



30th Annual Women's Leadership Conference
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Opening Remarks: Why Principled Leadership & Why Now?
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Our Leadership Conference is a vivid expression of the School of Management's mission to educate and inspire women to lead at all stages of their lives. We do this through our undergraduate management, MBA, and executive development programs. But, we also do this through creating powerful days of learning and reflection such as the one we are all embarking on today.

Yet never in our 30 years, has the need for learning and reflection been more compelling. It is almost a cliché now to say that we are living in unprecedented times. Uncertainty shapes our days and public trust has been broken. Many of the "truths" that have served as our ballast and guided our thoughts and actions in the past, are now held in question. Many of the systems and institutions that have structured our commerce, our economy, and our society have been shaken to their foundations and have to be redesigned, not just rebuilt. Many of the natural resources we have taken for granted to sustain our livelihoods and fuel our prosperity we now know are in perilous decline.

And so we must ask ourselves, how do we lead now – and how do we want to be led now – as we face these challenges and navigate through this change.

At the School of Management, we asked ourselves this question. And, we have concluded that these times call for a broader definition of leadership and leadership accountability. It is no longer sufficient to define effective leaders as those who mobilize groups of people to achieve extra ordinary results. We know only too well that leaders can mobilize people to pursue the wrong ends, do the wrong things, and produce extraordinary, but the wrong results.

And so, we have revised our mission and our teaching at the School to focus on what we call principled leadership. And we believe that this qualifier – principled – is at the essence of how we should define effective leadership now and in the coming decades.

With principled leadership, we make explicit four dimensions of leadership accountability that match the challenges we face today.

First, principled leaders examine every decision they make, large or small, unfailingly against a code of ethics and guiding values and they view integrity as an explicit measure of leadership success.

Second, principled leaders hold themselves accountable to all stakeholder groups – employees, customers, suppliers, the communities in which they operate –, not only to owners or share holders of for-profit companies, or to donors or board members of the not-for-profit organizations.

Third, principled leaders building inclusive organizations where equity is a guiding value and the power of diversity is harnessed to create greater value.

And fourth, principled leaders hold themselves accountable not only for short-term results, but for the long-term impact of their decisions on the strength and sustainability of their organizations, the societies in which they operate, and on the resources we bestow to future generations.

Now, I know some view these four dimensions of leadership accountability as desirable, but not essential or, even, attainable.

But, we argue that the choice is not ours to make. Success in meeting today's challenges requires no less.

The theme of our Conference today is Vision to Voice. So, just envision the difference we all could make if, collectively, we drew on the tenets of principled leadership to shape our visions, buttress our voices, compel our actions, and measure our success.

And so, as we engage with the individual stories of leadership today, I encourage us to listen for insights on how each of our speakers has been able to enact specific dimensions of principled leadership.

I encourage each of us to step back and reflect on how we can offer – and ask for – principled leadership.

And, I encourage each of us to use this day to rejuvenate ourselves, to let ourselves be inspired, and envision the promise that lies before us.

Thank you, and savor this remarkable day.