leaders comes not from armoring ourselves against struggle, but from staying honest with it - mind, body, emotions, finances, and relationships all held together with intention.

I have spent more than 25 years working across diverse industries - fintech, telecommunications, shipping, and banking. Ironically, my father was a banker, and for the longest time I was convinced banking was the one industry I would never enter. Earlier in my career, I was with a global technology services firm, starting in asset management before helping establish its data warehousing division - work that involved years of travel between China and Malaysia.

Around that time, I interviewed with a global bank. After several rounds, I assumed the opportunity had disappeared when I heard nothing for almost a year. But life has a way of surprising us. Just as I was feeling a strong pull to return to Malaysia and spend more time with my parents, that same bank reconnected with me, offering a role in technology delivery. I accepted - stepping into the very industry I had once sworn I would never join. Looking back, that decision was one of the moments I consciously chose balance over fear.

Conscious Balance is an inner intelligence that helps me stay clear-headed when fear, uncertainty, pressure, or strong emotions threaten to cloud my judgment. It is my inner anchor - the part of me that remains grounded even when everything around me feels uncertain. Over the years, that clarity has become one of my greatest strengths as a leader.

My new role was incredibly intense - internet banking, where every decision carried weight because it involved people's money. I was terrified. Walking into that building felt like entering a palace where everyone seemed to size me up from head to toe. The pressure only deepened when 35 people left the function within a short period, and I found myself rebuilding an entire team almost from scratch - hiring more than 30 people in my first year alone, despite having no prior experience in large-scale recruitment.

People often say leadership decisions should be guided by data and facts. While I value both, I've learned to trust the clarity that emerges when I'm grounded in my own well-being. I hired based on potential, belief, and gut feel - and when something didn't feel right, I paused rather than ignored it. Those moments of reflection often gave me the clarity to make better decisions. Over time, I've realized conscious balance is deeply connected to trusting yourself: sometimes your inner voice understands something long before your logical mind can explain it.

Fear was never far away. For much of my career, like so many women, I worried about the future - would I survive, succeed, be perceived the "right" way? Likability often plays an outsized role in career growth, and I was never particularly skilled at organizational politics. By nature, I'm

direct and transparent, saying things as they are rather than sugar-coating them - and I know that can make people uncomfortable.

But conscious balance helped me stay grounded, navigating uncertainty without compromising my authenticity. What changed was not my personality - it was my relationship with my own emotions. I stopped treating vulnerability as a weakness to hide and started treating it as a source of trust. Some of the strongest relationships I've built with my teams came from moments when I let them see me as human - uncertain, still figuring it out. That honesty didn't weaken my leadership; it deepened it.

One of the hardest periods of my life came when I was retrenched with only two months' notice, just after returning from maternity leave with a six-month-old daughter at home. My husband had already stepped away from his own career to support mine, so the full responsibility of providing for our family now rested entirely on me. I had very little savings, and I panicked - applying for anything and everything, driven more by fear than clarity. Despite all the frantic effort, months passed without success, and I eventually found myself down to my last dollar, having to ask my own parents for financial support.

That experience taught me an important lesson: panic wasn't moving me forward; it was only magnifying my fear. At some point, I allowed myself space to pause and think. The moment I did, things started to shift. Instead of reacting, I began reflecting. Instead of chasing every opportunity, I became clear about what I actually wanted, and started applying with intention rather than desperation. Within three months, I secured a role. The circumstances hadn't changed overnight - what changed was my state of mind. Financial well-being, I've learned, isn't only about the number in your account; it's about the clarity you bring to rebuilding it.

One of the most painful experiences of my career came while working with an overseas client. During a moment of frustration, I made a comment to a colleague about the client's expectations being unreasonable - a comment that somehow reached the wrong ears. The consequences were immediate: the client refused to sign off on the project and made it clear they no longer wanted me involved. I received

a late-night call telling me to leave the project immediately. I was devastated, and I cried my heart out.

I pleaded for one more chance and asked for a month to prove myself. What stands out to me today isn't the mistake itself, but what happened afterward. In the middle of my disappointment, I stopped and asked myself: "You're in this mess now - what are you going to do about it?" That pause created clarity, and with clarity came courage. I prepared for the worst case - if my plan failed, I would leave - but first, I would do everything possible to repair the situation.

I reached out directly to the most senior leader on the client side and offered a sincere apology, committing myself fully to rebuilding trust. The months that followed were exhausting - difficult conversations, setbacks, misunderstandings - but I stayed focused on the larger goal. Slowly, trust returned, and the relationship evolved from confrontation to collaboration. Conscious balance hadn't protected me from failure; it had helped me respond constructively after it. That pause - that return to my breath before reacting - created the clarity that fear alone would have let me abandon.

Today, I lead a team of more than 100 people, and I believe one of the most powerful ways organizations can support women's well-being is through active sponsorship, not just mentorship. Women need leaders willing to say, "I believe in her. I will back her."

I know this because sponsorship transformed my own career. Two senior leaders chose to take a chance on me for a transformation role that had gone unfilled for three years. Their belief did more than open a door - it strengthened my confidence to step into challenges I might otherwise have avoided. When leaders put their credibility behind talented women, they help unlock potential that might otherwise stay invisible.

I would not be here without one more form of sponsorship: a husband who chose to become the anchor at home so I could build the career I believed in - a quiet sacrifice that rarely gets named. But this journey also taught me something about my own growth edge: I have leaned heavily on external validation and support. The next chapter of my own conscious balance is learning self-authorization - trusting my own voice

as the final word, not just the one that confirms what others have already given me permission to believe.

We live in a world of constant change. Artificial intelligence is reshaping industries and redefining work. Yet I have learned that when I am clear about my purpose and grounded in my values, fear loses its grip. In an uncertain world, clarity remains one of a leader's greatest advantages.

I often think about what I want my daughter to inherit from me - not a flawless story, but an honest one. I've told her that being weak is okay, that struggle is not something to be ashamed of but something to transform into strength, and that she doesn't need anyone's permission to be enough. That is what "From Worrier to Warrior" means to me: not a single act of heroism, but a continuous passing down of resilience, from the woman I had to become, to the woman she is becoming.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Embrace vulnerability instead of hiding it

Some of the strongest relationships I've built with my teams came from moments when I showed my human side. Vulnerability didn't weaken my leadership — it strengthened trust and helped me successfully lead multi-million-dollar projects.

2. Give yourself permission to pause

Life and work will always bring competing demands, but it's okay to stop. Even if a pause feels like a sacrifice in the moment, the clarity and strength it gives you are usually worth far more than what you temporarily give up.

