

"Beyond My Years: Managing Big Responsibilities Early"

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Foreword

I was 24 years old when I ran a team in a multinational company. There was no warm-up, no slow climb — just a seat at the table and the weight of real responsibility on my shoulders. I was younger than most of my colleagues, greener than my rivals, and yet expected to deliver results like a seasoned leader.

This is not a textbook on management. It's the raw, unfiltered story of what it's like to lead before you're "ready." The late nights. The moments of doubt. The unexpected wins that make all the struggle worth it. The lessons you can't learn in school, but only by stepping into the fire.

I wrote this book in the first person because I want you to be there with me — inside the meetings, behind the tough decisions, feeling the pressure and the breakthroughs as they happen.

If you've ever been told you're "too young" or "not experienced enough," this book proves leadership is not about age. It's about courage, adaptability, and showing up daily with the willingness to figure things out.

If this book ever becomes a best-seller, the first people I will be grateful to is my mom and my little sister for always supporting me and pushing me forward.

Intro

When I first stepped into my role as a manager at 24, I didn't feel ready — and maybe I wasn't. My mind was full of doubts: Would they respect me? Could I make the right calls? Was I about to fail in front of everyone? But life doesn't always give you the luxury of feeling ready. It hands you the opportunity, and you either step up or step aside.

This book is my story — not a polished fairytale, but an honest account of what it means to lead while still figuring yourself out. I've worked full-time, juggled personal challenges, and learned to make decisions when the pressure felt unbearable. I've had moments of triumph and moments where I questioned everything.

Through these chapters, I'll take you inside the real-life situations that shaped me: the late nights spent untangling problems, the strategies I had to invent on the fly, the failures that taught me more than any success ever could. You'll see how I navigated team dynamics, built trust, created innovative solutions like an AI-powered admin support system, and learned that leadership isn't about being the loudest voice in the room — it's about being the most consistent one.

This is not just a career memoir. It's a guide for anyone who has ever felt too young, too unprepared, or too overwhelmed to lead — and still decided to do it anyway. If you've been thrown into deep waters, I want my journey to be a reminder: you can swim further than you think.

Let's begin.

Chapter 1, Ambition in My Blood

I was never the kind of girl who waited for opportunities to come to me; I chased them. I felt drawn to structure, planning, and precision from an early age. While my friends dreamed of lives in music, medicine, or media, I found myself fascinated by something else: systems, schedules, and responsibilities. I loved organization. Even in school, I was known as the one who coordinated our group projects, kept track of deadlines, and ensured everything was submitted on time.

That sense of order and responsibility carried through my time at university. I studied business and sociology because I wanted to understand both operations and people. I took every chance to improve my communication skills, whether writing, translating, organizing, or managing data. I didn't realize it then, but I was building a foundation for a career that would take off faster than I could have imagined.

Shortly after finishing my undergraduate studies, I was 24 and as I was working at a simple secretary, I received an unexpected opportunity: a management role in a multinational company.

The position wasn't just symbolic. I wasn't there to take notes or shadow someone senior. I was hired to manage. I supported executive leadership, handled customer communications, assisted with human resources tasks, and oversaw the company's day-to-day administrative needs. It was real, intense, and far from a junior role.

From the start, my responsibilities were broad and detailed. I managed our department's general administration. This meant drafting and sending professional emails daily, sorting incoming and outgoing mail, and writing

everything from formal letters to contracts and reports. Every document and communication carried the voice of the company. At 20, I had to quickly master professionalism, tone, and clarity.

I handled both physical and digital archiving systems, scanned and organized files, updated Excel spreadsheets, created and maintained internal databases, and tracked important deadlines with reminders to master professionalism, tone, and clarity quickly nothing slipped through the cracks. I also translated documents between English and French when necessary — sometimes on the spot, other times for key internal meetings. I became the quiet engine behind the scenes, ensuring processes flowed smoothly and nothing got lost in the details.

What surprised me most wasn't the workload; it was how ready I felt to take it on. Of course, I had moments of self-doubt. Who wouldn't? But I also felt a strong sense of ownership. This was no longer a student project or a summer internship. I was trusted to run things, and I made a decision early on: I wouldn't just survive in this role. I would grow and lead in it.

It was the start of a journey that would change me forever.

Chapter 2, Learning to Lead Up

When I took on my role as a manager at 24, I quickly learned something important: leadership isn't just about managing a team; it's also about supporting leaders. I worked closely with executives who had years, even decades, of experience. My job was to make their work easier.

One of the first skills I had to master was calendar and schedule management. It might sound simple, but it wasn't. My director operated across time zones including North America, Europe, and occasionally Africa. I became the gatekeeper of their time. I scheduled internal meetings, external calls, team

check-ins, and last-minute crisis calls while ensuring there were breaks in between. I realized that time is a valuable resource at the executive level, and I had to manage it effectively.

I also coordinated both virtual and in-person meetings. This involved more than just sending Zoom links. I prepared agendas, followed up with participants, booked rooms, managed tech, and anticipated potential issues. My aim was straightforward: to make every meeting feel smooth, purposeful, and productive.

Then there were the presentations. I had never created a PowerPoint deck for a CEO before, but I quickly adapted. I designed slides that communicated clearly, maintained a professional look, and followed a logical flow. I worked late nights to make sure our ideas were not only right but also engaging. Over time, I even found a bit of creativity in it, telling stories through design.

In addition, I handled project coordination. I tracked deliverables, followed up with team members, and ensured we met timelines. Whether launching a new service or preparing a quarterly report, I worked behind the scenes to keep everything on track. I learned to anticipate needs before they were voiced; I focused on being proactive, not reactive.

Another key part of my role was note-taking and writing executive summaries. After every meeting, I drafted clear, concise summaries for internal use. It was my responsibility to transform fast-paced discussions into actionable points and make sure nothing important slipped through the cracks.

Over time, those around me stopped noticing my age. They recognized my performance, discipline, and reliability. I wasn't just someone they assigned tasks

to; I was someone they trusted to handle sensitive information, manage priorities, and communicate on their behalf.

Being an assistant to leadership is often overlooked, but it's one of the best ways to understand how an organization functions. I learned how decisions are made, how people are managed, and how influence is created—not by being the loudest voice, but by being consistent, present, and prepared.

