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**Women's Leadership Summit 2024 Recap**
2024 Women’s Leadership Summit

The third annual Women’s Leadership Summit, hosted and founded by Dr. Shirley J. Everett, senior associate vice provost for Residential & Dining Enterprises (R&DE) and senior advisor to the provost on equity and inclusion, was held on March 5, 2024. This event was created to inspire and educate established and emerging leaders in the Stanford community and beyond to achieve excellence in their personal and professional journeys. The tone for the day’s program was set by the summit’s enduring theme: “Discover Your Potential. Ignite Your Power. Cultivate Your Excellence.”

Nearly 300 people from across the Stanford community attended the conference, which featured trend-setting keynote speakers, expert panels and breakout sessions on topics ranging from enriching leadership capabilities and leading with courage to using artificial intelligence and negotiating successfully.

A Passion to Motivate, Educate, Lift and Affirm

Dr. Everett opened the day asking attendees to think about how their lives have been of value to them and what they want to do next, and to then take who they are and what they bring and be of value to others. She encouraged the participants to engage, learn and then take insights from the summit back to their organizations and spread the love.

“One of the highest callings of a leader is to coach, to mentor and to develop others,” she said. “The vision for this summit was really born out of my passion to motivate, educate, lift and affirm women.” Noting that there were also plenty of men in attendance, Everett said she wants to make sure they are lifted and affirmed as well. During women’s history month, she added, “We always want to pay homage to the
Dr. Everett shared the hope that “one day there will be no need to say we have a women’s leadership summit, that it’s just a leadership summit. But until we start making the same amount of money, getting the same prestige and stop having to say, ‘she’s the first woman’... we are going to continue to move forward.”

Citing a McKinsey & Co. survey, Everett noted that there are signs of progress. The survey revealed that, since 2015, the percentage of women in the C-suite has grown from 17% to 28%. But women of color lag far behind. The survey also found that the greatest barrier for women is not the “glass ceiling” but the “broken rung.” This refers to the critical step for women going from individual contributors to managers. She inspired the audience to mentor, sponsor and develop women, especially in making that first, critical step.

She spoke about her foundation as a child for dreaming big and climbing mountains. “I was blessed to have two incredible parents. They mean so much to me,” said Everett. They created “a foundation for a young black girl who grew up in Chicago. They knew that at some point in my life I would meet great challenges – whether it was racism or sexism. They taught me and my eight siblings, that whatever we wanted to do, to dream big and then dream bigger. I knew then I could make a mistake, learn from it and grow. I knew then I could then climb mountains. In all of our lives, we’re going to have mountains. Make sure if you get a mountain, and we all do, learn how to scale it, go around it, go through it, go over it, as long as you get to the other side. Because when you get there, there’s going to be another mountain. Let’s continue to navigate the mountains in our lives, together.”
Embrace the Power of You

In her keynote address, Tricia Montalvo Timm—a board director, venture investor, speaker and best-selling author—shared her journey to embracing her true self, owning her identity, and achieving success and fulfillment in her life and career.

Montalvo Timm, a first-generation Latina who rose through the ranks of Silicon Valley, advising high-tech companies big and small, was the daughter of immigrants from El Salvador and Ecuador who wanted the American dream. When she was young, the family moved out of Los Angeles to the suburbs.

As a Latina girl in a predominately white area, Montalvo Timm wanted to belong and felt pressure to assimilate. To fit in she only spoke English, changed her diet, and softened her voice.

“Thought I was succeeding at being American, but I started to lose my sense of self,” Montalvo Timm shared. “Soon I found myself belonging nowhere.”

This desire to fit in continued as she began her career at a large national corporate law firm. “The law firm partners were made up of mostly older white men,” said Montalvo Timm. “I quickly realized that their lives and my life were completely different. At the time there were very few women in leadership and none who were women of color.”

As a first generation professional, she had no family, friends, or a network to show her the ropes. She started to do the things corporate lawyers were “supposed to do.” She bought golf clubs and took lessons, spent an hour every day straightening her and mastered the skill of looking like she belonged in that room, but she didn’t feel like she belonged in that room.

“Why did I not feel comfortable in this new corporate space, that I spent my whole life training for?” said Montalvo Timm. “As I progressed though my career, I kept asking that same question. Where do I belong?”

Montalvo Timm shared that hiding who you are or changing anything about yourself will eventually take its toll, leading to imposter syndrome, anxiety, depression and
burnout. She decided that after decades of hiding it was time to embrace her authentic self.

She shared tools to help attendees on their journey: “Surround yourself with people that accept you just as you are. Stop worrying about those who don’t get you. Lean on mentors and sponsors to remind you of what you bring to an organization and to provide you with the road map to succeed in both life and career. Join organizations and communities where your lived experience is celebrated and not just tolerated.”

The Challenges and Surprising Opportunities When Women Negotiate

Professor Margaret Neale gave a masterclass on negotiating. Attendees were given insights into negotiation, and specifically the dynamics of women negotiating.