3. Stay grounded in what you believe

There will always be noise and uncertainty around you. I've been able to navigate change and setbacks because I remain anchored in what truly matters to me.

CHAPTER 18

So-Young Kang



Founder & CEO, Gnowbe | Founder & Chairman, Awaken Group

So-Young Kang is a serial entrepreneur, transformation designer and leadership expert whose work is rooted in one purpose: helping people realize their fullest potential. As the Founder of Awaken Group and Gnowbe, she has spent her career bringing together leadership, learning, technology and human development. A former McKinsey leader and Harvard MBA, she was named a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader in 2014 and has spoken at Davos and TEDx. But behind these achievements is a deeply personal journey from growing up in survival mode to building a life and leadership philosophy centered on conscious integration, faith and human flourishing.

In the earlier phase of my life, I wasn't making decisions from a conscious place. I was making them from what I call a survival place.

I grew up in East Brooklyn, New York, as a Korean American child in a neighborhood that was tough in almost every sense of the word. There were gangs and shootings around us, and life at home was difficult too. When you grow up surrounded by that kind of violence, you learn to survive. You become resilient. You learn to read situations, adjust quickly, and keep going.

One of the first decisions that changed the trajectory of my life wasn't even mine. When I was in middle school, my mother moved our family

from New York to Florida. Almost overnight, I went from a highly urban environment to suburban life.

I did well in school and was fortunate to have friends who took academics seriously. But ours wasn't the kind of high school where students were being groomed for elite universities. We didn't have guidance counselors steering us towards Ivy League admissions. That world wasn't even on my radar.

In fact, I landed at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) almost by accident. One day, my brother simply said, "I heard this is a good school. You should apply." So, I did, without even knowing Penn was an Ivy League university.

Growing up, college was never an expectation. Yet I went on to become the first in my entire extended family to attend an Ivy League university, and the first student from my high school of nearly 500 to attend Penn.

Penn opened up a world I hadn't known existed. I met people from wealthy, educated, stable environments and began to understand how much bigger the world was, especially in terms of socioeconomic class. I also met people who hadn't grown up around violence and were genuinely nice. Initially, I was suspicious of them, until I realized they were simply stable and good human beings. I had never known what that kind of stability looked like.

But perhaps the most powerful example of another way of being, was unfolding much closer to home.

When I was 14, my father made a dramatic career change. He left his life as an entrepreneur, went to Bible college, and eventually became a pastor. In his forties, I watched him change from someone I would describe as having low consciousness into a remarkably gentle, kind, and deeply conscious person. That transformation continued until he passed away at 76.

Watching a human being change so profoundly had an enormous impact on me. That is why I often find myself saying, "I am my father's daughter."

His transformation planted the seed for my own consciousness journey, which has now spanned nearly two decades. During college, I began going deeper into my faith. I went on a mission trip to Russia and Ukraine, which was a really powerful experience, and also spent time in Korea.

Today, I don't believe in balance. I believe in conscious integration. We are never fully in balance; we are constantly weighing one thing against another. But when I am integrated and whole as a person, I can show up in the most conscious way, from the inside out.

For me, conscious integration means bringing my whole self wherever I show up—my past, my present, and my future. There is no shame in my past because it has shaped who I am. Whether those experiences were violent or abusive, they are part of who I am today.

Consciousness comes from working through that trauma so that I am no longer driven by fear. It is being able to say, *I am more than my past. I am more than trauma. I am more than pain.* I can work through it and allow that pain to become a source of my power.

That consciousness would eventually change the direction of my career.

By 2008, I was at McKinsey and on the partner track, serving as the North America Head of Finance Transformation. Around that time, Bridgewater, a hedge fund in Connecticut, offered me a position as one of the top 20 people on its leadership team. It was a dream job with a high-paying salary.

This was November 2008, in the middle of the global financial crisis, and I was literally shopping for Porsches in my head and thinking, *Okay, how many houses can I have? Maybe one in Connecticut, one in the city, and one in Los Angeles.*

And then I had a spiritual encounter with "God." During that encounter, I heard a clear voice telling me, "*From now on, I want you to develop people."*

My immediate reaction was, *No. That is a terrible idea.*

Developing people was nowhere near what I did. I worked in corporate finance and strategy with key performance indicators (KPIs), numbers,

CFOs, and profitability. I would look at the numbers and say," Global *financial crisis? Cut leadership. Reduce headcount. Chop, chop, chop. Let's make it more profitable."*

Walking away from the career in front of me made little sense. It wasn't a decision I consciously wanted to make. But somewhere in my spirit, I knew what I was experiencing was true. That encounter began a very different spiritual journey—the journey of having my true self revealed to me.

In 2010, I set up my first company called Awaken Group. That is how I became an entrepreneur.

Building Awaken also made me clearer about my values. One of them was potential. I made a conscious choice to work with people for who they could become, not simply for what they could deliver today. I once had to choose between a highly experienced sales director who could help us grow immediately and someone who had potential but wasn't quite there yet. Because I had decided to build people, I chose the person who was less capable in that moment. She went on to become the best chief of staff I ever had.

There will always be a tension between short-term performance and long-term outcomes. I choose the long term.

My consciousness has also changed how I respond to crises as an entrepreneur. I've learned not to let every problem change my heartbeat. You deal with what is in front of you and try to do the right thing.

That was tested in 2023, when a strategic decision I made nearly bankrupted Gnowbe. We downsized, received three offers to buy the company, and I was one week away from selling when an employee came to me crying. "So-Young, don't sell the company. What you've built is precious. If you sell it, it won't be the same."

That moved me deeply. I prayed, *God, do you want me to sell this company?* Fasting and prayer are part of how I become more conscious, so I spent three days doing both. At the end of those three days, nothing happened. I remember thinking, *Huh.*

Then, the very next day, a senior salesperson almost volunteered his services, and a loan came in to close our funding gap. Within two days, what we needed had fallen into place. I decided not to sell.

That experience reinforced that conscious integration doesn't stop crises from happening. It allows me to become still enough through prayer, reflection, and faith to choose how I respond.

Well-being is multidimensional and it encompasses the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of who I am. Physically, I'm quite strict about my diet and try to eat real, authentic, raw foods rather than processed foods. As we age, we need to become more conscious of how our health, hormones, and bodies are changing. I've been studying nutrition, fitness, and strength training, and recently started lifting weights—something I had never done before.

Emotional and social well-being matter too. My birthday is in May, and for someone who has celebrated with big parties since I was seven, this year was unusually quiet. It made me reflect that one of life's greatest gifts is the quality of our relationships and friendships.

