

Women Success Stories



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From Being Championed to Championing Others: The Leadership Legacy I'm Committed To.

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Abstract:

Women rarely rise alone, they rise when someone champions them before they feel fully ready. In this reflective leadership essay, Heidi Richards Mooney explores the often-unseen act of championing and how it shaped her own leadership journey. Through a personal story of being called forward by Chamber Executive Director Dolores Canizales,

she illustrates the profound difference between mentorship and championing, and how being publicly advocated for can alter life trajectories. As a publisher and community leader, Heidi now champions other women through visibility, opportunity, and access ... a legacy she views as essential to 21st-century leadership.

My story:

From Being Championed to Championing Others: The Leadership Legacy I'm Committed To

There's a quiet truth about leadership that rarely makes it into business books or keynote slides: most of us didn't arrive where we are because we were the loudest, the smartest, or the most prepared...we arrived because someone championed us before we felt fully ready.

I know that truth intimately. I've spent my life surrounded by people who saw something in me, named it out loud, and made space for me to grow into it. They didn't just cheer me on from the sidelines, they opened doors, recommended me, invited me into rooms, trusted me with responsibility, and believed I would rise to the occasion. And I did, not because I moved alone, but because I was moved forward.

That experience didn't just shape my career. It shaped my leadership philosophy. It taught me that leadership isn't solely about what we achieve, it's about who we **elevate** and **champion** along the way. And that understanding has guided every chapter of my life since.

The Difference Between Mentoring and Championing

We often talk about mentorship as a cornerstone of women's leadership, and it is. Mentorship offers guidance, wisdom, and advice. But championing is something different. Championing uses **reputation**, **access**, and **visibility** to create opportunities that may not otherwise exist.

Where mentoring says, "I'll help you grow," championing says, "I'll help others see you."

And once you've experienced that, you never forget it.

When Someone Championing You Changes Everything

In my case, that person was **Dolores Canizales**, then the Executive Director of our local Chamber. At the time, I was attending Chamber meetings but staying safely in the background...observing, listening, contributing when asked, but certainly not seeking the spotlight. I was comfortable being invisible.

Dolores was not comfortable letting me stay that way.

She wouldn't let me hide behind my seat or quietly slip out after events. She called me out, kindly, warmly, by asking what I thought, by introducing me to people she believed I should know, and by nudging me to take up more space than I naturally would have. She saw capability and potential long before I was ready to claim it.

And then she did something that changed the direction of my leadership journey: she invited me to serve on the Chamber's Board of Directors.

That was not mentorship, that was **championing**. She didn't just advise me privately; she **publicly vouched** for me. She used her voice, her influence, and her reputation to open a door I would not have opened on my own.

Sitting on that board led to opportunities I never would have anticipated, including ultimately serving as Chamber President. But more importantly, it taught me what happens when someone refuses to let you shrink, and instead creates room for you to expand.

That experience planted the seed for the kind of leader I wanted to become, one who does for others what Dolores did for me.

A Life Defined by Being Championed and Then Championing Others

Looking back across my career... from community leadership roles, to magazine publishing, to entrepreneurial ventures, to serving on boards, to building platforms for women — a clear pattern emerges: whenever I took a leap, someone had quietly (or not so quietly) championed me first.

That lineage of support, from women and men who spoke my name in rooms I wasn't yet in, created a responsibility I don't take lightly. So much so that championing others has, in many ways, become my **life's work**.

It's why I built platforms designed to increase visibility for women. It's why I create space for women's stories, achievements, expertise, and leadership. It's why I say yes to nominating women for awards, featuring them, publishing them, highlighting them, and recommending them. It's why I look for women who are ready for opportunities they don't yet see in themselves.

Because championing is how we continue the lineage. It's how we disrupt gatekeeping. It's how we change the face of leadership.

Why Championing Matters in the 21st Century

We are living in a time when women have greater access to information than ever before and yet, access to *opportunity* remains uneven.

Talent is abundant. Potential is abundant. But visibility, advocacy, and invitation are still scarce.

Championing fills that gap.

Championing says:

- "I know your work."
- "I believe in you."
- "You belong in that room."
- "Let me tell others why."

And for many women, being championed is the difference between staying hidden and becoming seen.

In a century defined by innovation, collaboration, and shared leadership, championing is not optional — it is the currency of progress.

Legacy as a Leadership Choice

As I consider the legacy I want to leave, I'm not interested in building monuments — I'm interested in building momentum.

Monuments celebrate the leader. Momentum elevates the community.

My legacy, the one I'm consciously crafting and living, is to champion others the way I was championed. To use whatever platforms, relationships, and influence I have to make sure more women are **seen, heard, trusted, and invited**.

Because leadership is not only measured by what we build for ourselves, but by what we make possible for others.

A Leader's Call to Action: Champion Someone

If you're reading this, you likely already mentor, support, or encourage others. But here's my invitation:

Champion someone.

Not just by offering advice, but by:

- recommending them,
- nominating them,
- introducing them,
- publishing them,
- collaborating with them,
- amplifying them,
- and trusting them with opportunity.

Ask yourself:

- Who has championed me?
- Who could I champion today?
- Whose talent deserves a wider audience?
- Whose name can I speak in a room they aren't in yet?

Because being championed is a gift, but championing others is a choice. It's how we

build a world where women don't just succeed,
we rise together.

Biography:

Heidi Richards Mooney is the Publisher of WE Magazine for Women and Founder of Women in Ecommerce. A longtime community leader and former Chamber President, Heidi has dedicated her career to championing women's visibility, storytelling, and economic empowerment. Through publishing, platforms, and advocacy, she creates pathways for women to be seen and succeed. You can learn more about Heidi at HeidiRichards.com and connect with her on LinkedIn

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