



Women in Leadership

Leading Through Disasters

In times of crisis, strong and decisive leadership navigates the world through uncertainty and fosters resilience.

Around the world, female leaders have demonstrated exceptional crisis management skills in handling global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and economic instability. Their approaches, often characterized by empathy, collaboration and decisive action, have set examples for effective governance and sustainable solutions.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the strengths of women-led governments in crisis response. Leaders such as Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand, Angela Merkel of Germany, and Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan received international recognition for their swift and science-driven handling of the crisis. Their governance models emphasized clear communication, proactive policies and community-focused measures, leading to lower infection and mortality rates in their respective countries.

For example, Jacinda Ardern implemented strict lockdown measures early in the pandemic and prioritized transparent communication with the public, fostering trust and compliance. Similarly, Tsai Ing-wen swiftly enacted border controls and mass testing strategies that kept Taiwan's outbreak under control. Their leadership styles illustrated the importance of decisiveness combined with compassion in crisis management.

CLIMATE ACTION

Climate change is one of the most pressing global crises, and many female leaders have taken the helm in advocating for environmental sustainability and policy innovation. Figures such as Ursula von der Leyen, president of the

European Commission, and Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen of Denmark have spearheaded ambitious climate policies aimed at reducing carbon emissions and transitioning to green energy.

Von der Leyen's European Green Deal is a landmark initiative that aims for carbon neutrality by 2050, emphasizing sustainable growth and environmental responsibility. Women leaders in grassroots movements, such as Christiana Figueres, the former UN climate chief instrumental in the Paris Agreement, have also played critical roles in shaping global climate policies.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Economic challenges, including financial recessions and gender-based economic disparities, require strong leadership. Female leaders have demonstrated resilience by implementing policies that prioritize social welfare, economic inclusivity and long-term stability.

For instance, during the global financial crisis and subsequent economic downturns, leaders like Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank, championed economic reforms that balance fiscal responsibility with social protections. Countries with women at the helm often adopted policies that support working families, small businesses and social security measures to ensure equitable recovery.

THE FUTURE OF WOMEN IN CRISIS LEADERSHIP

Women's leadership in crisis management showcases the importance of diverse perspectives in governance. Research indicates that female-led governments tend to prioritize health care, education and social cohesion, leading



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to more sustainable and people-centered solutions.

As the world continues to face new and evolving crises, promoting women in leadership roles remains critical for fostering innovation, inclusivity and effective governance. By learning from the successes of female leaders, societies can cultivate more resilient and equitable frameworks for managing

global challenges.

The influence of women in crisis management underscores the need for continued efforts in gender equality in leadership. As more women rise to positions of power, the global community stands to benefit from their strategic, empathetic and forward-thinking approaches to crisis resolution.

Cracking Male-Dominated Fields

For decades, women have faced significant barriers in industries traditionally dominated by men, including construction, finance and aerospace.

Despite systemic challenges, many have entered these fields and risen to leadership positions, breaking the so-called “glass ceiling” — an invisible barrier that has historically limited women’s advancement in the workplace.

Through resilience, innovation and advocacy, women are transforming these industries and redefining leadership.

PAVING THE WAY IN CONSTRUCTION

The construction industry has long been perceived as a male stronghold, with women historically underrepresented in trade roles, engineering and management positions. However, the landscape is shifting. Organizations such as the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) and Women in Construction (WIC) Week have helped amplify female voices and provide networking opportunities.

Women like Barbara Res, who served as an engineer and construction executive, have demonstrated that leadership in this field is not gender-specific. Today, more women are becoming site managers,



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architects and engineers, contributing their expertise to build infrastructure projects worldwide. By fostering inclusive workplaces and providing mentorship opportunities, companies are encouraging more women to pursue careers in construction, proving that competence, not

gender, determines success.

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF FINANCE

Finance has traditionally been a male-dominated field, with leadership roles largely occupied by men. However, women are increasingly making their mark, challenging

the status quo, and reshaping the industry’s culture. Leaders such as Janet Yellen, the first female U.S. Treasury Secretary, and Abigail Johnson, CEO of Fidelity Investments, have shattered long-standing barriers and set new benchmarks for women in finance.

The rise of women in

finance is also fueled by initiatives that promote gender diversity. Many financial firms have implemented mentorship programs, diversity training and equitable hiring practices to ensure more women have access to leadership roles. The increasing representation of women in investment banking, financial advising and executive roles proves that diversity leads to stronger decision-making and better financial outcomes.

SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS IN AEROSPACE

Aerospace has long been seen as one of the most challenging industries for women to enter, with a historically low percentage of female pilots, engineers and executives. Despite these odds, trailblazers such as Eileen Collins, the first female space shuttle commander, and Gwynne Shotwell, president of SpaceX, have paved the way for future generations of women in aerospace.

Today, aerospace companies and organizations are working to close the gender gap by investing in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education for young girls, creating more inclusive workplace cultures, and advocating for policies that support work-life balance. The growing number of women in key aerospace roles signifies a shift toward a more equitable industry where talent and ambition, rather than gender, dictate success.

Billionaire Breaks Barriers

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw is a pioneering entrepreneur who has revolutionized the biotechnology industry in India and beyond.

As the founder and executive chairperson of Biocon, she has built one of India's leading biotech companies and has emerged as a global influencer in health care innovation. Her journey from a young aspiring brewer to a billionaire entrepreneur exemplifies resilience, vision and determination.

A TRAILBLAZING JOURNEY

Born in Bangalore, India, in 1953, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw initially aspired to become a master brewer, an unconventional career choice for a woman in India at the time. After earning a degree in brewing from Melbourne University in Australia, she returned to India, only to find limited opportunities in the male-dominated brewing industry. Undeterred, she turned to biotechnology, a field that was still in its infancy in India during the late 1970s.

In 1978, with limited capital and experience, Mazumdar-Shaw founded Biocon in a small garage in Bangalore. She faced significant challenges, including a lack of funding, skepticism from investors and gender biases. However, she persisted, and Biocon evolved from an industrial enzymes company into a leading player in biopharmaceuticals, focusing on affordable health care solutions for chronic diseases such as diabetes and cancer.

TRANSFORMING HEALTH CARE AND BIOTECHNOLOGY

Under Mazumdar-Shaw's leadership,



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Biocon has grown into a multinational biopharmaceutical company, specializing in research-driven solutions. One of its significant contributions is the development of cost-effective insulin and biosimilars, making life-saving medicines more accessible to people in developing countries.

Her commitment to affordable

healthcare has made a profound effect, particularly in India, where high drug prices remain a barrier to treatment. Biocon was one of the first companies to develop biosimilar versions of critical drugs, significantly lowering costs for patients worldwide.

Mazumdar-Shaw's rise in the biotech industry was not without obstacles. As

a woman in a male-dominated field, she encountered resistance from investors and business leaders who doubted her abilities. However, she overcame these challenges with persistence and by proving that competence, innovation and leadership transcend gender.

She has actively promoted women in STEM and has become a vocal advocate for gender diversity in corporate leadership. Her success story serves as an inspiration for aspiring women entrepreneurs, demonstrating that determination and resilience can break societal and professional barriers.

A LEGACY OF INNOVATION AND PHILANTHROPY

Beyond her business achievements, Mazumdar-Shaw is known for her philanthropic efforts. Through the Biocon Foundation, she has supported health care initiatives, rural development and education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she played a crucial role in driving vaccine and drug research while contributing to relief efforts.

Her contributions have earned her numerous accolades, including the Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri, India's top civilian honors. She has also been recognized by Forbes as one of the most powerful women in business.

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw's journey exemplifies how vision, perseverance and a commitment to innovation can transform an industry and improve millions of lives. She continues to lead Biocon with the mission of making high-quality, affordable healthcare accessible worldwide. Her legacy as a biotech pioneer and champion of women in leadership ensures that she remains a role model for generations to come.

Teen Makes Scouting History

Only 5% of Scouts achieve the rank of Eagle Scout.

It's an impressive achievement and one that has only recently been opened to young women.

In 2021, Kendall Jackson made history as the first Black female Eagle Scout, a groundbreaking achievement that showcased her perseverance, leadership and commitment to service. As one of the inaugural female members to earn the highest rank in the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), Kendall's journey exemplifies the increasing opportunities for young women in scouting and the broader impact of representation in leadership.

Kendall's journey to Eagle Scout began in 2019 when the BSA officially opened its flagship program to young women, allowing them to work toward the prestigious rank that had long been reserved for male Scouts. She quickly rose,

demonstrating exceptional skills in leadership, community service and personal development.

To achieve Eagle Scout status, a person must earn at least 21 merit badges, take on leadership roles within their troop, and successfully complete an extensive community service project. Kendall's project reflected her deep commitment to giving back, as she led an initiative to support underserved youth in her community. Her efforts included organizing educational workshops, revitalizing public spaces and mentoring younger scouts to inspire them to pursue their own goals in Scouting.

