Leading with compassion and kindness - Pinky Lilani

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SPEAKERS

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Thank you so much for inviting me to this. I'm always hugely honoured and feel privileged when people asked me to speak. And I'm very excited because it's always wonderful to new people and share our journey. So I'm going to be telling you a little bit about my story. And I've called it Coriander, Kindness, and Courage, and I'll go through all my lessons, and where I come and what I've learned and what I love to share so that people can hopefully be inspired. Let's start with saying, it's wonderful in life that we have a mantra, we have something we believe in. I have a mantra, and my mantra is, you have not lived a perfect day, unless you've done something for someone who can never repay you. And the great thing about that, it's about kindness. And everyone can be kind. You don't need to be well educated, you don't need to be rich. But everyone has the asset they need to be a kind person. And so for me, also, it says if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together. And that's why I really believe in that. And you can see that in the picture that I have up there - there are many people have been part of my journey and I'm just honoured to have them. I actually came to England hundreds of years ago when I met my husband and married him in two weeks in India, and he had done no due diligence whatsoever. He thought he got a good wife who could cook. I'd never been inside the kitchen because we had one of the best chefs in Calcutta. So I came to England not knowing how to cook, not knowing my husband, and having no aspirations to work. But it's been a very interesting journey since then. And I share it because I always feel, if I can do all this, so can anybody. So I think what's really important is to be the best version of yourself. And I love the fact that you're dealing now with equity, with inclusion, with diversity, because we need to take all that on board to make a difference. And I'm very lucky, I think what helps us most is other people. So as much as we know, I know I couldn't do anything if it weren't for other people. So I set up, you know, after I came here, everybody told me I learned to cook because I love having people over! Anybody who was in town, I'd tell them "come and have lunch with me." I went back to India every year and our cook taught me how to cook. And my first job was teaching adults cookery, where somebody said, "could you teach adults if we pay you Â£11 an hour?" And I said, "yes, I will!" I didn't have a clue what I was doing but I was teaching cookery to adults, one day a week. And then everybody told me write a book. So I wrote a cookery book, self-published it, and when I got all these books, and tried to sell them,

nobody really wanted to buy them. They said, "are you a celebrity? are you on television?", and when I said no, none other than bookstores wanted one. Well, you have to be creative and innovative all the time. So I came up with this idea that I can take my electric wok and make one of the recipes, spicy Bombay potatoes, in five minutes. So I asked one of the shops if I could come and bring my wok. And I think he felt really sorry for me and he said, "yes, we'll serve some wine as well." And I took the wok and it turned out to be a huge success. So I started travelling around England, in my car with my books and my spice box, just demonstrating the wok, and the wok still accompanies me on my journey so many years down the line. Whenever I give a talk on leadership, be it at Oxford, Cambridge, at London Business School, the Bank of England, at about 100 corporates, I talk on leadership, and I always take my wok and plug it in and make spicy Bombay potatoes in five minutes. So it really is something that I really believe in passionately. That's another tip for all of you: be passionate and really believe in what you do. Be the best version of yourself. I think that's what gives us all credibility; don't let that go. So one of my first things was to set up the Asian Women of Achievement awards, it's been mentioned, in 1999. And we've grown in 25 years. We met the most amazing people. We had only Insectus to start with, now we have 12. And I went on in 2006, then, to set up the Women of the Future Awards, which is for women under 35 in the UK. One of our first winners, in the second year I think, was Liv Garfield, who was amazing, and very shortly after that, she became the youngest CEO of a 300 company, but she's still the youngest CEO. And so we've had all kinds of people on the journey. And the main thing that I think is important for me is to meet new people, to always be curious, to be courageous, and to ask -because the only thing you get for in life without asking is an infectious disease, everything else you have to ask for. So that's really, really important. And of course, we got amazing corporate support. As you will see on my presentation, we've got everybody from Coca Cola, we've had Tescos, Burberry, the FTC, NBC, so many amazing people with us on the journey. But I refused to just stop at awards and I started to set up many more programmes. And you'll see that on my screen. Also, we set up the Network, the Ambassador's Programme, the Summit, and then we went to Southeast Asia in 2016. I knew the British High Commissioner in Malaysia and took a delegation and when we were there, everybody said, "well, why don't you bring your award to Southeast Asia?" And I thought, that'd be amazing. I have to find sponsors. But we did! In 2018, we had the women and future awards in Southeast Asia. And so therefore, that really helped on the journey, so we come to Southeast Asia to 11 countries where we actually have acknowledged amazing, amazing people, and you will see from the screen there. And what's important for me at the height of everything I do is kindness. So we had the first Kindness in Leadership: 15 leading lights here in 2018. And we opened the London Stock Market on World Kindness Day, which November 30th, with this list. And the FT publishes the list, and we've taken that to Asia, so we would love you all to nominate people if you know anybody, men and women of any age, for the Kindness List. A year ago, Jimmy Choo was on the list in Asia, which was amazing, as he's so inspiring. And here we had Juergen Klopp, the head of the Liverpool Football Club, and that gentleman was on our list. And then of course, it's always about starting new things, so as the third year that we set up the Women of the Future 50 Rising Stars in ESG, it's our first global programme and we brought together people from around the world who are under 35. And what you find really inspiring is when the FT, last year had the list in the FT, they hosted a lunch for us. We'd written to all the people on the list and said, we're having this lunch, you're invited if you would like to come. And ten of them flew from around the world to be with us at their own expense. I think that we will need - we need to connect with people everywhere to be part of our journey. In fact, at anything, stand on the shoulders of giants, and the giants are at every level. Now we've got so many programmes. I think the power of the network is so important. We are so lucky that Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Edinburgh became our patron in 2018. And there we have sitting next to her, Her Royal Highness Princess Badiya from Jordan. That Kindness List, wherever I can, I take people