Neale showed attendees that the common view of negotiation as battle creates a negative frame through which negotiators assess their counterparts’ behavioral intentions, setting the tone for the interaction and cueing counterparts to prepare for battle, leading to escalating conflict where winning becomes more important than the quality of what is won.

She challenged attendees to reframe their perspective on negotiation as collaborative problem solving, sharing that negotiations are interdependent, where both negotiators must voluntarily agree to an outcome. Rather than winning as the goal, negotiators should create solutions where they are better off than the status quo and their counterpart may be better off, but certainly not worse off than the status quo.

Neale also shared that women who ask for what they want are perceived as more greedy or not nice, compared to their male counterparts. She said that women need to learn to ask differently because there is not a level playing field, and women are burdened with society’s view that a woman’s role it to make people feel good.

She pointed to research that illuminates a way women can ask that will actually improve outcomes, by pairing their asks, their confidence and their demands with a communal concern for the other.
“What does that mean?” Neale asked. “The problem-solving approach. ‘My solution, that I’m proposing, is a solution for a problem you have. And how can you think of me as greedy, difficult and demanding when I’m helping you solve a problem of yours?’”

Neale said when it’s no longer a fight, but problem solving, it changes the conversation. When you start problem solving it becomes a lot easier to ask for what you want. People want to answer yes to your requests, they want to help. If you don’t ask for what you want, how will other people know what you want?

**Navigating the Artificial Intelligence Frontier:**
**Understanding AI and Revealing Its Potential for Bias**

A timely artificial intelligence panel discussion, moderated by Paul Robles, chief information officer for R&DE, focused on the benefits, risks and complexities of AI.

Summit attendees gained new perspective and insight on AI, and left with cautious, optimistic takeaways and advice on how to approach AI. Kristen Harris, Chief Operation Officer and Co-Creator at Portfolio Creative, shared her view of AI as a tool—a really helpful assistant—that can be used to create efficiencies in hiring and to enhance our work, but a tool we need to review, edit and fact check.

Associate Support Analyst at Giant Eagle Caitlin Price’s take on AI was that it does not create anything new It is only as strong as what we put into it, it is not capable of human storytelling, and it lacks the ability to exercise humanity, intuition, and empathy. That said, AI can serve as an awesome copilot.

With extensive expertise in security, Amy Steagall, Chief Information Security Officer at Stanford University, pointed to privacy considerations, the weaponization of AI tools, and the need to pay attention to not only content, but the data and information AI bots may collect from your personal files and calendars.

Ashley Thompson, J.D. Candidate, 2024, at the Stanford Law School, shared her legal perspective on AI, highlighting concerns over bias in outputs, privacy, whether generated content is accurate and factual, intellectual property protections, the stifling of creativity, and liability for harms.
Leading With Courage: Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Through Troubled Waters

Moderated by Dr. Everett, a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) panel focused on the challenges faced in today’s polarized society. Panelists shared their lived experiences in DEI and ways to continue this important work.

Inspiring summit attendees with the story of her mother’s incredible journey from Scotland to America at the age of 17, Deborah Cullinan, Vice President for the Arts at Stanford University, said it allowed her to be here and shaped her passion for the arts. She offered a new perspective on art and the process of creation as an act of courageous hope, the hope for a better world for ourselves, our families and communities, a world that can be what we want it to be by not limiting ourselves.

Patrick Dunkley, Vice Provost for Institutional Equity, Access and Community at Stanford University shared that his formative experiences in college and law school, where there was a lack of diversity, had a big impact and made him be passionate about creating a world where his daughters, and Stanford students, can live a life where they are valued as young women and for who they are, and where they can grow and become the person they are meant to be without barriers. He stressed the importance of being anchored, having principles and values, and standing up to whatever faces us and presents challenges.

“We are in troubled waters. We are in the boat, we are rowing, and we will get there together,” he said.

A passionate advocate for equity in medicine and access to care, Dr. Joyce Sackey, Chief Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Officer for Stanford Medicine, shared her personal experiences as a young girl growing up in Ghana where she saw inequity in medicine first-hand. She challenged summit attendees to reorient how they see the issue of equity, not as a zero-sum game, but to tackle the disparities with imagination, to address historical wrongs, and find a path forward towards justice through a lens of empathy.
Dr. Ayodele Thomas, Associate Vice President, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging for Stanford University Human Resources, talked about her family’s legacy of being in the United States for more than 200 years and how one side bought themselves out of slavery and the other escaped and fought in the civil war. She said that this legacy has allowed her to inhabit the spaces she now inhabits. She was the first black woman to get a PhD in electrical engineering at Stanford (the only one in her class of 125), making her a trailblazer and role model, allowing future generation of students to not have to face the same challenges she did.

**Leading in Uncertain Times**

Jan Barker Alexander, Vice President & Dean of Students at Pitzer College, led an engaging panel about embarking on a journey of leadership evolution, where the panelists talked about leading, being led and driving change in today’s unpredictable landscape.

