

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



## Episode 40

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Host: Annemarie Cross

Annemarie Cross: You're listening to Women in Leadership podcast episode 40, brought to you by Microsoft Surface. Hi. I'm your host, Annemarie Cross, branding communication strategist also known as the podcasting queen. Welcome to another episode of Women in Leadership – the podcast that empowers you to reach your full potential.

Sarah Holloway joins me on today's show. Now Sarah joins me on today's show. Now Sarah began her work in life as a mergers and acquisitions lawyer at a leading international law firm. While she enjoyed several years building strong professional foundations an invaluable business acumen, she found it increasingly challenging to reconcile all consuming corporate lifestyle with her personal passions for health, wellbeing, creativity, and adventure.

In pursuit of balance, Sarah and her partner started a creative side project in late 2014, capitalizing on a gap they discovered in the health food market for matcha green tea powder. Eighteen months on this vibrant green super food is one of the world's premier health food trends and Matcha Maiden is leading the way with a growing community of over 1000 stockers, 80,000 social media followers, and a very bright green future.

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Sarah has now hung up the suits and heels to step into business full time and is thoroughly enjoying her life as a full time funtrapreneur. On today's show, Sarah is going to share the importance of agility, the importance of balance, and why you can't please everyone and you shouldn't be doing that anyway, and what you should be doing instead. So welcome to the show, Sarah.

Sarah: Hi, thank you so much for having me. It was quite an introduction.

Annemarie: Look so impressed with your background. I mean you gave up a high court associateship to pursue Matcha Maiden. You left your corporate law job to work full time in your business. My goodness. This has just gone from growth to growth. Congratulations.

Sarah: Thank you so much. It's funny listening to bios and hearing the story from someone else telling it. It's sort of like unreal. I just forget that it all happens so quickly that sort of thing. Oh really, is that me.

Annemarie: Absolutely. I mean I love the saying that Steve Job shared. Unless we look backwards and join the dots we can then see how things have progressed. I mean when you did leave your full time job to start your business or do that full time, could you ever have imagined you would be where you are today?

Sarah: Not at all. I never expected that I'd ever be able to leave my job to begin with. But even once I did, it was still a big risk and a hugely scary step. Cause I thought oh my gosh, is this actually going to work. Is it going to keep growing? What's going on to happen. I had no idea. I sort of thought I'd skip out for a little while and ride a wave and then I might have to go back.

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



You know it's natural. You just get filled with all the doubts and worries and you just have to sort of try and quiet them and move beyond them and surround yourself with people who also believe in what you're doing so that you can get over those hurdles. Then you might surprise yourself like we did.

Annemarie: Looking back cause I know we have a lot of listeners who are in business already. However, there are also many listeners who are still working in a role in corporate and long to be able to start their own business full time. What was it for you – I mean obviously you really did long for that balance.

Was it something you told yourself? Did something happen that finally had you go, you know what, I am stepping into that from the corporate into full time entrepreneurship. What was it for you?

Sarah: It was the moment where we went from being able to manage both with our fulltime jobs to the moment where we got a really big opportunity that might not have been an opportunity that sustained us forever, but it was big enough that we would have to hire someone for that particular contract.

So it was impossible for one of us to not go full time or for us to hire someone. It was at that point where it really became mutually exclusive. I actually had to choose. I couldn't just keep doing both and seeing how they went. I kind of like to hedge my bet and sort of have one foot in both doors while I'm a bit unsure about things.

But it was that crossroad where I realized the business is growing to a particular point but actually can't grow any further. We're going to have to start saying no

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



to opportunities that we've worked for because there's not enough time and we don't have enough hours to give to it.

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So am I willing to risk the fact that you know. Am I willing to leave my job, to throw my all into it and really see what can happen or am I too scared and accept that this is as far as it will ever become. Once I thought about that I was like no. No. We've got momentum and how could I not see that through and give it the chance to grow bigger.

Annemarie:

Exciting. You obviously then whilst you were working really slowly started to build up the business. Where there some key things that you were doing? Cause that's really important I think and we kind of called that a portfolio career cause you have a number of different things on the go.

