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Spotlight #8: Shira Miller

1 COMMENT

Shira is a powerful example of a woman who embodies the **Lift & Be Uplifted** mission through her efforts to help people claim the life they deserve by blending her corporate career with a purpose-driven life. In this Spotlight post, she reveals learning to own her voice when expressing challenging opinions to leading effectively in male-dominated environments, in addition to being authentic in the workplace, and choosing to be her best advocate.

Shira is an active writer, speaker, and coach for those struggling with self-doubt, in addition to paving the way for women in the professional world by serving as the Chief Communications Officer of a \$2 billion supply chain management company. A few of her personal transformations include maintaining a 50-pound weight loss over 25 years, transitioning from financial upheaval to prosperity, overcoming health challenges and embracing wellness and finding lasting love post-divorce. Shira's stories have been recognized in *Shape*, *Health*, *For Women*, *Quick & Simple*, the *Atlanta Journal - Constitution*, *Emory Magazine*, bestselling business book *The Power of Intuition* and *Trust Your Gut: How the Power of Intuition Can Grow Your Business*.

In one of her TedX Talks, she speaks about how constantly over-apologizing or making self-deprecating comments to hide your awesomeness, diminishes the value of your ideas and accomplishments in every part of your life. I see this all the time in my friend groups, but especially in the workplace. I have even been a victim of a "stop the apology speak," myself! After you read through her Spotlight, check out one of her TedX Talks by clicking the button below.

"STOP THE APOLOGY SPEAK" | SHIRA'S TEDX TALK

1. Rarely is someone's journey linear. Can you explain what you wanted to be when you grew up, and how your career landed where you are right now?

When I was a kid, I dreamt about being a space engineer. To my eight-year-old self, that meant designing spaceships and then being the astronaut taking them into outer space - you know, the final frontier. That dream evaporated when it became apparent math was not my friend during middle school. Used to compete in math at high school and college and got lots of pressure to become a lawyer, but it didn't appeal to me. But then I landed out into a part-time job with the NBC Southeastern News Bureau while still attending Emory University, which sparked my interest in working in communications. Spent the next decade doing corporate public relations before starting my own boutique agency, Shira Miller Communications. Built it up with a great team working on major consumer brands but when the Great Recession struck in 2009, it killed my business along with 200,000 others across the U.S. The next few years were really hard, as I detail in answering your question #3. But proving that old adage (and excellent Kelly Clarkson song) "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger" is

learned a lot about myself. When I discovered how deep my interest ran in helping others reach their full potential, it prompted me to become a Certified Professional Co-Active Coach. Then in 2014, I brought all of my interests in communications, culture and people development together and returned to Corporate America. I work as the Chief Communications Officer of National DCP, the \$2 billion supply chain management corporation serving the franchisees of Dunkin' Donuts. It is a great organization and I am glad to be there.

2. Which single word do you most identify with?

Gratitude. Just saying it makes me smile. Being grateful for the positive developments, people and experiences in my life has helped me overcome so many challenges and continues to help me maintain a balanced perspective each day. I've also found that gratitude is something you can learn and created a complimentary Gratitude Fuel Exercise that anyone can download from my website at <https://shiramiller.com/>



3. After watching your TedX Talk, I learned that you overcame a multitude of barriers in your life. What was your biggest barrier you experienced as a woman in your career?

There have been a number of barriers along the way, from learning how to "own my voice" when expressing challenging opinions to leading effectively in male-dominated environments. But the biggest barrier was for myself after my business failed during the Great Recession. I had to fire good people. I racked up over a hundred grand in business debt and was on the hook for another \$60,000 for an office lease with no escape clause. I handled the entire client workload - by myself - for the next four years to pay it off. That stress did a nasty thing on me. When I could finally breathe again in 2013, I was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease. It was an ugly time, but once I started forgiving myself, after much coaching, reflection and journaling, it opened up a whole new world of possibilities. I'm a lot happier now with my multi-hyphenate career as a corporate executive, a certified professional coactive coach and writing about well-being.

4. What advice would you give other women to determine if they are "on the right path" in their professional life? What does being "on the right path" mean to you?