Underlying everything is my spiritual well-being. I pray every day, throughout the day. I never cease praying. The number one thing that keeps me integrated is my relationship with my God, the Creator. That is my foundation, and it is a relationship I consciously nurture.

When it comes to women's well-being, it cannot be an individual's responsibility alone. At work, there is still a lack of consciousness among both women and men, about gender discrimination. When women are not treated with respect and dignity, or given the space to simply be, it inevitably affects their well-being.

Organizations need to raise consciousness about the biases, including unconscious biases, that shape how we see and treat one another. I would also like to see greater investment in women's confidence, identity, and ability to occupy space. *How do we increase agency in women?*

When women have greater agency, they can influence their environment and help create the conditions they need to thrive. But one woman cannot

do that alone. She needs allies, organizational support, and a system that enables her.

We all have the potential for greatness and the privilege of doing great things, but that is not what makes us great. The real privilege is the journey itself—the people we meet, the lives we touch, and the opportunity to walk alongside them.

That is the journey. And that is the gift.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Pause and listen

Create space to slow down before you react, decide, or speak. We have two ears and one mouth for a reason—listen more and speak less.

2. Choose conscious company

Consciousness is not a destination or about judging who is more or less conscious. Surround yourself with people who are committed to growing and becoming more aware, wherever they may be on that journey, with zero judgment.

3. Invest in your whole, integrated self

Invest in your physical, emotional, and spiritual consciousness. Be curious. Be hungry to learn. Read books, listen to podcasts, watch videos, and study what helps you grow. I would also encourage individuals to create and learn in 'Gnowbe'. This is a journey of expansion, not a destination. As you go deeper, you may need new friendships and a community that can journey with you. Have the courage to embrace that newness.

CHAPTER 19

Sumita Tandon



Head HR Global Sales Solutions, LinkedIn

Sumita is a global Human Resources (HR) leader with over 30 years of experience across technology, advertising, financial services and hospitality. She has built and led talent strategies across organizations of different scales in India and Singapore. Currently Sumita is the Global HR leader for LinkedIn Sales Solutions and HR leader of LinkedIn in Asia Pacific, and is responsible for leading LinkedIn's HR teams in creating a transformational environment for employees across the APAC regions. Her professional journey has been anything but linear, from hospitality and financial services to a career break, a return to work and, eventually, senior HR leadership. At its heart is a fierce commitment to independence and the power of choice. For Sumita, conscious balance is not about compartmentalizing work, family, relationships and ambition, but about bringing her authentic self to each while making intentional choices.

Conscious balance is the journey of life itself. It isn't about separating myself into different compartments—the professional, the mother, the wife, the friend, the woman with ambition, or the woman who sometimes doubts herself. It is about bringing my whole, authentic self to every part of my life and making intentional choices along the way.

When I look back at my own journey, I can see how each chapter of my life has taught me what that really means.

My story begins in Mumbai. I was born and brought up there, a Mumbai girl through and through. School, college, my first job, even falling in love, it all happened in that city. Growing up in a big, diverse and progressive city like Mumbai gave me some of the best exposure one could have from an early age. It taught me resilience: how to navigate challenges, bounce back and move forward.

My parents raised me to be independent, and it has always been an anchor for my well-being. In fact, I would call myself fiercely independent in every aspect of life including financial, physical, mental and emotional.

When I got married, I was 22. My parents had never imagined I would marry so young, and Papa was surprised. He had always imagined me building a career and an independent life. I remember telling him, "Papa, I'm getting married, but I promise you I will never, ever stop being financially independent and I will not give up on my career aspirations."

He said something to me then that has stayed with me ever since. Physical dependence, he explained, was something you could find a way to manage. If your health ever made you dependent on others, you could pay for the help and support you needed. Financial independence was a choice. But he cautioned me to be very careful about becoming emotionally dependent on someone, because that was something money could not solve.

Those words have shaped who I am and the choices I continue to make, always staying true to myself and being 100% authentic, 100% of the time.

I joined the Oberoi Group of Hotels for my first job, convinced that hospitality was where I would build my career. But after meeting my husband, life took me from Mumbai to Delhi, where I joined American Express and spent five years in card operations. Then, in 2003, we moved to Belgium with our young son. I had my second son there, and what began as a forced sabbatical kept me away from work for more than three years.

We returned to India in 2005 and settled in Bangalore. I was ready to work again, but the world I returned to had changed. India was in the middle of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) boom, and most roles out there meant night shifts, weekends or US hours. With two young children, one barely a year old, I was clear about what I would not compromise. I wanted a career, but I also wanted to be present for my children. So, I kept looking.

Then, one day at a dinner with some of my husband's colleagues, I simply put myself out there. Whenever someone asked what I was doing, I said, "I'm looking for a job. Can you give me one?" One of those conversations eventually led to an offer.

The role involved managing the CEO's budget for employee experience at Hewlett-Packard (HP). I worked closely with HR, but initially, the team resisted me. I was doing HR-related work without being part of HR, and they were reluctant to let me in.

I was also a woman returning after more than three years away from the workforce, at a time when career breaks were rarely discussed and return-to-work programs simply did not exist. There was no established pathway for me; I had to advocate for myself.

And I did. Within two years, the same HR team that had initially resisted me advertised a role within the function. I applied, went through the interview process, got the job and have never looked back.

As my career in HR grew, I recognized something fundamental about myself: I was born to serve, and I have intentionally chosen to do so. Being in service of others brings me immense joy, whether it is the people, teams, businesses, customers and clients I work with, or my family and friends. Perhaps it is fitting that my name, Sumita, means *good friend*.

Today, conscious balance for me means being deeply connected to the people I love without losing my sense of self or independence. I live in Singapore while my husband lives and works in the Bay Area. He has always encouraged, supported and partnered with me, even as we have broken some norms around the "ideal Indian family." I could move to the US, but I choose to live in Singapore. Having the independence to

stand on my own gives me the freedom to make conscious choices about how I want to live my life.

But independence doesn't mean I never need others to hold me up. I was reminded of that powerfully at 51, when my confidence was shaken in a way I never expected. In 2025, I was invited to facilitate roundtables with some of India's most senior HR leaders at LinkedIn's annual programme. I love public speaking and am comfortable on stage, so I said yes without hesitation.

Then I started reading about the leaders I would be moderating and their impressive careers, achievements and titles and, for some reason, my confidence crashed. I began comparing myself to them. For almost a week, I cried and questioned everything: *Have I achieved enough? Did prioritizing my family, my husband's career and my children come at the cost of my own ambitions?* Eventually, I called the colleagues who had invited me and said, "I can't do this. I'm not coming."