Beyond her Eagle Scout project, Kendall has been an outspoken advocate for diversity and inclusion in Scouting. Her historic achievement represents personal success and a significant milestone for young women of color seeking opportunities in leadership and public service. By breaking this barrier, she has encouraged countless other young women to challenge traditional boundaries and pursue their ambitions without hesitation.

Earning the rank of Eagle Scout is a distinction that only a small percentage of Scouts ever achieve. It requires dedication, perseverance and a strong sense of civic responsibility—qualities that Kendall has demonstrated throughout her scouting journey. Her legacy as the first Black female Eagle Scout is an inspiring testament to the power of determination and the importance of opening doors for future generations.

Since her accomplishment, other young Black women who have achieved the rank include Phoenix Moyer and Kimani Brame from Michigan and Jakayla Armstrong from Alabama.

Jackson's story serves as a reminder of the strides women continue to make in fields that were once closed to them. Her pioneering role in Scouting honors those who paved the way before her and sets the stage for many more young women to follow in her footsteps. Kendall's achievement is a beacon of inspiration, proving that with determination and resilience, barriers can be broken and history can be made.

Economist Leads World Agency

Kristalina Georgieva is a formidable force in global economics, serving as the managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since 2019. In October 2024, she was reappointed to a second term.

As a Bulgarian economist and policy-maker, she has played a pivotal role in addressing pressing world financial challenges, including economic inequality, climate change and the financial repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Her leadership in international finance has made her one of the most influential women in the world.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Born in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1953, Georgieva grew up under a communist regime that shaped her early understanding of economic policy and global finance.

She earned her Ph.D. in economic science from the University of National and World Economy in Bulgaria, where she later became a professor. Her early academic work focused on environmental economics, a subject that would later influence her policies at the IMF.

Georgieva's career took off in 1993 when she joined the World Bank, where she specialized in environmental and sustainable development. Over the years, she climbed the ranks, eventually becoming the CEO of the World Bank in 2017. Her work at the World Bank included efforts to reduce global



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poverty, increase sustainable investments and promote gender equality in economic policies.

In 2010, she took on a political role within the European Commission as the commissioner for international cooperation, humanitarian aid and crisis response. She was widely praised for her management of humanitarian

crises, including disaster relief efforts in Haiti and Pakistan. Her ability to navigate complex global challenges earned her a strong reputation as a pragmatic and effective leader.

LEADING THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

In 2019, Georgieva made history

when she became the first person from an emerging economy to lead the IMF.

As managing director, she has overseen the organization's financial assistance programs for countries facing economic instability. Under her leadership, the IMF provided unprecedented emergency financing during the COVID-19 crisis, helping countries stabilize their economies amid the global downturn.

Georgieva has also been a strong advocate for addressing climate change through economic policy. She has urged nations to implement carbon pricing and increase green investments to ensure long-term financial stability. Additionally, she has emphasized the importance of reducing income inequality, arguing that economic policies must prioritize vulnerable populations.

CHALLENGES AND CONTROVERSIES

Despite her achievements, Georgieva's tenure at the IMF has not been without controversy. In 2021, she faced scrutiny over allegations that she pressured staff at the World Bank to alter economic rankings to favor China. While an independent review did not find definitive proof of wrongdoing, the controversy sparked debates over governance and transparency within global financial institutions.

Georgieva remains one of the most powerful women in finance, shaping policies that affect millions of people worldwide. Her leadership influences global economic strategies, particularly in times of crisis. As she steers the IMF through uncertain economic times, her legacy as a champion for sustainable growth, financial stability and inclusive economic policies is already well established.

Teen Scientist Changes the World

From the time she was a teenager, Gitanjali Rao had already left her mark on the world of science and technology.

Named TIME magazine's first-ever Kid of the Year in 2020, she has become a role model for young innovators everywhere. A scientist, inventor and advocate for STEM education, Rao is using her talents to tackle global challenges, from water contamination to cyberbullying.

With a passion for innovation and a commitment to empowering young people in STEM, Rao is proving the next generation of scientists and engineers is ready to change the world.

PASSION FOR PROBLEM-SOLVING

Born in 2005, Rao grew up in Lone Tree, Colorado, where she developed a fascination for science and engineering at an early age. Encouraged by her parents and inspired by scientists like Marie Curie, she began conducting experiments and brainstorming ways to use technology for good.