What was some of the steps that you took whilst you were still working that you believe were really crucial to the ongoing growth and involvement of your business? Cause there's so many things that we can do as business owners. Yet there are some steps that we take that are so important to the growth of the business.

Obviously, you did those steps. You took those steps, had those conversations. What were they? What was some of the things looking back that you did that enable you to grow the business to a point where you said, you know what, I'm now going to step into that full time?

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Sarah: One of the things that was really instrumental for us growing as quickly as we did both within Australia but then also globally, which we didn't expect, was just harnessing the power of social media. Because I had to accept the physical limitations of being in an office all day, I couldn't use that time for physical networking or being out on the road or doing all those kind of things that I would wanted to do in business development.

The only thing that I could do is focus on things I could do on my devices. So working with that I was like I'm always on my phone and I'm always on my computer anyways so what's going to be a forum that I can inject all my energy into while I'm still doing this job that will help the business grow without a lot of capital investment.

Social media was right there in front of us. It was everything. It's been our whole marketing strategy from the very beginning. So I just put a lot of effort into developing a strategy, developing the right brand voice for that, timing, kind of a formula that would work for us and adapting that.

Annemarie: Was that on one particular platform? Because I know that your Instagram account, and of course we'll list all of the ways that people can connect with you on social so they can go and check that out. I notice you've got some incredibly strong followers on Instagram. Did you find Instagram was really working well for you or across some other platforms too?

Sarah: Definitely Instagram was our main focus. That's where we got the quickest growth, the strongest responses because the product is such a bright color and part of our message was to show people how you can actually use it then having a visual element was really important. We also find the engagement was just the

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



highest in our target market as compared to Facebook where the feed was already starting to be interfered with by paid advertising.

I had no experience in that. So I thought Instagram is just an easier place to start cause I was familiar with it. Twitter again without the imagery was sort of hard to get momentum. So we focus most of our attention on Instagram. All the bloggers were kind of really heavily concentrated there as well and they are the people who we wanted to pay attention to us and get curious and start wanting to play around with it.

That was really well responded to from like the first week and just continue to grow faster than anything else so we just continue to put our effort back into.

Annemarie:

Yeah. As someone who loves social media and let's be honest I am an introvert. So sitting behind a computer or my device rather than – I mean I do love meeting people too. I prefer to behind that device if I'm honest. I mean that just excites me.

I know other people too because for people who are still balancing a career but they haven't yet quiet left corporate because they haven't yet grown their business to think that if they have the right strategy the tools are there. The audience is there. You just got to obviously have the right strategy.

You did that. Just if you think back then I mean obviously great graphics. You had a great story. Great brand voice. Did you find that you were networking however doing it online by connecting with bloggers? Did you tag them so that they can learn about you? Was there any specific strategy around that?

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Sarah: Yeah. Definitely. I learned very quickly that you know a lot of people say you need to be really active. I think a lot of people interpret that as posting regularly.

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They forget the follow through which is to go back to those photos when people have asked questions or comments and actually respond to them all even though that sort of seems less important the post itself. It's probably more important cause why do you bother posting something if you're not going to interact with people who bother to see it.

So we spent a lot of time making sure every comment and every tag was acknowledged and answered. I do look back and think I was actually networking in the best way that I could from behind my day. That meant that by the time I did leave six months later, I'd actually build up a network of quite a few good relationships with bloggers.

So the minute that I could do meetings during the weekdays, I had already set there. I just shout out some Instagram messages to them said, oh my gosh, I'm full time. I can meet you for brunch. Let's take it into the real world and go get a matcha latte.

I spent I think maybe the first two or three months full time of just meeting all the people who I developed online relationships with in person which sound really creepy but is actually not. It worked really well cause we've been able to build up a foundation beforehand. You do feel a little bit restricted by the fact that you've got working hours and you can't be everywhere.

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Annemarie: But you would have been so much more focus though, wouldn't you? I mean let's face it. Sometimes if we were to do audit on where we're focusing our time and energy through the day, a lot of that time can be not really the best use of our time. I would imagine that when you look back you would have to be really focused, really on target to make sure that what you were doing had the best momentum for you. Yes.