The most important thing you can do is to trust your gut. Ultimately, it doesn't matter what your professors, mentors or conventional wisdom says about your career - you are the only person who knows what is right for you. I define the right path as that which resonates with your mind, body and spirit. For example, let's say you are at a career crossroads, trying to decide between two new job opportunities. Your brain has urged you to create a pro and con list about each role. On paper, one job clearly looks better than the other - great compensation package, the company has a more recognizable brand that would impress friends, and free lunches are served in the employee cafeteria. However just thinking about that job makes your stomach hurt and causes a spike of anxiety. The other role offers slightly less money with a smaller organization, but you smile when considering it, and your whole being feels lighter. That is your gut (intuition) giving you clues about which path is in your best interests. Hey, I practice what I preach. On my birthday in 2014, I was offered two jobs - one with a billion company that acted like a start-up, which would require lots of work, and the other with a huge corpora

less than two miles from home where I'd be part of a larger team. My inner voice knew the first job was harder, but so much more interesting and exciting than the other "cushy" job. So, I took it. That proved absolutely the right move.



5. You are a loyal follower of pop-culture! Who is your favorite female celebrity/public figure to keep up with?

It's so hard to pick just one! I'm a big fan of JK Rowling, Taylor Swift, Michelle Obama and Jennifer Lopez. But one person I enjoy keeping up with the most on social is Jennifer Garner. I always liked her as an actress and adore how much she shares of her authentic self – whether it is embracing goofy Halloween costumes, loving kids, helping worthy causes and so much more. Hanging out with her would be a blast.

6. How do you define what it means to be a woman?

For me, being a woman means empowerment. We can be incredibly resilient and wise. Our ability to form meaningful relationships in our personal and professional lives literally transforms the world – improving and redefining what's possible, creating more successful business outcomes and raising the next generation. I'm grateful for the progress that women have made in the workforce since taking my first corporate job 30 years ago – back in the days when fax machines were cutting edge technology – it is frustrating that females overall are still struggling for equal pay, recognition and compensation. According to [Women In the Workplace 2019](#), the report done by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.org, more women have entered senior leadership positions but gender parity remains out of reach for most, especially women of color.

7. How can we best encourage young women to advocate for themselves in the workplace and to not be afraid to speak up?

The early part of your career is really critical, as that is where leadership and compensation gaps typically form. Giving yourself permission to be your own best advocate is an excellent place to start. Speaking up is about building your courage muscles and the more you do it, the easier it will become. Pay close attention to your workplace environment and notice who is effectively "heard" and how they communicate. Whether she is a worker or a leader in another area, consider expressing your admiration and asking her for advice/mentors. You will learn to speak up. A note of caution here too; don't talk just for the sake of hearing your own voice or be super assertive in a culture that values nuanced behavior or vice versa. Be thoughtful and confident in how you express your words in the manner that will be most effective in your culture. Finally, be true to yourself. Be outgoing and appreciate a good laugh. So throughout my career, I've often used humor to speak up and in tense situations, which works because it is part of my core identity.



8. As the Chief Communications Officer of a large corporation, what do you think is the most effective leadership trait you've utilized to lead your team to success?

The most effective leadership trait I've used to lead my team to success is the ability to see possibilities in people as well as situations. In spotting opportunities, even in the midst of crisis situations, I see how my team can rise to the occasion with the right level of support, encouragement and an environment where difficult conversations can be productive. Plus, I walk my talk. While strategy is my favorite place to hang out at throughout my career, I'm happy to roll-up my sleeves and do what it takes to get things done. Well-being is a key priority for me and I ensure my team has the time and flexibility to create a fulfilling work-life blend for themselves.

9. You have had a list of accomplishments in both your personal and professional life! What one thing are you most proud of?

I am most proud of my ability to get unstuck, even when the odds are against me. My personal transformations include maintaining a healthy 50-pound weight loss for over 25 years; transitioning from financial upheaval to prosperity; overcoming health challenges and embracing wellness; finding lasting love post-divorce (my husband Justin is the coolest person I know); and blending a corporate career with a purpose-driven life. Now I'm trying to help others do the same through the articles I contribute to [Thrive Global](#), Arianna Huffington's online community that helps people unlock their greatest potential and the [book project](#) that I'm currently working on to help people get unstuck and unleash their inner rock star.

10. What is your "mantra," or personal "motto" that keeps you motivated and focused?

The most important relationship in your life is the one you have with yourself.

One of my favorite quotes reinforcing that comes from *Sex and the City*, which I was a total fan girl over back in my day. During Carrie Bradshaw's final voice-over at the end of the series finale, her character said: "The most exciting, challenging, and significant relationship of all is the one you have with yourself. And if you can't find someone to love the you that you love, well, that's just fabulous."



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AUNT HARRIET

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The article was great and I am very proud of my beautiful, very bright niece!

RE

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