I didn't have a corner office or a fancy title. But I was right there, helping shape the daily rhythm of a powerful organization, and every day, I grew stronger in that role.

Chapter 3, The Customer Comes First

One of the earliest lessons I learned in management had nothing to do with spreadsheets or executive calendars. It was all about people, specifically customers. At 20, I found myself in the middle of a complex web of expectations, complaints, questions, and gratitude. I needed to respond with clarity, speed, and empathy.

Customer service wasn't just a small part of my job. It was a main responsibility, and it taught me how to listen actively, stay calm under pressure, and represent the company confidently, even in tough situations. Every time the phone rang or a new email arrived, it was my duty to respond directly to customers. Some were polite, while others were frustrated. Some sought help, and others demanded solutions.

I became skilled at handling client inquiries and complaints. I didn't take things personally; instead, I focused on solving problems. I'd gather the right information, contact the right department, and always follow up. I learned quickly that

customers don't just want answers; they want to feel heard. In many ways, that became the heart of my customer service approach.

I also managed payment reminders and overdue invoices. At first, I felt hesitant; sending payment reminders was uncomfortable. But I learned to communicate professionally and assertively. I wrote emails that were respectful yet firm, reminding clients of their obligations while protecting our company's interests. It became a careful balance between service and structure, and I grew more confident with each message I sent.

Beyond handling individual cases, I tracked client satisfaction. This meant sending surveys, collecting feedback, and analyzing trends. I learned how valuable client insights can be when shared with the right people. I presented results to our leadership team and helped implement small but effective changes based on what our customers said.

It wasn't always easy. There were times when clients were upset, when systems failed, or when I had to apologize for things beyond my control. But those moments shaped me. They helped me develop emotional intelligence, patience, and strong communication skills.

What surprised me most was how much trust I earned from both clients and colleagues. Internally, I became known as someone who could calm a tense situation or turn around an unhappy client. Externally, clients began asking to speak directly with me. They appreciated the consistency and professionalism, even if they didn't know I was only 20.

This part of the job reminded me that every business, no matter how big, relies on human connection. People remember how you made them feel. In a world that

often moves too fast, I learned the importance of being present, responsive, and kind, even through a screen.

Chapter 4 — Numbers That Talk

If customer service taught me how to manage relationships, billing and bookkeeping taught me how to manage facts. In this part of my role, there was no room for guesswork. The numbers had to be exact. The timing had to be perfect. And the records had to be clean.

One of my main responsibilities was creating and sending invoices. Whether it was for a client, a partner, or a service provider, I had to make sure every detail was correct — the amount, the dates, the services, the tax. A single mistake could lead to confusion or even loss of trust. That's why I triple-checked every invoice before sending it. I treated each one like an official document — because that's exactly what it was.

But my work didn't stop once the invoice was sent. I was also in charge of tracking payments — both the ones we received and the ones still pending. I updated our records daily, kept an eye on the status of every transaction, and followed up when needed. When a payment was late, I would send a professional reminder to the client. I learned to be firm but respectful. No threats, no pressure — just a clear message that we expected to be paid on time.

Sometimes, I had to follow up on unpaid invoices multiple times. At first, I found that stressful. But over time, I developed a rhythm. I knew when to escalate and when to give a little more time. I became the link between our finance department and our clients, and I understood the importance of keeping things smooth, even when dealing with delays.

I also prepared expense reports for our team and helped organize all the receipts and documents needed for monthly accounting. This meant collecting proof of purchases, categorizing them, and checking for accuracy. Every cent spent had to be justified and tracked — and it was part of my job to make that process easier for our accountant.

On top of that, I supported the accounting department by gathering and organizing key financial documents at the end of each month or quarter. I made sure everything was ready: payment histories, expense reports, invoice logs, and more. I didn't handle complex financial analysis, but I made sure the professionals had exactly what they needed to do their jobs well.

What I liked most about this part of my role was the clarity. Numbers don't lie. They tell a story — about how a business is doing, how healthy the cash flow is, and whether operations are running smoothly. I took pride in helping maintain that clarity. It made me feel like a key player in the system, even if I wasn't sitting in the finance department.

And more than anything, it taught me that details matter. A well-managed invoice today avoids a major problem tomorrow. Good recordkeeping keeps the business strong. Behind every service delivered, behind every successful project, there is a financial trail — and I was helping to keep that trail clean and traceable.

Chapter 5, Managing What Keeps the Office Running

Every office operates on more than just people and ideas; it relies on materials, services, and systems. As a manager, I quickly learned that if the small things didn't work, the big things would fail. That's why managing suppliers and orders became a key part of my daily tasks.

One of my first ongoing responsibilities was handling office supply orders. It may seem simple—pens, paper, coffee—but it involved much more. I had to ensure our team had everything they needed to work without interruptions. This included printers, ink, tech equipment, furniture, and software licenses. I monitored inventory closely, predicted what would run out, and placed orders before anyone had to ask.

Each order required dealing with vendors and suppliers. This meant communication, coordination, and sometimes negotiation. I reviewed quotes, compared prices, and made sure we got the best deal without compromising on quality. I learned to build relationships with our regular suppliers—not just to make things easier, but because trust was important. When they trusted me, they responded faster and took our needs seriously.

After placing an order, I didn't simply forget about it. I tracked every delivery, checked the contents when packages arrived, and compared them with the supplier invoices. Were all items delivered? Was anything damaged or missing? Did the invoice match the agreed price? I asked these questions because it was my responsibility to ensure we paid only for what we received and that everything arrived on time.

When things went wrong—like delays, mistakes, or billing issues—I stepped in to resolve problems directly with the supplier. It could be as simple as a missing mouse or as complex as a late equipment shipment impacting a client meeting. I had to remain calm, professional, and focused on solutions. I quickly learned that how you address problems often affects how people treat you later on.

Beyond supplies, I also negotiated contracts and service agreements. For cleaning services, IT support, and security providers, I helped compare offers, draft contracts, and manage the onboarding of new service partners. This

experience showed me what it means to manage operational costs and ensure that services meet company expectations.

This part of my role taught me how logistics and relationships are connected. You can't just send emails and expect everything to run smoothly; you have to follow up, check, confirm, and build trust over time. Supplier management isn't only about what you buy; it's about overseeing every step from ordering to delivery, including the people involved in those processes.