Then came the three people who helped me find my way back. One of them was my younger son, who reminded me, "Your biggest bank of deposits is your well-wishers and your good karma. You are my role model." The other two were close colleagues who urged me to stop measuring myself by titles and instead remember the work I had done, the people I had impacted and, most importantly, to simply show up. And that is exactly what I did.

I stood on that stage with the very leaders whose achievements had made me question my own. It taught me that even after decades of experience, self-doubt can find you. Sometimes, conscious balance means allowing the people who know your worth to hold you up until you can see it for yourself again. I showed up for myself, but also for those who believed in me when I struggled to believe in myself.

The word *genuine* matters enormously when we talk about how organizations support women and their well-being. Diversity initiatives may begin with targets and metrics, but what ultimately matters is whether they create meaningful opportunities. I have learned not to judge every action only by the motivation behind it. Even if someone

hires a woman partly to meet a target, ask: *Did it open a door? Did it give someone an opportunity to grow and thrive?*

We also need enough women in the workforce and in leadership because women look up to other women. At LinkedIn, one of our women leaders is a Chinese Singaporean woman with roots in a village, and many women look at her journey and are inspired by what is possible. That is the power of representation. But it cannot become tokenism. We need to keep creating genuine opportunities for women to succeed, so others can look ahead and think, *If, she can do it, perhaps I can too.*

Perhaps that is what I want my own journey to do for someone else. My life has not followed a conventional path, but the choices have been mine. If another woman can look at my journey and see that it is possible to build a meaningful career and life without losing her independence or herself, then perhaps I have served in one more way.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Hold on to yourself

Life will pull you in many directions - society, work, family and motherhood. I have experienced those pulls myself, from stepping away from work when my children were young to making career choices that allowed me to be present for them. Don't give up or lose yourself along the way. Keep making conscious choices about what matters to you, and trust that you will find your own way.

2. Own the power of choice

At the heart of conscious balance is something deeply personal to me: the power of choice. We all want the freedom to choose our relationships, careers and the way we live. I want my sons to see that in the way I live and, hopefully, learn from it too for themselves and the women they have in their lives. Sometimes the choices available to us are incredibly difficult, but that does not mean they do not exist. Conscious balance begins with recognizing that choice and having the courage to own it.

3. Trust your own intelligence

Don’t underestimate how intelligent you are. We often question ourselves while trying to meet the expectations of society, family and work. Conscious balance means trusting your own judgement enough to know what is right for you and having the confidence to make those choices for yourself.

CHAPTER 20

Supriya Rao Patwardhan

Executive Vice President, Global Head of IT Services, DHL



Supriya is a global technology leader who has built a distinguished career at DHL over three decades, having joined the organization in 1994. Today, she is the first Asian and the first woman to lead DHL's global IT Services organization, heading a diverse team of 5,800 professionals representing 87 nationalities and supporting operations across more than 200 countries and territories. Her team powers the technology platforms and services that enable all six DHL divisions worldwide. Her journey spans continents and large-scale transformations, marked not only by the scale and complexity of her roles but by her ability to navigate change with clarity and intention. From restarting her career in a new country to leading through periods of global uncertainty such as the pandemic, Supriya has developed a distinctive leadership style that balances performance with empathy. She is widely recognized for driving digital transformation, championing diversity and inclusion, and investing deeply in people and culture.

I grew up in Delhi, in a society that was, and in many ways still is, deeply patriarchal. But within my home, my family encouraged us to choose our own paths. That sense of freedom shaped my well-being early on and gave me the confidence to question norms.

My choices were rarely conventional. After studying science and math in school, I chose to pursue English Literature at Delhi University. Drawn to the arts, theatre, and books, this shift allowed me to explore a more creative side of myself. But like many of us after graduating, I soon found myself asking, what next?

That was when computers were just beginning to emerge as a serious field. I still credit my father for recognizing that shift early. He encouraged me to explore it, and I found myself drawn to the logic and problem-solving it offered. That curiosity eventually became a career in technology.

A few years into my career, I got married, and soon after, my daughter was born. With very little childcare support available, I had to step away from work. While I valued that time with my daughter, I also felt the absence of work as it had become my space for growth, challenge, and identity.

Then came another turning point. We moved to Singapore for my husband's career, and after nearly a decade of working. I found myself in a new country, where technology opportunities were harder to access as a young Indian woman at a time when Indians were far less represented in the industry. I had to restart my career almost from scratch. This was a humbling experience that required me to rebuild not just my career, but my confidence.

I was fortunate to join DHL, an organization that valued diversity and gave me the opportunity to rebuild. But starting over in a new country is not just about finding a job. It is about relearning the work ethic. You have to understand a new culture and adapt to unfamiliar expectations.

Looking back, I realize that what kept me steady through these transitions was what I now call conscious balance. Being intentional about how I managed and prioritized different parts of my life helped me stay resilient, be patient with myself, and move forward without losing confidence in who I was.

To me, conscious balance does not exist in a vacuum. Life is full of competing demands, shifting priorities, and constant change. It is

the practice of navigating these pulls with awareness and intention, rather than trying to control or perfect everything.

For women, this becomes even more important because we hold so many roles at the same time. Whether or not you have a career, you are constantly showing up as a daughter, sister, friend, mother, and often a counsellor. And at work, you carry multiple responsibilities as well. I often think of the image of an Indian goddess with many hands but one head. That is who we are as women, managing many roles at once! Conscious balance helps us navigate this complexity with a sense of steadiness and ease.

Over time, I have come to see that conscious balance is deeply linked to continuous learning. Life does not stand still, and neither can we. Every experience teaches you something about yourself, about others, and about how to respond better. This learning builds adaptability, and with it, comes the confidence to step out of your comfort zone and explore different opportunities.

One of the most defining moments in my leadership journey came during the pandemic in 2020, when I stepped up to take on a leadership role of a 5000+ strong unit. My original plan had been to travel, meet people, and build relationships in person. Instead, I found myself leading a large organization through a screen, at a time when people were navigating uncertainty, isolation, and personal challenges.

That was when conscious balance became real for me as a leader. It gave me the space to pause and reflect. I asked myself; do I continue to lead with a sharp focus on goals and performance, or does this moment require something different?

That was the turning point. I realized that leadership, in a moment like this, could not be driven only by goals and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). It had to be grounded in empathy, awareness, and human connection and that changed how I lead.

I consciously shifted how I engaged with my teams. I opened up conversations beyond performance, asking people how they were feeling, what they were going through, and what they needed.