Sarah: Yes, definitely. I used every lunch break to do research. If I could meet someone who is in the city, I would go and meet someone. There are other bloggers around as well of food and health and wellness influencers who were also sort of making the transition from their fulltime jobs and a lot of them were corporate. We sort of seek each other out and timed our lunch breaks at the same time. There's always something that you can do.

Annemarie: Absolutely. One thing that I did want to stress and Sarah has certainly said this as well is that yes there was posting on social media to share the story and the imagery and the graphics. But the most important thing was that when people were interacting with her post she strengthened that relationship by continuing to engage, by answering, responding.

And then if there was an opportunity to meet someone because they were in the same time for lunch or whatever, that then was taken straight away. It's all about relationship building I think. First, you get the visibility and then you need to develop that relationship I think is key. Are there any other lessons that you've learned around agility that you want to share today?

Sarah: A really big one for me was coming from an environment where everything is planned five years in advance kind of thing and everything has a process that you



# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



have to go through before it can be changed. Moving into an environment where we didn't even have a business plan and even if we had everything changes every day.

It's really shown me that the market like you make this assumptions about certain things. Like when we first started we had no competitors so we didn't have to think about how our product compare to other people cause there weren't any whereas very quickly after that competitor started popping up everywhere.

If we'd stuck to our business plan that was based on just being the main market share person you know all would have suddenly become irrelevant. So it's really thought me that you do need to plan and think things through. But if we've spent six months developing this amazing marketing strategy and plan, it would have been such a waste of time because the market changed so quickly after it that it all becomes irrelevant.

I think learning to operate according to strategies but also think on your feet about how they need to evolve as the market around you evolves and as your circumstances evolve is really important because if I've done it my way, I would have planned too much and then not being able to adapt everything to keep up.

Whereas having a business partner who has been in business a lot longer than me who knows like what are you doing wasting time on a 20,000 page document of operational procedures.

Annemarie: Yeah. Which is probably going to sit in the drawer and never to be looked at again.

Sarah: Exactly.

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Annemarie: I think that's the beauty of having a smaller business. We can react far quicker to what the market is doing in comparison to bigger business that takes a lot longer to kind of shift. Because there's so many more people around the leadership table and maybe board members and all that kind of things need to be passed through.

But I love the fact that you're saying you really were agile. You saw that there were some other voices starting to speak within your market and then you thought right we need shift, do something differently.

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I mean I've had a look through your Instagram account. I mean share a little bit about what Matcha Maiden is because you've also got a café. Share a little bit more about your business.

Sarah: Basically matcha it sounds like a bit of super fancy buzz word but it's just green tea leaves ground into a powder. So instead of throwing out the leaf like you would in a tea bag which seems silly to get rid of all the green it's ground into a powder. You dissolve it and you drink the whole leaves.

So you get a 137x the antioxidants of regular green tea then it's a powdered form so it's much more versatile and you can make it into lattes and smoothies and protein bars and desserts. We sort of found it in its traditional context as a ceremonial tea in Japan. But then we were traveling elsewhere, we started to see it use more adventurously.

I got quite sick and was sent to Hong Kong at the same time with my law firm. And in Asia matcha is not a new thing. It's been around for centuries. The Zen

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Buddhist monks were using it for meditation. I couldn't drink coffee, and as an M&A lawyer you need caffeine. I got hooked on matcha because it's got this unique amino acid L-theanine which makes the caffeine slow release into your blood streams.

So if you're caffeine sensitive a lot of people can still drink it. We came home and couldn't find it anywhere. So I thought maybe we could find it online. We can only find it on bulk. I was like what are we going to do with the leftovers. Maybe we should start a business. I knew, you know if I sell one bag I can put it on my LinkedIn that I'm an entrepreneur and that's all that really counts.

So let's just try and sell a bag and it turns out that lots of people wanted bags. We sold out very quickly. And then that just kept growing and growing into a big global matcha family and then we sort of expanded a little bit into – we love collaborating with other businesses. So we started the thing called the Collaboratory which is each month we picked, to show the versatility of the product, we picked a brand who we work with often and we create something together that uses whatever product they made and we make a matcha version of it together so we started to expand into different products.