Today, I still take pride in watching a well-run office function smoothly, knowing that behind the scenes, I contributed to keeping everything on track—from the smallest pen to the largest service contract.

Chapter 6 — Supporting People, Building Systems

Supporting a team involves more than just logistics; it's about people. As I grew into my role, I became more involved in human resources and staff support. This included helping new employees settle in, answering daily questions, guiding people through internal processes, and sometimes just listening when they needed to vent. While I wasn't the official HR manager, I became a trusted point of contact—the one who understood how things worked and how to get tasks done.

From onboarding documents to internal policies, I made sure staff had everything they needed. I prepared contracts, organized staff files, managed internal communication memos, and ensured everyone understood their benefits and rights. This work was detailed and sensitive, requiring care and confidentiality.

One challenge I noticed early on was how often people asked the same questions:

- “Where can I find the leave request form?”
- “Who do I contact for IT support?”
- “What’s our latest internal policy on remote work?”

That’s when the idea struck me: what if we had a centralized support system available around the clock to handle these questions automatically?

So, I took initiative.

I proposed and started working on an internal support website powered by AI. The goal was to create a digital platform where staff could log in, ask questions, and receive instant, reliable answers—similar to an internal chatbot assistant trained on our policies, documents, and workflows. There would be no more digging through old emails or waiting for a response. Answers would be quick, clear, and always available.

To develop this, I worked with our IT team to organize key internal documents. I focused on structuring the content—staff guides, templates, contact lists, and forms—and helped design a user-friendly interface. Every detail mattered. It wasn’t only about the technology; it was about solving real problems for real people.

The result? A smoother experience for everyone. New hires could find their way faster. Managers faced fewer interruptions. Staff felt more empowered and independent. And I learned an entirely new set of skills: how to connect human needs with digital solutions.

This project showed me that administrative support doesn't have to be old-fashioned. It can evolve and innovate. It can be proactive, not just reactive. Sometimes, the best support isn't just what you provide for people today; it's what you build to help them tomorrow.

That's when I began to see my role as more than a manager. I saw myself as a systems thinker—someone who improves processes, enhances experiences, and designs lasting tools.

Chapter 7 — Clear Words in Critical Moments

If there's one thing I learned early on, it's this: communication can make or break a moment — especially in times of crisis.

In a fast-paced corporate environment, it's not a matter of if problems will happen, but when. Emails go out with the wrong attachments. Clients cancel last minute. Systems crash. Colleagues misunderstand each other. And in those moments, everyone looks for calm, clarity, and action.

I didn't need to be the loudest voice in the room — I just had to be the clearest.

My role as a manager often put me right in the middle of tense situations. When a client misunderstood a proposal or a delay affected the timeline, I was often the one asked to step in — to clarify, to respond, and to repair the connection. It wasn't just about defending the company; it was about rebuilding trust, word by word.

That meant learning to write emails that de-escalated conflict instead of fueling it. It meant jumping into urgent meetings and listening more than I spoke — understanding both sides before offering a solution. It meant staying professional when others were stressed or emotional, and always remembering that tone matters just as much as content.

One moment I'll never forget was when a key document — meant for internal use — was mistakenly shared with a client. There was panic. People were blaming each other. The leadership team called me in and asked, "Can you handle the response?"

I took a breath, reviewed the situation, and wrote a clear, respectful message explaining the mistake and outlining immediate next steps. I reassured the client that no sensitive information had been compromised, and I apologized without over-explaining or pointing fingers.

The client responded with understanding and even thanked us for the transparency.

That day, I realized that communication is more than words — it's trust in motion.

But beyond external messages, I also had to manage internal communications during moments of change — like team restructures, policy shifts, or deadline extensions. I drafted messages that were sensitive, honest, and aligned with leadership's intentions. I helped translate strategy into language that people could actually understand and act on.

And in every message I sent — whether it was a crisis email, a project update, or a meeting reminder — I tried to follow three personal rules:

- Be clear. People shouldn't have to guess what you mean.
- Be respectful. Even in urgency, stay human.
- Be solution-oriented. Don't just name the problem — move things forward.

Over time, I became known not just for my organizational skills, but for my ability to communicate under pressure. That trust opened doors for me — to lead conversations, represent the company, and help calm the storm when it hit.

Because in business, as in life, the words you choose — and the calm you carry — can shape the outcome more than you realize.

Chapter 8, Learning from the Greats, Leading in My Own Way

One of the most humbling parts of stepping into a leadership role at 20 was realizing how much I didn't know and how much I could learn from those around

me.

From the start, I was surrounded by people who had seen and done more. They managed teams across continents and had decades of experience in strategy, human resources, finance, or innovation. Instead of feeling intimidated, I made a choice: I would turn their presence into my classroom.

I asked questions, observed patterns, and studied how they spoke in meetings, managed conflict, and gave feedback. I made mental notes on what inspired me and on what I wanted to do differently.

One senior executive became a silent mentor. She never officially took me under her wing, but her work ethic, clarity, and confidence left a mark. She didn't raise her voice in meetings or chase attention. But when she spoke, everyone listened. Her calm presence taught me that authority isn't about volume; it's about vision.

Another leader, a man with a strong background in logistics, taught me to think in systems. He challenged me to not just complete tasks but to understand the larger flow — the why behind the what. Thanks to him, I stopped seeing my role as a series of to-do lists and started seeing myself as part of a living, evolving engine.

In the spaces between assignments and deliverables, I grew. Quietly, but deeply.

But mentorship wasn't just about the high-level leaders. I also learned from colleagues, assistants, and interns. They taught me patience, reminded me to ask for help, and showed me how to navigate workplace politics without losing kindness.

Through it all, I started shaping my own style of leadership — part empathy, part precision.

I realized that leading isn't about being the smartest or the oldest in the room. It's about:

- Listening before speaking.
- Seeing people, not just job titles.
- Communicating with intention.
- Creating space for others to succeed.

Slowly, people started coming to me for help — for advice, for structure, for ideas. Each time they did, I didn't pretend to have all the answers. Instead, I responded with honesty, curiosity, and commitment.

Because the best leaders aren't just those who climb fast; they're the ones who grow deep, who bring others with them, and who never stop being students of the journey.