Over time, this shift transformed our leadership conversations. Even in the boardroom, the focus expanded beyond metrics and performance to include people, emotions, and lived experiences. Topics like diversity became more personal and reflective. Some of my colleagues began to share their own perspectives, especially as parents thinking about the future their daughters would step into.

What emerged was deeper trust and stronger connection. I saw firsthand that leading with conscious balance does strengthens your effectiveness. It builds resilience, deepens relationships, and enables you to show up as a more authentic leader.

I also believe organizations have a critical role to play in enabling conscious balance, especially for women. One of the most powerful ways to do this is by creating safe, inclusive spaces for real conversations. These are spaces where women can speak openly about challenges, ask questions without hesitation, and learn from each other.

At my organization, we brought this idea to life by creating a dedicated forum for women. It is a space where women can come together and discuss anything on their mind, from navigating difficult conversations to finding time for themselves.

What makes this space meaningful is that it is participant-led and psychologically safe. Over time, it has become a strong network for women. It has also created opportunities for reverse mentoring, where insights flow both ways. I have learned as much from younger colleagues as they have from me.

When I reflect on my journey, I realize that conscious balance has not just helped me navigate life, but it has also shaped the kind of leader and person I have become. It is not something I have achieved, but something I continue to practice every day in how I live, lead, and show up.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Prioritize yourself, because balance begins with you

Make time for yourself intentionally. Build simple, non-negotiable practices, whether it is meditation or quiet thinking time. Even small shifts can protect your mental space and remind you that balance is something you consciously create.

2. Find your voice

Speak up and don't carry everything in silence. What you suppress doesn't disappear; it builds quietly and weighs you down. Having the courage to express what's on your mind is often the first step towards clarity, support and the way forward.

3. Strength in asking

Ask for help. It is a sign of strength, not weakness. When you reach out with honesty and intent, support often shows up, helping you restore balance and protect your well-being.

CHAPTER 21

Tieu Yen Trinh

Founder & CEO, Talentnet



Trinh, is one of Vietnam's most respected Human Resources (HR) leaders and entrepreneurs. After 12 years with PwC, she founded Talentnet, growing it from a 12-member start-up into Vietnam's leading human capital solutions company, serving over 1,000 organizations, including many Fortune 500 companies. Guided by a people-first philosophy and inspired by her upbringing in Vietnam's Mekong Delta and Buddhist values, she champions conscious balance through purpose, empathy, learning, and well-being. Trinh founded the Vietnam HR Awards in 2014 to recognize excellence in HR practices and has been honoured among Vietnam's Top 10 Red Star entrepreneurs and as a Forbes Vietnam Outstanding Self-Made Leader. She is also Vice President of the Young Business Association (YBA), and the Vietnam Human Resources Association (VNHR), reflecting her commitment to advancing Vietnam's business and HR communities.

When I think about where my understanding of conscious balance began, my mind returns to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, where I spent much of my childhood and high school years. It wasn't something anyone taught me. It was simply the way people lived. They were honest, warm, and deeply rooted in their communities, always ready to help others and create value beyond themselves. Watching them, I learned that my own well-being would never come from personal success alone, but from the way I live, connect, and contribute.

I began my career in consulting and executive search at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), where I spent 12 formative years. When the firm decided to exit its executive search business, I was offered the opportunity to transition into HR. It was a secure path, but I chose to take a leap instead. In 2007, I reached an agreement with PwC to take over part of the business and founded Talentnet, marking the beginning of my entrepreneurial journey.

Talentnet began with just 12 people and a shared belief that we could build something meaningful. From the very beginning, I wanted to create a world-class Vietnamese HR company that combined international standards with a deep understanding of the local market. Today, that vision has grown into a team of more than 400 people, partnering with over 1,000 organizations, including top Multinational Corporations (MNCs), Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs)s, and local enterprises in Vietnam and Cambodia.

But from the start, my ambition went far beyond building a successful business. I wanted to create an organization where people felt proud to work, where they could learn and build better lives for themselves and their families. When I shared that vision with my founding team, their trust strengthened my belief that together we could make it a reality.

The early years tested that conviction. Like many start-ups, we worked relentlessly, often putting the business ahead of ourselves. There were months when paying salaries felt uncertain. Unlike corporate life, there was no safety net. Yet I never saw this as a journey I had to carry alone. My inner dialogue was never, *"I can do this."* It was always, *"We can do this."* Whenever the challenges seemed overwhelming, I drew strength from the people who had chosen to build this dream with me. That shared sense of purpose and responsibility kept us moving forward.

Just three months after launching Talentnet, an unexpected opportunity came our way. Mercer, the world's leading consulting firm in its field, was looking for a partner in Vietnam. Four companies were shortlisted, and we were by far the youngest. Still, I believed we offered something they could not. During the interviews, I spoke about our commitment to our people and clients. Combined with my consulting experience and deep understanding of the Vietnamese labour market, that perspective

helped us reach the final round and ultimately become Mercer's partner in Vietnam. It was an extraordinary moment, and the entire team celebrated the achievement.

Later, I asked Mercer's leader why they had chosen us over firms with much longer track records. His answer has stayed with me ever since. He said, "In every conversation, you spoke about people. Your focus was always on helping people and creating value for others."

That conversation reaffirmed something I had always believed: meaningful leadership begins with people. When you genuinely invest in helping others grow, business success becomes a natural outcome rather than the sole objective.

Conscious balance, to me, is living with purpose and doing meaningful work, continuing to learn, and investing in relationships and communities that are bigger than myself. When my actions are guided by these values, balance is not something I have to chase; it naturally becomes a way of living.

But conscious balance also means making room for the people and moments that give life meaning beyond work. My family, my friends, and even the quiet time I carve out for myself all deserve my care and attention. Every few months, I pause and ask myself whether I am giving enough attention to each part of my life. If work is entering a particularly busy season, I tell my family in advance. My two children, who are now studying in New York, have grown up listening not only to my dreams but also to my disappointments, difficult decisions, and even my business strategy. Somewhere along the way, we became more than mother and children; we became trusted friends.

People often wonder how I manage to do so many things without running out of energy. I smile because there is no magic formula. I have simply learned what gives me energy and what quietly takes it away. If I neglect my health, I feel it immediately. If I carry resentment or judge someone too quickly, it weighs on me far more than I realize. My beliefs remind me that every person is shaped by experiences I may not fully see. Choosing empathy over judgment brings me a sense of peace and keeps me grounded.

I have also learned to protect my optimism. Even when things don't go as planned, my instinct is to look for what is still possible rather than dwell on what went wrong. Every year, I write down things I want to nurture in my business, family, personal growth, and the simple experiences that make life enjoyable. If I don't accomplish everything, I don't see it as failure. I simply carry it forward.