We had one every month this year. We have like a protein bar mix, a gluten-free seeded loaf, a face mask, bar of soap, sort of everything you can think of. And then end of last year we decided that we wanted to take it into the physical world and our business partner were on the same page with us. They were actually the café owners of our first physical stockers and open a specialty matcha café as well

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



called Matcha Mylkbar which has been opened for nearly six months now. So it just keeps taking on a life on its own.

Annemarie: Don't you just hate that saying when people look at you and you're being so lucky. And it's like you have not seen the hours that we pushed in behind the scene. The things that you're doing, it's evolving. People find out more about you. The market grows and then there's an idea that you have. How many of us have an idea like the Collaboratory. I love that word.

But rather than kind of putting it on the back shelves or analyzing it to the nth degree. By the time you've done that you've often talked yourself out of it. But you've followed that idea and through that I would imagine you've developed some incredible relationships, gotten exposure for both those businesses times how many times you've collaborated. I mean what a brilliant idea.

Sarah: Thank you. It's just funny how sometimes the ideas that turn into really businesses aren't the ones that start as business ideas. They're an idea because you know you say you want it for yourself and you're like maybe they will be other people who will find this kind of market.

Annemarie: Let's just talk about balance. It is so important to have balance. I know that as entrepreneurs in our business there's so many different things that we can do and be doing every single day but if we don't have a mindset that we have to have balance, it can suddenly really fall pear shaped, can it. We become pear shaped.

Sarah: Totally. I've really learned that. I thought I knew that already but it's interesting how it's continued to be an ongoing struggle for a lot of us I think.

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Annemarie: Is there anything that you do? Maybe there's a ritual or something that you do on a daily basis or maybe there's like a trigger that if you know that x, y and z happens that you think I need to pull back and start to reclaim some balance cause things happened that can often have us be a little bit imbalanced. But is there something that you do consistently that help you maintain that balance?

Sarah: To be perfectly honestly and I've been sharing this a lot lately just because I think a lot of people say, oh my gosh, how do you do all the things you do. And I recently had a little bit of a crash and burn and I feel it's really important to share that I obviously don't. Like it still is really hard for everyone to find the right balance.

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I really thought that moving from the corporate lifestyle to health and wellness that I'd just be like the picture of health glowing and like at the gym all the time. But once you love what you do, it's even harder to stop working because it doesn't feel like work. You do sometimes wait for those triggers of your body to tell you to slow down. But because you're so excited but what you're doing it can even block out the messages that you get from your body.

What I'm learning is that I used to look for physical triggers. I just start to feel a little bit rundown and think I need to put on the breaks. But now I've realized the adrenalin and excitement of work can really block those messages out until you've gone too far. So I'm trying to preemptively get more balance on a regular basis rather than waiting. I found obviously exercise is really important for that.

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Doing things that you can't physically be thinking about work at the same time. So classes are really good. Yoga is really restorative I find. Going for long walks without my phone has also been really good. We've got a big dog. He's a golden retriever so that's a really nice time to just not take anything with me. I also meditate quite regularly which really helps. I used to be quite skeptical when I was a corporate and think oh my god.

Annemarie:

You need to find an activity that really can relax you so that you can refresh or regenerate yourself. That's important to do consistently. Not wait till all of a sudden you fall flat on your face. You think time to rest. Because by that time often it's too late and you really do find yourself ill.

Let's talk about not pleasing everyone. I know often as women we want everyone to like us and we can drain ourselves to the point where we just don't want to get out and talk to anyone if we're people pleasers. Let's share a few insights around that for our audiences today.

Sarah:

Yeah. I think that's another part of being so passionate about what you do and loving the industry that you're in. It's such a community that the health and wellness small business world. You're getting pulled in so many different directions.

People want to collaborate or you just got customers who have different tastes in particular since opening as hospitality venue that's quite quirky. It's all plant based, really innovative and creative dishes. When you've got lots of different ideas like that it's really hard to please everyone.