Chapter 9, The Balance I Almost Lost

When I first stepped into my role as a manager at 20, I thought I could handle everything. Long hours? No problem. Endless meetings? Bring them on. My mindset was simple: the more I give, the more I'll succeed.

It worked for a while, until it didn't.

I began to notice that my days felt like a blur of screens, deadlines, and constant notifications. I skipped meals. I stayed up late finishing reports. Even when I was home, my mind was still at the office. I started measuring my worth by how quickly I could respond to an email.

It was a dangerous cycle.

One Friday evening, I caught myself answering a work message while standing in my kitchen, my dinner untouched and my phone battery nearly dead, just like my own energy. That's when it hit me: I was on the edge of burnout, and I was only 24.

I had to make a change.

The first step was setting boundaries. I started small:

- No checking work emails after 9 p.m.

- Blocking out lunch breaks on my calendar as “non-negotiable meetings with myself.”
- Scheduling at least one evening a week where I did something just for me—reading, walking, meeting friends—anything unrelated to work.

The second step was learning to say “no” when needed. At first, it felt risky, like I was letting someone down. But I realized that saying no to one thing often meant saying yes to something more important: my health, focus, or family.

The third step was physical care. I began exercising again, not to chase perfection but to feel strong. I paid attention to what I ate. I started sleeping better. The difference was immediate; my energy returned, my thoughts felt sharper, and my mood lifted.

Ironically, the more I cared for myself, the better I became at my job. I was more patient, more creative, and more resilient. I could handle stress without feeling like it was consuming me.

Balancing work and life isn’t a one-time decision. It’s a daily practice—a commitment to protect the very thing that allows you to lead in the first place: yourself.

And now, when someone asks me how I manage it all, I tell them the truth: I don’t do it all. I do what matters, and I make room for the rest of my life.

Chapter 10 — The Power of Mentorship

When I first became a manager at 20, I thought leadership was about having all the answers. I believed that if I didn't know something, it would make me look weak or inexperienced. So, I tried to figure out everything alone — reading articles late into the night, replaying every conversation in my head, and silently struggling with problems I didn't fully understand.

That approach worked for a while, but it came at a cost. I was constantly exhausted, second-guessing myself, and afraid to admit when I was unsure. The truth is, no matter how skilled or motivated you are, leadership can be lonely. And loneliness, in leadership, can turn into self-doubt if you don't have the right guidance.

That's when mentorship entered my life.

My first mentor wasn't assigned by the company. I found her naturally. She was a senior manager who had been with the organization for over 15 years, and I admired the way she navigated challenges with calm confidence. She never raised her voice, never rushed to decisions, yet always managed to command respect.

One day, after a particularly stressful week, I asked her if we could have coffee. I expected a quick, polite conversation. Instead, it turned into a turning point in my career.

Over that coffee, she told me something I will never forget:

"You don't need to know everything. You need to know where to find the answers and who to trust."

Those words hit me like a beam of light cutting through fog. I realized mentorship wasn't about being taught step-by-step instructions. It was about gaining perspective — seeing the bigger picture when I was stuck focusing on tiny details.

From that day on, I made mentorship a deliberate part of my professional growth. I met with her once or twice a month, bringing both my victories and my mistakes to the table. She listened without judgment and often asked me the kind of questions that made me think deeper:

- What’s the real problem here, beyond the surface?
- Is this a short-term issue or a long-term pattern?
- What outcome do you want — and why?

Through those conversations, I learned how to manage not only tasks but also people’s motivations and emotions. She taught me to anticipate problems before they exploded, to negotiate with empathy, and to lead without trying to control everything.

But mentorship wasn’t just something I received — it became something I gave.

As my own confidence grew, I noticed new team members looking to me for advice, just as I had once looked to her. At first, I hesitated, thinking, Who am I to guide anyone? But then I remembered how much my mentor had changed my path simply by listening and sharing her experiences. So, I started paying it forward — taking time to check in with others, offering guidance where I could, and encouraging them to develop their own voices in the workplace.

I learned that mentorship is a two-way street. Even when I was the one “mentoring,” I often learned just as much from the other person. Their fresh ideas, different perspectives, and challenging questions pushed me to grow in ways I didn’t expect.

Now, mentorship is one of my non-negotiables in career development. Whenever I enter a new role or face a major transition, I make sure I have someone I can turn to — someone who has walked the road before me and can help me see around the corners I can’t yet imagine.

Because leadership isn’t about standing alone at the top. It’s about climbing together, holding the hand of the person behind you, while being guided by the one ahead of you. That’s how growth becomes sustainable, and that’s how you turn a career into a legacy.

Chapter 11 – Decision-Making with Confidence

In leadership, hesitation can be more harmful than making a wrong decision. I learned this early in my career during a moment that changed how I approached every choice afterward.

I was managing a critical client project when we faced an unexpected problem. The software we depended on failed midway, and our deadline was just days away. The client was frustrated and anxious. My team looked to me for direction, and I felt the weight of responsibility heavily on my shoulders.

My instinct was to slow down and gather every bit of information before acting. However, time was not on our side. Each hour we hesitated meant losing credibility, momentum, and possibly the client. I realized that being a manager wasn't about waiting for the perfect moment; it was about making the best decision with the information I had at the time.

Building My Decision-Making Framework

To overcome my fear of making the wrong choice, I created a personal decision-making framework. It became my guide in uncertain times:

1. Define the problem clearly. I take time to remove confusion and get to the heart of the issue.
2. Consult the right people. Instead of asking everyone, I focus on those who are most affected or informed.
3. Weigh the risks and benefits. Every decision has trade-offs, and I try to anticipate them beforehand.
4. Commit and act. Once I make a decision, I fully support it, focusing on execution instead of second-guessing.

Following this process gave me both clarity and confidence. It turned decision-making from an emotional burden into a structured, repeatable skill.

A Defining Moment

One of my proudest moments as a manager came when a sudden staffing issue forced me to reassign a major account to another team member. It was a bold move—the client had been working with the same representative for months, and change often leads to tension.

I considered delaying the decision until the original staff member returned, but the client's needs couldn't wait. So, I made the call, personally reassured the client, and equipped the new representative with all the background and resources they needed. Not only did the transition go smoothly, but the client relationship actually improved. We delivered ahead of schedule, and the client even sent a personal thank-you note.