I often think about how different our workplaces would feel if organizations approached people with intention. Just as I make a conscious effort to nurture my own well-being over time, organizations need to nurture the well-being of their people. It cannot be treated as an occasional initiative or a wellness day. It has to be built into the strategy, the culture, and the way leaders support their teams every single day.

At Talentnet, we encourage people to stay active through running clubs, pickleball, tennis, and other activities because healthy habits are easier to sustain when they are enjoyable and shared with others. We also create opportunities for people to build relationships beyond their immediate teams through seminars, networking events, and learning communities. Financial well-being matters just as much. A financial crisis can affect anyone, and as an organization, we do everything we can to support our people through those difficult moments.

Finally, we invest in intellectual well-being because people thrive when they continue to learn and broaden their perspectives. Along with online learning, and professional development programmes, we also provide employees with international exposure across more than ten countries, such as Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore. Experiencing different cultures, markets, and ways of working helps people grow in ways that formal learning alone cannot.

While our well-being strategy is designed for all employees, we have seen women especially thrive when they feel healthy, connected, supported, and inspired to keep growing. They bring their best selves to work every day. Conscious balance is ultimately about making each day count.

I was devastated when I lost my mother-in-law. She loved me like her own daughter, and her sudden passing reminded me how fragile and

unpredictable life truly is. Until then, I believed happiness would come only after I reached the next milestone.

I now know that happiness is found in the way we choose to live each day, in the people we love, the moments we cherish, and the gratitude we bring to even the simplest experiences.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Practice kindness toward yourself

I make time for the things that recharge me, whether it's singing karaoke, travelling with my family, or spending time with friends. When I reach my limit, I give myself permission to rest. Those small rituals help me return with fresh energy. I've also learned that self-kindness matters. Many talented people care deeply for others but forget to care for themselves.

2. Lead with trust

As a leader, my role is not to stay buried in the day-to-day work. It is to hold the vision and create the conditions for others to succeed. I surround myself with talented people, trust them to take ownership, and give them the space to do their best work. In return, I create the time to think more clearly, build stronger relationships, and focus on what matters most.

3. Create energy through meaningful connections

Conscious balance grows through meaningful human connections. Whenever someone shares a challenge, I instinctively think about who might be able to help and make that introduction. Creating value doesn't always mean solving the problem myself; it often means bringing the right people together. Some days I spend ten hours in meetings, and from the outside, it may look exhausting. But when I know those conversations have helped people or created value, I end the day feeling energized rather than drained.

CHAPTER 22

Yana Fry



Founder | Coach | Speaker | Podcaster

Yana is an internationally recognized relationship expert, speaker, and founder of Awaken Human and The Academy of LOVE, platforms dedicated to conscious leadership, relational mastery, and soul-based success. Her work is deeply shaped by a remarkable personal journey that began in post-Soviet Russia, where childhood hardship, emotional trauma, and years of caregiving ultimately led her toward profound personal healing and self-leadership. Today, with over 15 years of global experience and clients across 30+ countries, Yana helps high-achieving women create lives rooted in purpose and love. She is also the creator and host of YanaTV and the Timeless Teachings Podcast, where she explores love, leadership and legacy with global thought leaders and changemakers.

I grew up in a world where survival came first. My parents divorced when I was young, and after that, life became financially brutal. I still remember being twelve years old and having only one meal a day. My mother would quietly give up her own dinner so I could eat. By thirteen, I had already started working. My childhood was all about learning how to survive uncertainty.

Then the Soviet Union collapsed, and everything around us changed overnight. Violence, fear, and instability became part of everyday life.

There were men with guns everywhere, and even walking home from school was unsafe. It felt like living in the “Wild Wild West”.

Despite all the challenges, I always had the unwavering love of my mother. Back then, that was the greatest source of well-being in my life. Her love carried me through the hardest years and gave me the strength to survive what I experienced in the first quarter of my life. It taught me that love is not just emotional comfort; it is a powerful anchor for conscious balance, especially during life’s darkest moments. I believe her love also shaped the person I became.

At twenty-one, I left Russia in search of a better life as nothing around me felt emotionally safe, stable, or inspiring. I moved to Switzerland where I had just one friend with a small bag and USD 100 from my mother’s savings. I had no job, no bank account, and no family there. Three months later, I called my mother and told her I was not coming back.

A year later, I got married, thinking it would be “love for life”. We moved to New York and just three months after we arrived, my late ex-husband was diagnosed with cancer. It was a total shock for both of us. For the next seven years, my entire life revolved around his illness. I became his primary caregiver while still in my early twenties, living in a foreign country with no social or emotional support system.

Through it all, I held on to hope by enrolling in an acting school, a lifelong dream and one of the few things that still brought me joy. But as my late ex-husband’s condition worsened, I had to give that up too. I remember one day he told me “I don’t know how you do that. I am not sure I would've been able to stop my life like that, even for someone I love deeply.” I cried. After I finally received my work papers and briefly started working, I had to stop that too, because there was nobody else to care for him. Slowly, the weight of those years began to break me.

I was clinically diagnosed with depression. The emotional and physical exhaustion became so overwhelming that I seriously contemplated attempting suicide several times. No matter how strong I tried to appear, I found it increasingly difficult to cope with the trauma I was carrying. I

lacked the tools to manage it and an emotional support system. I did not even have access to affordable counselling.

In 2008, we moved to Singapore. While my late ex-husband was physically dying, my mental health continued to deteriorate. I began experiencing memory blackouts and realised I was completely losing myself. That became my wake-up call! I knew that if nothing changed, I would disappear entirely.

Carrying the weight of emotional burden and social judgment, I made the painful decision to end my marriage. For five years after that, I was waking up at night in cold sweat from panic attacks. But then, gradually, something inside me had begun to change for the better. I found myself being deeply committed to rebuilding my own well-being.

My entrepreneurial nature and personal healing journey led me to becoming a self-development coach. I immersed myself in understanding human growth, leadership, emotional healing, and personal transformation. I studied coaching, counselling, team building, leadership development, and human behaviour. I also became a certified yoga instructor.

My healing journey took nearly fifteen years. Building my inner strength helped me take charge of my life and create the conscious balance I so deeply needed.

Conscious balance, for me, is rooted in self-leadership. It begins with becoming deeply aware of my needs, boundaries, energy, and values. Conscious balance is understanding the difference between waking up with peace and clarity or starting the day consumed by stress and survival mode.

