



### **Henna Inam**

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## **Henna Inam's Leadership Lessons | ExCo Insights**

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In this series, we explore some of the most important lessons and insights from our executive coaches and mentors.

Henna Inam, executive coach and mentor at The ExCo Group, board director of Engro Corp, and former Global Head of e-Innovation at Novartis, shares her leadership lessons. She highlights the significance of authentic leadership, focusing on self-awareness, and each team member's responsibility in fostering trust.

### **KEY LEADERSHIP LESSONS**

One of my most pivotal leadership lessons, which has also influenced how I mentor and coach others, is the importance of leading from who you are. So many of us have been taught that leadership is all of these “must be’s,” as in, you must be strategic, or you must be collaborative.

But what really matters is who you are in the moment. Many of us are on autopilot, rushing from meeting to meeting. When you're dealing with a crisis or a big disruption in your market, when you have to respond in moments of ambiguity, what comes out is who you are at your core. And so, the biggest lesson for me has been discovering who I am inside and paying attention to who I am at this moment. What do I care about? What brings me joy? What triggers me?

The moment when I started making the distinction between the “shoulds” of leadership and who I really am came when I was turning 40. I had been running our company’s business in Mexico, and my team and I had had a tough turnaround. Our business became successful, and we were able to drive one of our biggest competitors out of the market. My team and I were among the ten teams recognized by the CEO that year out of 90,000 people at our company. I remember during a long flight home after that, thinking that I should be happy. And I was excited about this enormous recognition, but I started then to understand the distinction between achievement and fulfillment.

Up until that point in my career, I had been given a new assignment or promotion every two years. And then, once you climb that mountain, there was this kind of sinking feeling of, now what? It set me off on this amazing journey of self-discovery. I took ten days away from work, went on a retreat, and learned mindfulness and meditation. It was probably one of the most impactful and transformative ten

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days of my career because I started paying attention to myself and what was happening inside me. I learned that what brought me joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment was helping others grow, have those moments of self-discovery, and learn how to be more successful because of that authenticity.

The second lesson, which I learned the hard way, is that each person on a team has to take personal accountability for developing trust on the team. It happened when I was a regional president of a more than half-billion-dollar business. I was asked to take on that role because the business had been in trouble because of quality issues. Several months later, we had another quality crisis, leading to a recall. We had supply chain problems, and people in different regions started competing for limited product. There was a lack of transparency, and it created a culture where there was absolutely no collaboration.

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I needed to step up and call out the lack of trust on the team, but I didn’t. Everybody’s stress levels were really high, and the team was not okay. The lesson for me was that every single person on the team is responsible for building trust on the team and calling out when the team is being dysfunctional. It starts with taking baby steps to creating trust on the team and having conversations with people not wired as team players to help them understand what is at stake if we don’t work together.

## **WHEN I COACH CLIENTS, WE OFTEN TALK ABOUT...**

One big theme is responding to and driving change— whether it’s climate, AI, or the rapid change in innovation and technology in their businesses. Everybody is trying to figure out how they keep up with the pace of change and all the ambiguity. It often starts with recognizing when you’re feeling stress

and then learning how to pivot to states of greater inspiration and connection. In my book “Wired for Disruption,” I call this neuroemotional agility. Doing that can make you much more resilient and help impact others in the workplace.

Another big theme is the challenge of working across silos, particularly in large, complex organizations. When there are entrenched silos, it can be hard to transcend the goal of the silo and focus more on the goal of the broader organization. That’s a big part of leadership. And so I invariably help my clients understand how they connect with stakeholders across their system, both inside and outside their organization. How do you influence them? And how do you really listen to what their needs are, so that you are focused on the goals of the system in which you’re operating? That requires a shift in mindset.