That day, I learned something important: leadership isn't about avoiding mistakes; it's about owning your decisions and standing by them. Even when the outcome isn't perfect, your team will respect you more for acting decisively than for hesitating in uncertainty.

The Power of Confidence

Over time, I noticed something interesting. The more confident I became in making decisions, the more my team trusted me. And as their trust grew, it became easier to make decisions together. Confidence became a cycle—each decisive choice led to the next.

Now, I no longer fear making the wrong decision. I fear letting indecision hold us back. Every choice, whether it leads to success or a learning experience, becomes a step toward better leadership. I've learned that the ability to decide

quickly and effectively isn't just a management skill; it's the essence of leadership itself.

Chapter 12, Mentorship and Growth

If there is one thing I have learned in my career, it's that no leader stands alone. Behind every confident decision, every breakthrough, and every success, there are people who have guided, challenged, and inspired you along the way. For me, mentorship has been one of the most valuable forces in my personal and professional growth.

When I became a manager at 20, I thought leadership meant having all the answers. But the truth is, leadership often means knowing who to ask when you don't. My mentors taught me that strength lies in curiosity, humility, and the willingness to keep learning.

The Gift of Guidance

I remember one of my earliest mentors, a senior manager who had been in the industry for over 25 years. She had this amazing ability to listen deeply before speaking, and when she did speak, her words felt like they cut straight to the heart of the matter.

When I struggled with handling a difficult employee situation, she didn't give me a ready-made solution. Instead, she asked me questions that forced me to think more critically:

- What outcome do you want for both the employee and the company?
- What are you afraid might happen if you take action?
- How can you address the problem without damaging trust?

Those questions unlocked a perspective I hadn't considered. She didn't just solve my problem; she taught me how to approach challenges with a balanced and strategic mindset. That's the power of a great mentor. They don't carry you forward; they teach you how to walk farther on your own.

Becoming the Mentor I Once Needed

As I grew in my role, I realized that mentorship isn't something you just receive; it's something you give back. Over time, my team members began to look to me for guidance in the same way I had looked to my mentors.

I started making time for regular one-on-one check-ins, not just to discuss tasks but to talk about career goals, personal challenges, and skills they wanted to develop. Sometimes the most important conversations we had weren't about projects at all. They were about confidence, mindset, and self-belief.

One of my proudest moments as a manager came when a young employee I had mentored for months was promoted to a team lead position. Watching them step into leadership with confidence reminded me of my own journey. It was proof that the time invested in mentorship pays off in ways that benefit everyone.

Learning as a Lifelong Habit

Mentorship isn't one-directional; it's a two-way street. I've learned just as much from the people I mentor as I have from those who guided me. Newer team members often bring fresh ideas, new technologies, and different perspectives that challenge me to stay adaptable.

For example, one junior colleague introduced me to an innovative project management tool that completely changed how we tracked deadlines and

handled team communication. It was a reminder that no matter your title, there's always more to learn if you remain open.

Creating a Culture of Growth

Mentorship works best when it becomes part of the team culture. I began encouraging peer-to-peer mentoring so that knowledge and skills could flow freely between colleagues. We paired experienced employees with newer hires for training, created a shared library of resources, and even started a monthly learning lunch where anyone could present a topic they were passionate about.

The results were incredible, not just in productivity but in team spirit. People felt more connected, more valued, and more willing to help one another succeed.

Now, when I think about my role as a leader, I don't just see myself as someone who drives results. I see myself as someone who plants seeds of growth—seeds that may blossom years later in ways I can't yet imagine. Mentorship is not a side activity; it is leadership in its purest form.

Chapter 13 – Balancing Pressure and Well-Being

Leadership comes with a price. One of the biggest challenges is the constant pressure to perform. Targets to hit, deadlines to meet, and crises to manage made some days feel like I was carrying the weight of the entire department.

In the early days, I pushed through that pressure by working longer hours, skipping breaks, and telling myself I'd rest once things calmed down. But the truth is that things never really calmed down. I started noticing subtle signs of burnout—difficulty sleeping, less patience with my team, and moments when I felt mentally drained even before the day began.

A conversation with my mentor helped me realize that leadership isn't about running yourself into the ground. It's about sustaining your energy so you can lead effectively, not just today but for years to come.

Recognizing the Signs

One of the toughest lessons I learned is that pressure doesn't always look like panic; it often hides in quiet exhaustion. I began paying attention to my own signals:

- Was I reacting instead of responding?
- Was I feeling overwhelmed by small issues?
- Was I avoiding creative thinking because I was too tired to focus?
- Once I recognized those patterns, I knew I had to make a change.

The Shift in Mindset

The first step was giving myself permission to prioritize my well-being. That meant reshaping my daily routine:

- Taking short breaks between meetings to reset.
- Blocking out time for focused work instead of letting my calendar dictate my day.
- Scheduling my workouts like important appointments.

I started practicing mindfulness—not through long meditation sessions but with small, simple actions like deep breathing before a challenging conversation or stepping outside for five minutes of fresh air. Those moments made more difference than I expected.

Setting Boundaries Without Guilt

At 24, I was still learning how to say “no” without feeling like I was letting someone down. I came to understand that boundaries aren’t walls; they’re guideposts that help protect your energy and focus.

For example, I made it clear that after a certain time in the evening, I wouldn’t respond to work messages unless it was truly urgent. Surprisingly, instead of resenting this, my team respected it, and some even felt encouraged to set their own boundaries too.

Well-being as a Leadership Skill

I used to think wellness was a personal matter, separate from the workplace. Now, I see it as a leadership responsibility. When a leader models healthy habits, it sends a strong message: it’s okay to take care of yourself.

I started encouraging my team to fully use their vacation days, take breaks without guilt, and speak up if they felt overwhelmed. We also implemented a “meeting-free hour” once a week to give everyone some uninterrupted focus time—or just time to breathe.

The effect was clear: productivity increased, creativity blossomed, and the atmosphere became more positive.

The Ongoing Balance

Balancing pressure and well-being isn’t a one-time achievement; it’s an ongoing process. Some weeks, I still feel stretched thin, but now I know how to realign. I’ve

learned that leadership isn't about proving you can endure constant stress; it's about leading in a way that allows you to keep going long after the adrenaline fades.