Her breakthrough came at just 11 years old when she learned about the Flint, Michigan, water crisis and wanted to help. Frustrated by the slow and expensive methods used to detect lead in drinking water, Rao invented Tethys, a portable device that uses carbon nanotube sensors to detect lead contamination in seconds. This invention won her the 2017 Discovery Education 3M Young Scientist Challenge and put her in the national spotlight as a rising innovator.

PUBLIC HEALTH INNOVATIONS

Rao didn't stop with Tethys. She



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turned her attention to other social issues, including cyberbullying and opioid addiction. She developed Kindly, an AI-powered app that helps detect and prevent cyberbullying by analyzing language patterns and encouraging positive interactions before harmful messages are sent.

She also worked on a device that uses genetic engineering to detect early signs of opioid addiction, aiming to provide a tool for early intervention in the opioid crisis.

INSPIRING OTHERS

Beyond her inventions, Rao is a

passionate advocate for STEM education, particularly for girls and underrepresented communities. She regularly conducts innovation workshops for students around the world, teaching them how to apply scientific thinking to real-world problems.

In 2021, she published "A Young Innovator's Guide to STEM", a book designed to help young people develop their own ideas and inventions.

Through this work, she hopes to democratize innovation by making STEM education accessible to all.

Rao's achievements have earned her

numerous accolades, including recognition from Forbes 30 Under 30, the Environmental Protection Agency and MIT. As she continues her studies and research, she remains focused on using science and technology for social good.

Her journey is a testament to the power of curiosity, determination and the belief that young people can change the world.

Through her inventions and advocacy, Rao is solving today's problems and paving the way for the next generation of scientists, engineers and innovators.

Football Coach Blazes Trail

Once the exclusive domain of men, women have been making strides in the world of football with 2025 seeing the first Black woman to be part of the winning Super Bowl coaching team.

Autumn Lockwood's journey to becoming the first Black woman to coach in and win a Super Bowl is a testament to her dedication and the evolving landscape of the NFL. She was the first Black woman to coach in a Super Bowl in 2023, when the Philadelphia Eagles challenged the Chiefs. Then in 2025, as an assistant performance coach, Lockwood contributed to the team's Super Bowl victory over the Kansas City Chiefs.

A native of Media, Pennsylvania, 31-year-old Lockwood's passion for sports was evident early on. She pursued a bachelor's degree in exercise science at the University of Arizona, laying a strong foundation in athlete development and sports science. She played soccer and was a criminal justice student.

According to AfroTech.com, her

academic journey continued with a master's degree in sports management from East Tennessee State University, where she gained valuable experience that would shape her coaching career.

In an interview with the NSCA Coaching Podcast, she said she took advantage of every opportunity offered to her, "Getting in the door, it's all about that opportunity and what you do with that, and how you show up every day," she said. "Once you're there ... I'm going to observe everything. I'm going to be a sponge. I'm going to be so hands-on. I'm going to be an extra set of hands. I'm going to do everything that I can to help this team, this staff, all these departments that go into building a championship culture."

According to Sports Illustrated, only two Black women have coached in the NFL — Lockwood and Jennifer King. King was the first Black woman to have a full-time assistant coach position in the NFL. She coaches for the Chicago Bears.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell told Forbes Magazine after the 2025 Super Bowl that the league is committed to more diverse hires because it reflects their fan base, communities and players.

"We got into diversity efforts because we felt it was the right thing for the

National Football League, and we're going to continue to do those efforts. We're not in this because it's a trend to get into it or a trend to get out of it."

Lockwood's professional trajectory is marked by diverse experiences across collegiate and professional sports. She began her career with roles at East Tennessee State University and the University of Houston, where she honed her skills in sports performance. In 2019, she entered the NFL as a strength staff intern with the Atlanta Falcons, marking her initial foray into professional football coaching. Her commitment and expertise led her to join the Philadelphia Eagles in 2022 as a strength and conditioning associate, and she was promoted to assistant performance coach in 2023.

Her historic achievement in 2025 highlights her personal success and signifies a broader shift towards inclusivity within the NFL. Lockwood's presence on the Eagles' coaching staff during their decisive 40-22 Super Bowl victory underscores the increasing recognition of women's contributions in professional football.

Lockwood's success serves as an inspiration, demonstrating that with determination and expertise, barriers can be overcome, paving the way for future generations of women in sports.