When I became a mother, my entire life changed and it became all about learning to create a conscious balance. As an entrepreneur, there is no real maternity leave and no one who can simply step in for you. During my pregnancy, I was managing Yana TV, private clients, leadership programs, and teaching commitments. I worked almost until the day I delivered and returned to teaching just five days after my daughter was born to lead the final session of my women's leadership programs.

In the beginning I tried to juggle everything, but eventually motherhood compelled me to become far more intentional with my time and energy. I began approaching both life and work with greater clarity, stronger delegation, and the discipline of the 80/20 principle — focusing only on the few things that create the greatest impact.

This also highlights an important truth about high performance, especially for women who are constantly trying to excel across the many roles they carry. Most women give everything of themselves as they try to keep up with expectations at work, at home, and in society. But conscious balance teaches us to pause, take charge of our own lives, and decide what truly matters to us. It helps us align our choices with what gives us meaning, energy, and joy. Today, I structure my work around a rhythm that supports both my family and my well-being.

I do not believe conscious balance comes from following wellness routines perfectly every day. For me, it is about embodiment and the inner work required to reach a place of calmness, self-awareness, and emotional steadiness. I have achieved this through discipline, continuously working on myself, and being willing to sit with discomfort long enough to rewire my nervous system. I am only human, and of course I still have difficult days, but my recovery is much faster now, sometimes it takes just a few hours. Today, I feel a deep sense of integration between my work, mind, heart, body, and soul.

What I have observed in many organizations is that women often struggle to ask for help. That is why well-being has to be built proactively into the system. I strongly believe every woman should have structured emotional and personal support the moment she steps into leadership. Whether through a coach, wellness guide, facilitator, mentor, or a strong support system, this must become a default part of leadership development.

Organizations also need to start treating well-being support as essential to conscious leadership and sustainable success. The stigma around seeking support has to change. When women are given the space and permission to ask for help, they thrive, and it does not make them any weaker.

It is conscious balance that gives you the strength to build a healthy relationship with yourself, which is fundamental to your well-being. I remember sitting among incredibly wealthy and powerful individuals and realizing that true inner balance cannot be bought, inherited, or handed over to you. No amount of money can create it overnight. It is a deeply personal journey, and one you must have the courage to undertake for yourself.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Balance begins with clarity and courage

I learned that conscious balance starts with knowing what truly matters to me. I had to communicate those needs honestly to myself and to others, and then take consistent actions; because nothing changes without action.

2. Protect your environment and energy

Our environment shapes us far more powerfully than we often realize, which is why I consciously manage the noise around me. In today's culture of hustle, comparison, and constant stimulation, I am deeply intentional about the information I consume, the people I surround myself with, and the energy I allow into my life.

3. Invest deeply in relationships

Living through grief and the loss of many loved ones has taught me that, at the heart of conscious balance, lies the quality of our relationships. Success, status, and achievement may bring temporary satisfaction, but research consistently shows that long-term happiness, health, and emotional well-being are deeply rooted in meaningful human connection.

CHAPTER 23

Yasmeen Shaikh



Head of Human Resources | Global HR Leader | Sabre India | Badminton Champion | Bangalore

Yasmeen Shaikh is a fearless, compassionate Human Resources (HR) leader with over two decades of experience across global technology and healthcare organizations. She has led large-scale transformations while building strong, people-centered cultures at organizations including Infosys, Informatica, NextGen Healthcare, Lumen and Sabre India, where she currently serves as Head of Human Resources for India and Global HR Leader for Airline Technology. Beyond the boardroom, Yasmeen is a competitive badminton player who made a remarkable return to the sport after a 20-year break, going on to winning the gold medal the All-England Senior Badminton Championship as the first Indian woman to claim the title in her category. This is after she missed winning a medal for India at the World Championship following which she won three medals for India at Asia Championship before she went out to play the All England tournament. She believes that life is not about perfection, but about making conscious choices each day and creating harmony between personal well-being and professional responsibilities — and that no meaningful journey is ever made alone.

I was born and raised in Bangalore, in a progressive family. My father was an Executive Engineer at Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (BESCOM), and his transferable job meant that our lives were

constantly on the move. My mother was the steady force behind it all, supporting him while making sure we, as children, felt secure busy with studies, sports and extracurricular activities no matter where we were.

My sister has been a constant through every stage of my life, my anchor through all our childhood moves even as I moved to the Sports Hostel as part of the SAI selection (Sports Authority of India) and my sister went on to become a doctor and moved cities to the hostel. Looking back, I realize that this may have been my first experience of practicing conscious balance; holding on to who I was while learning to adapt to the changes around me. Life's journey is a constant interplay between the people, actions, and experiences around us and how we respond within.

Today, we are a family of four, with two children, a boy and a girl, who are both deeply involved in sports. My son plays as a goalkeeper for the Karnataka Junior football team, competing and winning at the national level. My daughter, just as driven, plays as a striker and mid-fielder for her school team.

Supporting their journeys has not just been about managing schedules or showing up on the sidelines. I have learned that to truly support their passion, I cannot run on empty. I need to show up fully, both as a mother and as myself, and I can only do that when I take care of my own energy and stay centered.

My professional journey has evolved steadily over the years. I started my career as a recruiter and then moved into a generalist HR role. I went on to spend ten enriching years at Infosys, followed by leading India HR at Informatica, then at NextGen Healthcare, Lumen Technologies and now Sabre.

Through all of this, one thing has remained constant is my deep sense of gratitude for my support system. I have come to see that gratitude itself plays an important role in staying grounded. It reminds me that I do not have to do everything alone.

My family has played a huge role in helping me navigate both work and home. I lean on them in many ways, whether it is my husband, children, parents, extended family, coaches, trainers, physiotherapists, house help,

badminton fraternity, friends or sometimes just strangers. Their support has made it possible for me to manage different responsibilities in a way that feels sustainable.

At different stages of my life, I have also had to consciously pause and reassess how I was living and working. Whether I was single, newly married, or adjusting to life after becoming a mother, each phase came with its own demands. I chose to take career breaks after both my son and daughter were born, knowing that I needed that time for myself and my family. I chose to prioritize and be fully present for them. These decisions were not always easy, but they helped me stay aligned with what mattered most in those moments and move forward with greater clarity when the time was right.

My mom, dad, son, daughter and husband, have been my home team in the truest sense. They held the fort during the early mornings, Sunday lunch time or post dinner time when I was at badminton training, navigated school runs when work ran late, completing homework and celebrated my wins as if they were their own. They offered steady reassurance on the days when doubt crept in making me feel special. Their support has not been occasional or circumstantial. It has been consistent, quiet, and deeply generous. They have made space for my ambitions at every turn, and I do not take that for granted.