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



I spend a lot of time because you take such pride in your work trying to make it so that it pleases everyone. I think you do at one point need to realize that you have a target market and everyone else outside that you're never going to actually be able to have a product that everyone universally likes. There would be something wrong with it if that was the case.

Annemarie: Yeah. For sure.

Sarah: Sometimes you need to just narrow your focus a little bit and just take a moment to stop and think who am I doing this for? Who is my ideal target market and how can I focus more on them because the broader you make your audience the less focus your product becomes.

If you do kind of adjust it to suit one group and then the next month you adjust it to suit another you're losing your brand message as well which I've fallen into the trap of doing before you know. Sometimes we want to be like we've got like the vegan corner and then the gluten-free corner and sometimes it's a bit harder to decide what do you we want to post on our page and all that kind of thing.

And then you just have to decide how narrow or how wide you'll go and just be comfortable with that and not beat yourself up about it. No matter what you do, you'll get some haters and really that's just sign that you've made it. That's the only way that you can look at it and take it as a compliment.

Annemarie: It's so true.

Sarah: And not take it so personally.

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Annemarie: I think that brand voice and the vision or the direction is so important to establish because that holds, if you're holding true all of the other decision that you're making in your business continues to align and you're moving forward then you know you're on the right track. But often the people who are not really clear about that that's when they start to really become shaky, don't they.

Because they're listening too much to their market and it's not adding value. It's actually distracting because they don't have clarity. But that's true and that's right. You know what. We could run around trying to please everyone. At the end of the day though, they're not really our target market or ideal clients.

We're not doing our ideal clients, the ones who love our product and what we stand for in our message and voice they love that and they'll stick by us. So when we start to tone that down and weaken that message then we're not doing our ideal clients any justice and certainly not our business. So great insights there. Share with everyone what is the best way that people can get in contact with you and where about is this Mylkbar that you have to.

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Sarah: The Mylkbar is in St. Kilda, 72 Ackland Street. It's opposite Luna Park. I have three Instagram account and three email addresses that all come to me so you can pick any of those. There's matcha\_maiden and the email address is in the bio. There's matcha\_mylkbar and the email is also in the bio. And then my personal page is spoonful\_of\_sarah and again the email is in the bio so you can take your pick.



# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



Annemarie: Fantastic. Are there any last words of advice that you would have for people today?

Sarah: I have a quote. I absolutely love quotes. They're my favorite thing in the world and for anyone who is starting anything whether it's a business or just a new goal my favorite quote is that doubt kills more dreams than failure ever will. I really like it because when we first started I was so wreck with doubt that I genuinely thought at times it was horrible idea that would never work.

And if I let that dictate my decision rather than just acknowledging it and then pushing it to the side, I would have never known that I was actually really wrong. That's scary to me how close I came to just packing it all before I even started. So if you do get some doubts it's totally natural. Just acknowledge it but you have to give yourself the chance to see what you're capable of.

Annemarie: Thank you so much for coming on the show.

Sarah: Thank you so much for having me.

Annemarie: Now before we finish up, remember if you are networking but you're struggling to get clients then make sure that you access my network with confidence checklist. In there is some suggested ice breakers so you can have meaningful conversations even with people you haven't yet met, how to create that powerful introductions so that you really do speak to your ideal clients who asked you tell me more about your business.

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PODCAST



So how to network and communicate with confidence to grow your network, your relationship, your business and your career. All you need to do is go to [annemariex.com/networkwithconfidencechecklist](http://annemariex.com/networkwithconfidencechecklist). And of course make sure that you do check out the show notes so that you can connect with Sarah.

Please check out the images she's got on her Instagram account. They are absolutely fabulous and here is a business that was started and really grew and had that momentum through social media. I mean that just excites me.

If you haven't already subscribed to the show, please do that. Every week, we have another fantastic guest expert just like Sarah today. [annemariex.com/podcastitunes](http://annemariex.com/podcastitunes). While you're over there rate the show. Leave us a message.

Also too what was the biggest aha that you took from today's show. Maybe it was the quote about doubt. We'll throw doubt out the window. We don't need that anymore. Fantastic everyone. Have a fantastic week. See you again next week. See you, Sarah.

Sarah:

Bye.

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