



## Leading Through Disruption

Powerful conversations with prominent leaders on navigating this era of relentless change

# As A Leader, You Have To Carry The Weight of Making Difficult Decisions

Published on October 19, 2022



Seyran Ates



### Dr. Anastassia Lauterbach

Managing Director EMEA The ExCo Leadership Group, NED, Professor for AI, Public Speaker and Writer, Leadership Coach

[24 articles](#)

---

***Seyran Ates, a prominent lawyer and women's rights activist, shared key leadership lessons with me and my colleague Adam Bryant, managing director of The ExCo Group, in our latest "Leading Through Disruption" interview. Subscribe [here](#) to receive future interviews.***

**Lauterbach: What does it mean to be a leader?**

Ates: It starts with exceptional character and wanting to use power very positively. You have to decide in your life if you want to be a leader or if you want to be always the person who needs permission to do something.

For a while, I taught migrants who wanted to start their own business. And one important point I would share with them is that they really have to decide if they want to take full responsibility. This is the most important decision for everybody. You can learn to be a leader if you have the fire within yourself to make things happen. And if you don't have that true motivation, be honest with yourself. Because there will be many forces that will try to stop you from doing what you want to do.

**Bryant: You mentioned character. What does that word mean to you?**

Ates: You have to accept that you are the decision maker and be able to

make decisions very quickly. You should want to be the decision maker. This is what I know about the best leaders. They like to find a solution and they like to decide. You should be able in very stressful situations to see the whole picture very fast and make decisions while also being empathetic to the people who are affected by your decisions.

Character also means that you are always wanting to do better. So always ask other people for feedback. You should not be afraid of feedback. Ask for feedback. Accept feedback. And thank people for their feedback.

*You cannot be a really good leader unless you think big.*

And think big. Some people have trouble thinking really big. I'm not saying that as a criticism or suggesting that they are wrong. I just believe that you cannot be a really good leader unless you think big.

**Lauterbach: What do you think is the hardest part of leadership?**

Ates: The hardest part is sometimes being the only one who can make decisions. People can feel very lonely in those kinds of situations. But at the same time, that responsibility can be really satisfying. So learn to feel the satisfaction. If you feel like you are having to carry a heavy weight in difficult situations, you can make it lighter if you feel satisfied because you are the person who decides.

But life is always flowing with decisions, and sometimes the decisions are really, really hard. And you always have to accept that you are not perfect, and that you don't have to be perfect. You just have to do your best to bring out your best, and being a leader never, ever means being the most perfect human being in this world.

**Bryant: What leadership advice would you give to a group of first-time CEOs?**

Ates: Decide for yourself to be the leader and accept that your day, your whole day, is part of your life as leader. You cannot be a half-time leader. You should decide that this is your life. To be a leader is not a nine-to-five job. You should be able to see that there is not a difference between your life when it comes to work and your private life. What is really important in my life is that I never, ever feel that I work. This is life, and you shouldn't see work as something bad and hard that has to be finished at the end of the week.

***[Subscribe here](#) to get future "Leading Through Disruption" interviews.***