

If you only have a minute: Rooted and Unwavering is all about connecting deeply with ourselves, others and our service in the world. How can a set of personal guiding principles help us navigate life's challenges and connect more fully with the world around us?

Love Fiercely, Lead Boldly, Make a Positive Impact

By Esther Groves and Hylke Faber

Love fiercely, lead boldly, and make a positive impact. For Patty Obermaier, former Chief Growth Officer at Microsoft Life Sciences and the CEO of Resigility, this is not just a motto; this is a trio of guiding principles to embrace every day. Few people manage to live up to such high aspirations, but Patty is well on her way.

Loving fiercely seems to come naturally to this advisor, mentor, and mom. To her, this means cherish and nourish relationships, play a little, and learn something new every day. “You have no idea what someone's bringing to their day. Just be aware of that. Because it's so easy to expect people to perform or lead in a certain way, and you don't know what their day was like, how they got there. Whatever the case may be, you will never know.”

As a scientist, Patty learned an important life skill: caring for others means separating problems from people. Perhaps the issue lies in the high expectations for financial growth or an underperforming business unit. She likes to take the emotion out of the problem, distill it down to identify its root causes, and take care of the people so she doesn't “lose the human aspects of the people or the team.” Then she asks, “What's the next reasonable action [we can take together]?”

Leading boldly means seizing opportunities, challenging assumptions, and having difficult conversations. Patty was newly assigned a project that was already losing money, and she couldn't turn it around overnight. Tempers were running high. The client's team believed it was acceptable to yell and scream at her team. Taking a significant risk that the client might fire her company, she and her team walked out of the meeting to send a strong message: “We don't accept this behavior.”

Instead of terminating her contract, a senior leader from the client called to apologize and discuss the new rules of engagement. Over informal bagged lunches, the teams got to know each other and reset the expectations for how her team should be treated going forward.

“What I thought was important to the client that cost us a lot of money,” she says, “wasn't important to them. Then, why were we doing that? And so...we put everything on the board. What are the assumptions we're making? What do we think is important? Why do we think that? What proof do we have?”

Patty has found that “Leaders are most effective when they ask the best questions, not when they have the answers, and also when they listen to the answers and remain open and honest with who they are.”

“Making a positive impact does not need to be grandiose,” Patty says. “I bake cookies for the homeless. I love to bake, and if someone gets a really good chocolate chip cookie, I hope it puts a smile on their face and makes them feel like somebody's thinking about them. Just smiling at somebody can have a positive ripple effect.”

On a more grandiose level, Patty is a mentor and serves on several advisory boards for start-ups.

With a schedule that might sound exhausting to most people, Patty knows she must take care of her own engine first. She exercises fiercely and boldly and with high impact.

“I enjoy being outside and especially running. [This is] my meditation, my relaxation. I find my best thoughts then, and I say to myself, ‘If I can run - if I can do this physically, I can do this at work.’ And that's mentally and physically how I keep it together.”

“I don't spend a lot of time looking in the rearview mirror,” she says. “I do for learning, but I look out the windshield because it's a lot bigger.”

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