Because at the end of the day, a burned-out leader can't inspire a team. A leader who takes care of themselves can lead with clarity, energy, and purpose—and that's the kind of leader I strive to be every day.

Chapter 14 – Decision-Making Under Pressure

Pressure tests not just your stamina but also your judgment. As a manager at 20, I faced a steep learning curve when it came to making important decisions. I often had no time to hesitate and no guarantee that I was making the right choice.

In a corporate setting, calm moments are rare. Decisions about budgets, staffing, client issues, or operational priorities often come with tight deadlines and incomplete information. At first, this made me anxious. I worried about making the wrong choice and causing setbacks for my team.

However, I quickly learned that failing to decide can be more harmful than making a choice that might need adjustment later. Leadership requires the courage to take action.

The “Information Enough” Rule

Early in my career, I thought I needed all the facts before making a decision. I would delay choices while waiting for more data or opinions. But I soon realized that waiting too long meant missing opportunities or letting problems worsen.

That's when I adopted what I now call the “information enough” rule:

- Gather as much relevant data as you can within the available time.
- Identify the key risks of each option.
- Decide and move forward, knowing you can adjust if necessary.
- This shift in thinking moved me from seeking the “perfect decision” to making an “effective decision.”

Balancing Logic and Instinct

Not every decision can be solved with spreadsheets and charts. Sometimes, especially when dealing with people, you have to trust your instincts.

One experience comes to mind when a high-performing team member began showing signs of disengagement. The logical approach would have focused on performance metrics, but I sensed that a deeper conversation was necessary. That talk revealed personal challenges affecting their work, and we found a flexible arrangement that helped them recover.

Logic gave me structure, while instinct added a human touch. Together, they made my decisions stronger.

The Calm Factor

In high-pressure situations, how you present your decision is just as important as the decision itself. If you announce a choice in a tense or frantic way, your team will feel that tension. Speaking with clarity and composure helps even difficult decisions go over more smoothly.

I started to pause before responding; sometimes, just for a few seconds. This allowed me to breathe, think, and center myself. That small pause often made a big difference between a rushed reaction and a confident response.

Owning the Outcome

Making decisions under pressure also taught me a humbling truth: you won't always be right. And when you aren't, you have to own it.

I made it a habit to tell my team, "Here's what I decided, here's why, and here's how we'll adjust if it doesn't work." This transparency built trust because they saw that I wasn't hiding behind authority. I was leading with accountability.

Building Decision-Making Confidence

Over time, I developed strategies to help me decide faster and more effectively:

- Set clear priorities; knowing what matters most helps eliminate less important options.
- Consult the right people; seek insights from those with relevant experience, not just the loudest voices.
- Break big decisions into smaller steps; this reduces risk and builds momentum.

The more I practiced, the less fear I felt during those high-pressure moments. Decision-making became less about anxiety and more about trust—trust in my skills, values, and my team's ability to adapt.

Pressure will always be part of leadership. However, the ability to make decisions quickly, fairly, and confidently turns that pressure into progress. Every tough call I've made—whether right or wrong—has strengthened my ability to lead. And that, more than anything, keeps me moving forward when time is short.

Chapter 15 – Building Influence Beyond Authority

Leadership isn't just about the title you hold; it's about the influence you carry. Early in my career, I learned that my job description could only take me so far. To truly make an impact, I needed people to want to follow my lead, not simply feel obligated because I was the manager.

In a corporate setting, authority can open the door, but influence keeps it open. Influence is what inspires people to go the extra mile, share ideas, and trust your direction even when things get tough.

The Power of Relationships

One of my earliest breakthroughs came when I realized influence begins with relationships. I made a point of knowing not just my team but also colleagues from other departments, support staff, and even suppliers. I didn't talk to them only when I needed something; I asked about their work, listened to their challenges, and offered help where I could.

Over time, this genuine interest built a network of allies. When I needed a quick solution, a resource, or cooperation across teams, these relationships made it happen faster than any formal request could.

Credibility as Currency

Influence is earned through credibility. If people see you as competent, reliable, and fair, your words carry more weight. That meant delivering on my promises consistently.

I learned not to overpromise just to win approval in the moment. Instead, I made realistic commitments and then ensured I delivered. Over months, this created a reputation: “If she says she’ll do it, it will be done.”

Credibility made my influence stronger than any policy or directive could.

Listening More Than Speaking

Ironically, I found that my influence grew more when I listened than when I spoke. People are more open to your ideas if they feel you’ve understood theirs first.

In meetings, I practiced holding back my own suggestions until I’d heard from others. This not only gave me more perspectives to work with but also made people feel valued. And when people feel valued, they become more open to your guidance.

Inspiring Through Action

I could not expect commitment from others if I wasn’t willing to commit myself. I made sure to show the work ethic, adaptability, and professionalism I wanted to see in my team.

If deadlines were tight, I stayed late alongside them. If a project required extra effort, I jumped in to help. This “walk the talk” approach showed that I wasn’t just giving orders; I was part of the mission.

Influence Without Control

There were moments when I had no direct authority over a situation, like collaborating with senior leaders or external partners. In these instances, persuasion mattered more than power.

I learned to focus on shared goals, frame ideas in terms of benefits for them, and be flexible in my approach. Sometimes that meant compromising on the “how” to protect the “what” we were trying to achieve.

Long-Term Impact

The beauty of influence is that it lasts longer than authority. Titles can change, but the respect and trust you build will follow you into any role.

By focusing on relationships, credibility, listening, and leading by example, I discovered I could move projects forward, rally teams, and create change—even in spaces where my nameplate didn’t hold the most power.

Authority is borrowed from your position; influence is built from your actions. While the first can fade, the second becomes part of who you are as a leader. That is the kind of leadership that endures.

Chapter 16 – Managing Across Cultures

One of the most rewarding and challenging aspects of my career by age 24 was managing teams across countries, time zones, and cultures. What worked well in one setting could fail in another. This wasn't due to a bad idea, but rather because the cultural context differed.

Global leadership involves blending perspectives so the team can succeed together, rather than imposing your own way.

Learning Before Leading

When I first started working with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds, I quickly discovered that my assumptions were not universal truths.

Communication styles differed: some teams valued direct feedback while others preferred a more indirect approach.