in, and that is actually the Speaker of the House, who asked me to bring people. We're so lucky. The year that King Charles, well Prince Charles then, married Camilla, he actually came to our awards, and he's come twice. And then we have, I love my favourite author in the world, you all must read if you haven't, is Elif Shafak. She's a Turkish writer. And there's a picture of her. She wrote 14 Rules of Love. And there's a picture of everyone at the Stock Exchange so that we get people everywhere. And I just love the fact that we can take them with us on the journey. But I've come up with something I'd like to share with you. And that is, what helps people to succeed. And I call it the Seven Qs of Success. So IQ is very important. We can't influence that. EQ we all know about. I think AQ is so important - it's an attitude quotient. You know, we love people with the right attitude. MQ - think about meaning and what you do, meaning quotient is important. And CQ. I used to call that communication quotient. But I've changed that now to curiosity and courage. I'm still, even at my age, always curious. So you may wonder in what way I learn? Every single day when I'm on the train or bus going into London, I will talk to people on the train and bus and invite them to my house, learn about what they do, ask them questions, and everybody said, "nobody ever does that,", but I like doing it - do things you like doing. The likability quotient is very important. Because when you think about the people you like, we like people who are warm, who are interested, who are always present. So the likability quotient is really important. I remember this lovely story of Winston Churchill's mother going out with two people who were standing to be prime ministers here. And when she went out with one of them for dinner, she came back saying, "when I was with him, I came back thinking he was the cleverest man in the world." When she went out with the other person, also who was aiming to be Prime Minister, she came back and said, "I felt when I went out for dinner with him, I felt that I was the cleverest woman in the world." So we like people who value us. And the last thing is the kindness quotient. I mean, that is absolutely paramount, as I said earlier. So what do we need? What is the recipe for success? It's hard work and passion, important to dream. Think about things you dream of, never be embarrassed by them. Curiosity, failure - I've failed so many times, it is unbelievable how many failures I have had and it's important to have self belief in what you do. The seven Qs - leave your signature, let people know what you really are. And the strength of weak ties, sometimes our weak ties that help us on the journey. Collaboration and networks are very important, and kindness. And the picture there is for me. One of the things when I started cooking, I was inviting, and some big corporates would send their team in for a day of leadership and learning to cook in my kitchen. And there's that picture. And so I actually just invite people I hardly know and mix them up with each other and give them food. You know, I say, if I could see further, it's because I stand on the shoulders of giants, and we've been so lucky. Theresa May has come to our event. There's Jimmy Choo there with two British High Commissioners. I was very lucky to meet Michelle Obama and a Deputy Lieutenant and one of the duties I had two years ago was to see Prince William. And that's me with Miriam Clegg, who, again, is an amazing, amazing woman who's inspired me - her husband was deputy prime minister, Sir Nick Clegg, when I met him first. So those are people that have been influenced me. And the final one I'd like to say, before I move on, are a couple of things is, if you can dream it, you can do it. You can do that on my next slide. So really, the importance of dreams are so important. And you know, you never know where you're going to be, but never have huge expectations, just go along with the hope things will work out. And the three pictures are, obviously, we work with young girls on this programme. I took a lot of women to Downing Street, that's them up there. And that's at Buckingham Palace where we have over the years taken young women, giving them that opportunity. And the next slide will show you have one ends up in strange places. So that was in the Mail Online. I was invited to the Liverpool Football Club, because we agreed to work with them. The day I went there, I'd never been a football club to watch a match, I had gone with my son. And somebody WhatsApped me and said,"why are you Liverpool?" And I said, "how do you know I'm at Liverpool?" He said, "well, I can see you on TV!" "Why am I on television?" They