That support has mattered especially during the phases when I felt completely stretched. One of the most intense was during the global pandemic. As an HR team, we were deeply involved in setting up support systems for employees, and the emotional and physical demands during COVID were high. It was draining, but the cause felt so important that it took precedence over almost everything else. I could feel the exhaustion, not just within myself but across the team. It was in those moments that I realized that constantly giving without pausing was not sustainable, even when the work felt meaningful.

There were other demanding phases as well, such as global implementations, when work stretched into late nights and early mornings because of time zone differences. At times, it felt overwhelming and physically exhausting. I knew I was being stretched, but I also knew these were critical moments for the organization.

What helped me through was consciously prioritizing. My children's schedules and family needs remained non-negotiable, so I planned my days around them as much as possible. For example, I would return to pick up my children at 3:30 p.m. and request that my team and manager not schedule meetings at that time and ensured I made myself available for office meetings any time after that including late night hours.

I leaned on my team, shared the load, and found ways to support them, even if it meant taking video calls while picking up my kids from football practice or taking on additional load to ensure we met the deliverables as a team or simply rescheduling calendars to accommodate each other's' time respectfully.

It is through these experiences that I have come to define what conscious balance means to me. It is about creating harmony across all aspects of life, including family, work, relationships, and my own well-being, through both certain and uncertain times.

There are days when work takes priority and others when family comes first. What matters is being aware of these choices and understanding clearly what I am prioritizing and why. That same awareness became especially important when I returned to playing competitive badminton after a 20-year break. I realized that creating space for it would not happen on its own; it needed to be intentional.

I started using my early mornings for training after sending my children to school and before beginning my workday. I became more mindful about how I structured my time, prioritizing meetings, delegating where I could, and setting boundaries where needed.

Sport had once shaped my identity, and coming back to it felt like reclaiming an essential part of who I am. But that return was never mine alone.

My coaches believed in what I could become before I fully did. My physiotherapist and trainers kept my body strong through setbacks and adapted constantly to my goals and schedule. My badminton clubs became a second home, while my doubles partners, fellow players, and the wider badminton fraternity gave me the support, camaraderie, and encouragement to keep going.

Winning the All-England Senior Badminton Championship, becoming the first Indian woman to win the title in my category was a milestone I could never have imagined when I first returned to the court.

Sport has also shaped how I lead. Doubles badminton teaches you to understand, adapt, and support without always needing words, move without watching. It has deepened my belief in integrity, resilience, discipline, and teamwork.

My own experiences of navigating work, motherhood, career breaks, re-entry, and competitive sport have also shaped what I believe organizations can do differently. I believe the most meaningful shift organizations can make is to move beyond policies on paper to cultures of genuine flexibility, where women are not penalized, visibly or invisibly, for the choices they make to stay whole.

This means leaders actively normalizing boundaries, championing career continuity for women who take breaks, and treating well-being not as a benefit but as a business imperative. When women see their lived realities reflected in those who lead them, they know they, too, can bring their full selves to work and that is where real potential is unlocked.

The important thing is to stay connected to what matters, communicate our choices with clarity, and create the support systems that allow us to move forward without losing ourselves in the process. When individuals and organizations make room for that kind of balance, we do more than sustain careers — we create the conditions for people to thrive with greater purpose, resilience, and authenticity.

Lessons for Conscious Balance

1. Build self-awareness and prioritize what matters

Know yourself and be clear about what truly matters to you. Plan your days with intention, but do not aim for perfection. Focus on what needs your attention most and accept that you cannot do everything. Accept that balance looks different in different seasons.

2. Seek support and stay connected

Do not hesitate to ask for help or learn from others. Build meaningful relationships, collaborate, and uplift the people around you. Surround yourself with positive influences and remain confident in your journey.

3. Set clear boundaries and communicate them

Be clear about your non-negotiables and draw boundaries between work and personal life. Allow yourself to step back, disconnect from work, and take time off when needed. Set clear expectations with the people around you so they understand your schedule and commitments, making it easier to manage both work and home. Once you commit, show up!

Acknowledgements

Charu Mathur

Editor and Curator, She Leads with Conscious Balance



Some books leave you with stories that stay with you forever. Others leave you with lessons that change the way you see life. I believe *She Leads with Conscious Balance* will be both for every reader!

Bringing together the journeys of 23 remarkable women leaders has been a privilege and a deeply rewarding learning experience for me personally.

I cannot thank each of these extraordinary women enough for sharing their journeys with such honesty, openness, and trust. My heartfelt gratitude goes to *Deepshikha Kumar Anand, Dona Amelia, Edina Szabo, Gayatheri Silvakumer, Georgette Yousef, Helen Snowball, Jeslin Lim, Kameshwari Rao, Melissa Park, Mellener Anne Coelho, Neeti Mahajan, Nicole Golloso-Kazemi, Peck Kem Low, Ramya Ganesh, Ritu Sinha, Rucha Sawant, Seetha Christian, So-Young Kang, Sumita Tandon, Supriya Rao Patwardhan, Tieu Yen Trinh, Yana Fry, and Yasmeen Sheikh*, whose stories have truly brought this book to life.

One of the biggest lessons from these stories is that conscious balance is not about giving every part of life equal attention, but about understanding what matters most at different stages. Family, health, career, financial security, and meaningful relationships all need our attention, but not always in equal measure.

At a time when economic uncertainty, rising costs, and the rapid rise of AI are changing how we live and work, this understanding feels more important than ever. These stories show how staying grounded through fear, pressure, and uncertainty, and making thoughtful choices about where to invest time and energy, can help us navigate life's challenges. The ability to adjust priorities without losing sight of what matters is a strength that serves us both personally and professionally.

This e-book would not have been possible without the vision and belief of Bhavna Toor, Founder & CEO of Shenomics, who continues to create meaningful opportunities for women to share their experiences, learn from one another, and lead with greater visibility and courage. Bhavna, thank you for once again trusting me with the responsibility of bringing these wonderful stories together. It means a great deal to me.

A special thank you to my wonderful Shenomics teammate, Kavita Kochar, for her steady support throughout this journey.

As you turn these pages, I hope you see something of your own life reflected in these stories. Regardless of how successful someone may be, no one is immune to life's pressures, doubts, or difficult decisions. Perhaps the most reassuring lesson is that we don't need to have all the answers or get everything right.

What matters is learning to listen to ourselves, make choices that reflect our priorities, and find that inner steadiness when life feels overwhelming.

Thank you.

Warmly,

Charu