Before attempting to lead, I took time to observe, listen, and learn. I asked questions—not only about the work—but also about customs, traditions, and values. This wasn't just being polite; it was a strategic move. Understanding where people were coming from helped me tailor my approach, ensuring it would be received positively.

Building Cultural Awareness

Cultural differences can appear in small details:

- Punctuality may be crucial in one culture but more flexible in another.
- Decision-making may be quick and individual in some places, but consensus-driven elsewhere.
- Conflict resolution might be open and direct in certain regions, while handled privately in others.

Recognizing and respecting these differences allowed me to bridge gaps rather than create friction.

Finding Common Ground

While differences are significant, I found that people everywhere respond to the same core needs: respect, fairness, and a sense of belonging. I concentrated on those shared values, even when our working styles varied.

I encouraged team members to share their perspectives, not as “right or wrong,” but as “different ways that work.” By seeing diversity as an asset, we created an environment that encouraged the free flow of ideas.

Adapting My Communication

Emails, meetings, and presentations all required adjustments depending on the audience. In some teams, detailed written instructions were helpful. In others, a brief conversation worked better.

When leading virtual meetings, I learned to slow my pace, avoid jargon, and leave pauses for interpretation—both in language and meaning. This simple change reduced misunderstandings and made collaboration smoother.

Celebrating Differences

One of my favorite moments was organizing a “Culture Exchange Day” for our project teams. Each person shared something from their culture—food, music, or traditions. It was more than just fun; it reminded us that behind every email address was a person with a story.

These moments built trust and strengthened the team’s willingness to support one another, even across great distances.

The Global Mindset

Managing across cultures taught me that leadership isn't about making everyone conform to you. It's about finding ways to adapt together. The ability to navigate different perspectives, work styles, and expectations became one of my most valuable leadership tools.

By respecting local customs, seeking common goals, and remaining flexible, I found that diversity didn't slow us down. Instead, it made us stronger.

In a world where business is increasingly global, cultural intelligence is just as important as technical skills. Titles may define your role, but it's your cultural awareness that will determine your success on the international stage.

Chapter 17 – The Art of Difficult Conversations

No matter how skilled you are as a manager, you can't avoid difficult conversations. They take many forms: giving critical feedback, addressing performance issues, resolving conflicts, or explaining decisions that may upset some people. By the time I was 24, I had already learned that how you handle these moments shapes your credibility just as much as your successes.

The Power of Preparation

The worst thing you can do is enter a difficult conversation unprepared. I learned early on to take time to:

- Clarify my objective. What do I need to achieve from this discussion?
- Separate facts from feelings. While emotions are natural, decisions should be based on clear evidence.

- Anticipate reactions. Thinking ahead about how the other person might respond helped me prepare a calm, balanced reply.

The key is to enter the conversation knowing the why and how, not just the what.

Choosing the Right Setting

A difficult conversation in the wrong environment can increase tensions. I made it a rule to address sensitive issues privately to ensure the person felt respected. Whether in person or on a video call, I set the tone by making the space feel safe and uninterrupted.

Speaking With Honesty and Empathy

Honesty without empathy can come across as an attack. Empathy without honesty can seem like avoidance. The art is in balancing both.

Instead of saying:

“You’re not performing well,”

I would say:

“I’ve noticed some challenges in meeting your deadlines, and I want us to work together to identify the obstacles and solutions.”

This small shift turned the conversation from confrontation into collaboration.

Listening Without Defensiveness

When emotions run high, it's tempting to instantly defend your position. I found that true listening—without interrupting and without planning my response—often calmed the tension. Sometimes, people just needed to feel heard before they could hear me.

Managing My Own Emotions

Difficult conversations aren't just hard for the other person; they also test your composure as a leader. I learned techniques to steady myself: taking a slow breath before speaking, lowering my tone instead of raising it, and keeping my body language open rather than closed.

By managing my own emotions, I could keep the discussion productive instead of reactive.

Ending With a Path Forward

The conversation shouldn't conclude with blame; it should finish with a plan. Whether it's clear next steps, a timeline for improvement, or a follow-up meeting, I made sure the other person left knowing what to do next.

Even when the outcome was tough—like letting someone go—I aimed to ensure the person left with their dignity intact.

Why This Matters

As I grew into my role, I realized that difficult conversations aren't interruptions to leadership; they are leadership. They are where trust, fairness, and courage are tested. When handled well, they can strengthen relationships, clarify expectations, and move the team forward.

By approaching them with honesty, empathy, and a steady hand, I learned that difficult truths don't have to break people; they can build them.

Chapter 18 – Leading Through Change

If difficult conversations test your emotional intelligence, leading through change tests every skill you have as a manager. By 24, I had already dealt with reorganizations, policy shifts, and a major corporate transition that impacted every member of my team.

Change is inevitable, but chaos is optional. The difference depends on how a leader guides the team.

The First Rule: Communicate Early and Clearly

People fear uncertainty more than they fear change. When rumors take the place of facts, anxiety fills the gap. I learned to share information as soon as I could, even if I didn't have all the answers.

I'd say:

"Here's what we know, here's what we don't know yet, and here's when we expect more updates."

This honesty built trust. My team knew that if there was news—good or bad—they would hear it from me directly.

Acknowledging the Human Side

Change isn't just a business process; it's very personal. It can mean learning new systems, adjusting to new leaders, or even worrying about job security. I made it a point to acknowledge that it was normal to feel uneasy.

One team member once told me, "I appreciate that you don't pretend this is easy." That comment stayed with me. People don't want perfection from their leader; they want authenticity.

Becoming a Bridge, Not a Barrier

During transitions, managers can either be a bridge between upper management and the team or a barrier that blocks information and empathy. I chose to be the bridge.

That meant:

- Translating corporate language into simple, relatable terms.
- Advocating for my team's concerns in leadership meetings.
- Bringing back practical solutions instead of vague promises.

Staying Grounded in Values

When everything feels like it's shifting, values become the anchor. I reminded my team—and myself—that while processes and policies might change, our core principles of teamwork, respect, and excellence remained the same.

This consistency provided a sense of stability, even in tough times.

Leading by Example

If I wanted my team to adapt with a positive mindset, I had to model that behavior. That didn't mean pretending change was easy; it meant showing resilience.