said, "you're sitting with Sadiq Khan, behind him!" And so that picture appeared and went everywhere. So you just never know where you're going to be. The next thing they said about him is, "why is he there, he shouldn't really be there." So I was glad I was not part of that journey! I'd like to end by saying that kindness is never forgotten. So one little story to end with is that when I first came to England, about 10 years later, I was taking some of my clients to eat different kinds of food. And I took this lady who was looking after their food development, and I took her to a restaurant, which is a Burmese restaurant. A small restaurant. And this man came round, and it was his restaurant. He said, "where are you from?". I said, "I'm from Calcutta." He said, "I'm alive today because of a man in Calcutta. When I escaped during the war and came to Calcutta, I was going to be killed. And this man saved so many of us. And he's from Calcutta, and he was an Ismaili. I said, "I am an Ismaili, maybe I know who he is." And he said his name was Khan Barva Dasani. And they said, "that's my grandfather." So 60 years later, 70 years later, he still hadn't been forgotten. So kindness is something that people never forget. So I always say, the true meaning of life is to plant trees, and whose shade you don't expect to sit. So I've been to all these places that I never expected to go to and I've lived to tell the tale, so if I can do it, anyone can. But there's one story I love, if we have time, very quickly, because it's so important to me. I had my two sons and one of them, 15 years ago, 14 years ago, said, "Mum, I want to do my MBA and I want to go to Oxford." And like any Indian mother, I said, "oh, you must go to Oxford." So he said he was going to look around the Business School and I said, "I'll come with you." And so while he was around, I went inside the office and said, "what do you guys do for women?" And they looked at this middle aged Indian woman and said, "what do you do?" So I told him what I did. He got in and I was so happy. And I got a call from them to say, would I be the keynote speaker on the first day of term to the women's alumni. So I told him, "I'm speaking on the first day of your term, don't tell any of the women because if I make mess, nobody will date you." I obviously got it right, because he actually married one of them. And she's an amazing Chinese American Girl. So we all live in hope, and hopefully all of us succeed in some way. Thank you so much for asking me today. I'm delighted to be here. You know, follow your dreams. Do what you really believe in, but very important is having great people in your life, you know, the connections you have, the people you move around with. That's where I get the answers. Sometimes I don't know the answers and there are people at every level who give me the answer. So be curious, be courageous, be kind. And never give up. Don't be daunted by failures and things not working, and going off, because you never know who's going to help you on the journey. So that's where inclusion goes, in the most irrelevant people sometimes. And they're the ones who will help you. And always, always go out and help somebody else. I keep opening doors and people keep opening doors for me. There are always people who will be negative, but I feel they pay a price themselves. So you know, when someone tells me, you say, somebody who is very good, they're good, they haven't been good, and yet they've got away with it. And I always say it's not over till the fat lady sings. So there's always karma, all the people who behave in a way which isn't good, it catches up with them, you know, at some stage. So I think you will find those but try to look at it in a way that works for you. Very often, when I've thought something would work really well, and somebody would be very positive, they haven't. But then I always find somebody else. Every every book has two sides to it. So you can always turn to the next page and find someone else who will support you and follow you. And that's what's helped me most. And there are so many people who I would think would never have helped me but have opened so many doors, and some of them are really very diverse. I love the fact that I take everybody in - it doesn't matter their colour. I'm a Muslim and I know I always say, you know, living in the UK, I can tick all the boxes among Muslim. I'm an ethnic minority. I'm an older person, I'm a woman and I'm disabled. And you may wonder in what way I'm disabled, but about 20 years ago, I developed a very serious hearing problem, so I'm profoundly deaf. But I wear two very powerful hearing aids. But I tell people that up front, because sometimes when they asked me a question, I give a totally

doolally answer, like the time when someone said "how long did it take you to make a curry?" and I heard "how long have you been in the country?" So I said "42 years." He said,"I'm not coming to your house for dinner!" So I have my weaknesses and challenges too, but don't let that hold you back. Keep going. And also find other people who may not be in your organisation who have a similar situation or fairly similar. Talk to them - I always find that helps, you know? There are always people in the world and you have to knock sometimes at many doors and you will find somebody else who you can relate to, who you can trust, who will give you that belief that let me carry on let me not give up just because my organisation isn't the way somebody else's is. So it's really making sure you have that amazing network, as I say, of people in your life.