I stayed open to learning, asked questions without shame, and celebrated small wins along the way. The more my team saw me adapting, the more confident they felt about their own ability to adjust.

The Long-Term Payoff

Every change we went through made us stronger. We became quicker at learning, more flexible in solving problems, and more united as a team. I came to see change not as a disruption, but as a chance to grow skills we wouldn't develop in stable times.

Leading through change taught me one of the most valuable lessons in managing: you can't always control the pace or direction of change, but you can control how you and your team respond to it. That makes all the difference.

Chapter 19 – The Importance of Self-Reflection

In leadership, it's easy to get caught up in the daily rush of meetings, deadlines, targets, and problem-solving. I learned that if you don't take a moment to reflect, you might move quickly but not necessarily move forward.

Self-reflection became my valuable tool. It wasn't just a once-a-year event; it turned into a regular habit—a quiet moment to check if I was still on track with my goals, values, and purpose.

Why Reflection Matters

At 24, I was still discovering who I was—not only as a manager but also as a person. Reflection gave me clarity during moments of doubt. It let me ask:

What worked well this week?

What could I have done differently?

How did my actions affect others?

This process helped me spot patterns—both strengths to build on and mistakes to avoid.

Turning Mistakes into Lessons

I no longer feared mistakes; I was more concerned about not learning from them. Reflection turned regret into growth. Instead of replaying failures with shame, I asked myself, What is this teaching me?

When I mishandled a conversation or postponed a decision, I noted what I would change next time. Over time, those small changes added up to significant improvement.

Creating Space for Honesty

True reflection requires being honest with yourself. This meant acknowledging when I avoided a tough decision or let stress make me impatient with my team. It wasn't always easy, but it was necessary.

I also learned to celebrate progress, even if it was small. Recognizing wins—no matter how minor—boosted my confidence and kept me motivated.

The Power of Questions

The quality of your reflection depends on the quality of your questions. Some of my favorites included:

- Am I leading with integrity?
- Am I communicating clearly?
- If I were in my team's shoes, would I feel supported?

These questions kept me grounded and empathetic, stopping me from falling into automatic leadership.

Making It a Habit

Reflection doesn't have to be complicated. For me, it often meant taking 15 minutes at the end of the week to write down my thoughts in a notebook. Sometimes, it happened during a walk or a quiet coffee break. The important part was consistency.

This practice became a mirror, revealing who I was and who I was becoming. In leadership, that awareness is invaluable.

Self-reflection taught me that leadership isn't just about managing others—it's about managing yourself first. Without that inner work, no title, strategy, or experience can make you truly effective.

Chapter 20 – Looking Ahead

As I reached the end of my early days as a young manager, I realized something important: leadership is never a final destination; it's a journey. You never reach a point where you can stop growing. Every experience, challenge, and success simply prepares you for the next stage.

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The Road Beyond 24

At 24, I knew I still had much to learn. I had skills to sharpen, blind spots to discover, and new environments to adjust to. But I no longer feared the unknown. In fact, I welcomed it.

I understood that my career wouldn't always follow a straight path. There would be changes, including new roles, industries, and perhaps even countries. What I carried with me were the lessons from those early years:

- Resilience in uncertainty
- Empathy as a foundation
- The courage to decide
- The discipline to reflect

These weren't just leadership principles; they were life principles.

Evolving as a Leader

The leader I was at 21 is not the same leader I am now. The leader I am today will not be the same in ten years. That's the beauty of growth; it's constant, often invisible at the time, but clear in hindsight.

I've learned to view leadership less as managing people and more as enabling people to succeed. I believe the future of leadership will be collaborative, human-centered, and adaptable. Titles will change, workplaces will evolve, and technologies will advance, but the need for real human connection will remain.

Passing It Forward

One of my goals moving forward is to mentor others who find themselves where I once stood—young, somewhat uncertain, but full of potential. If someone can step into a leadership role feeling even a little more prepared because I shared my experience, then my journey will have been worth more than any promotion or award.

A Vision for the Future

When I imagine myself five, ten, or even twenty years from now, I don't see a rigid plan. I see a flexible, purpose-driven career where I'm still learning, still listening, and still challenging myself.

Leadership is not about holding onto power; it's about using it wisely and then passing the torch so others can shine. I want my career to be a series of opportunities that reach far beyond me.

Looking ahead, I know challenges will come. But I also know the foundation I've built—through trials, late nights, small victories, and humbling mistakes—will hold steady. With that, I step forward with clarity, curiosity, and quiet confidence that the best chapters are still to come.

"I was 24, leading a team, and learning the rules as I broke them."

I was just 24 years old when I stepped into the whirlwind of corporate leadership —managing people twice my age, making tough decisions, and learning the unspoken rules of the business world as I went. I didn't have all the answers, but I had determination, resilience, and the will to prove that age is not a limit.

This book is my story—an honest account of what it's like to grow into leadership in a global company before most of my peers had even started their careers. I share the victories that made me proud, the mistakes that taught me the most, and the moments when I questioned if I could really do it.

For me, leadership turned out to be less about holding authority and more about listening, adapting, and having the courage to stand by my decisions. It's about people, trust, and learning to lead yourself before you can lead anyone else.

Whether you're starting your first job, stepping into your own leadership role, or simply looking for inspiration, my journey will show you that you can create your own path—and thrive—no matter your age or starting point.

My story isn't over. In many ways, it's just beginning.

Author Biography

Kim Arimathie Stark was born on September 23, 1999, and grew up with a resilience forged through real-life challenges. From an early age, she learned to navigate both personal and professional hurdles, gaining a maturity well beyond her years. As a teenager, she faced situations that tested her strength and adaptability, experiences that would later become the foundation of her leadership style.

By the age of 24, Kim was already managing a team in a multinational company — an achievement that demanded discipline, quick learning, and an unshakable commitment to results. Balancing a full-time career with personal responsibilities was never easy, and at times, her availability was stretched thin. Yet, every obstacle became a stepping stone, shaping her into the determined, solution-oriented professional she is today.

Through her work and writing, Kim shares the lessons, struggles, and victories that defined her early career, inspiring others to embrace challenges as opportunities for

growth. Her journey proves that leadership is not about waiting for the “perfect time” — it’s about rising to the occasion when the moment calls.