Though American society currently presents a lot of uncertainty, the unpredictable landscape the panel focus on was the unpredictable landscape at work. “We do not have to go outside of work to find uncertainty,” said Barker Alexander. “It’s always about morphing changing and evolving. As women we know we have to do that in order to be competitive where we are.” She stressed the importance of a supporting community. “Who is your board of trustees? The people that are going to push you, the people that are going to question you, the people that are going to love on you.”

Sharing her personal journey with uncertainty, Dr. Fran’Cee Brown-McClure, Vice President for Student Affairs at Jackson State University, spoke about acknowledging when the moment you’re in is no longer working for you, even though you may be doing good work. She echoed Barker Alexander, Brown-McClure in challenging attendees to live their values and to find a “Board of Trustees” that they trust who can have the hard conversations, pour into them, challenge and sharpen them and help them think about life in a new way.

Jeanette Smith-Laws, Director, Operations and Student Unions, Student Affairs at Stanford University, shared the challenges she faced and overcame as she survived and worked to change the university.
“Stanford couldn’t break me; I was here to make Stanford better,” said Smith-Laws. “I have survived Stanford and adjusted and also work behind the scenes to help open the doors for you, young black folks. I’m here at Stanford University because I want you to see me, know me, acknowledge me, because I am who I am.” Smith-Laws thanked her “tribe,” the women who have supported and been a sounding board for her.

**Breakout Sessions**

Between two afternoon general sessions, the audience participated in one of five breakout sessions, covering a variety of insights and tools with personal and professional benefits. Adeline Bellot of the Stanford Federal Services de-mystified investing and inspired women to reclaim their power in securing their financial future. The Women’s Leadership Development Program shared the value of a more grounded and focused state, and led a guided meditation for their group. Renowned celebrity chef Tanya Holland shared her journey to success in a traditionally white, male industry, the challenges she faced and the strategies she employed to overcome obstacles. R&DE’s own Cyndi McCollister gave advice for those who want to learn to love their jobs. Experienced board members Gail Mosse, Barbara Nelson and Nancy Sheppard gave tips for those for whom board service is a goal.

**The Myths and Rituals of Inclusion**

The summit closed with an inspiring presentation by Lori Nishiura Mackenzie, Co-Founder Stanford VMware Women’s Leadership Innovation Lab. Nishiura Mackenzie shared her insight and perspective on inclusion in the workplace. Attendees were challenged to think about how their values shape norms, to rethink the norms we engage in, ask themselves if they are inclusive, and, if not, what behaviors can they engage in to shift those norms to be more inclusive.

Nishiura Mackenzie said that belonging unlocks the power of “we” and facilitates coming together and creating a space where people can get beyond covering their authentic selves.

**A Final Word**

In her closing remarks, Everett said, “I hope that all of you have discovered new potential and gained tools and insights to help reach them. I hope the personal stories and new ideas you’ve heard ignite something powerful and I hope that each of you personally and professionally depart today with a renewed vision and a commitment to cultivating your excellence.”
She also shared her hope that the goal for the Summit -- creating a day of transformational learning and new connections, with dynamic and inspiring speakers – was achieved. Everett echoed the words of many presenters by sharing her hope that the participants will mentor, sponsor and be an ally for others. “My hope for diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging is the foundation on which we can build an equitable ecosystem,” she said. “One in which all staff can bring their whole authentic selves to work. I want to make sure that we recognize our diversity as a strength, not fear, not give in to backlash but as a strength.”

As Dr. Everett ended her closing remarks, a sense of community, hope, and gratitude prevailed in the room. The Summit ended with a rousing standing ovation. R&DE looks forward to seeing you at the 2025 Summit.
Testimonials

“New tools and ideas were shared that we can take into our everyday work. This event is a highlight of my year and showcases the tremendous courage and support we women have.” - Michelle Ihrig

“The summit was uplifting, inspiring and energized me to do more.” - Marii Saucedo

“I was looking for inspiration, guidance, and a sense that I too could achieve my goals. Just listening to so many women who have overcome their own fears, adversity, and feelings of otherness was very inspiring. Hearing from all these brave women who have become leaders, mentors, and guides for others has reminded me that with persistence, love, and a sense of self, I can overcome anything. Thank you for enriching my life and I hope to do so for others!” - Dionicia Campos

“The speakers slate was curated to appeal to a very wide cross-section of leaders. From Tricia Montalvo Timm’s authentic keynote address to Prof. Maggie Neale’s
masterful command and cool delivery of her subject, from Dr. Everett’s inspirational story about her family thanksgiving to Lori Mackenzie’s engaging interaction with the audience, there really was something for everyone. That the food was fantastic was a big bonus!” - Curie Sevilla

“I was deeply impacted in witnessing and being part of a gathering of women leaders in such a down-to-earth setting. I was afraid of attending an event where I might be judged for my entry-level position. Instead, the speakers and the attendees made me feel immediately welcomed and part of the Stanford family.” – Anonymous attendee

Another attendee remarked, “There was great energy and a positive vibe in the room. I enjoyed the books sales throughout the day and getting to have my picture taken and having a short conversation with the author. Speakers spoke from an authentic place – from their heart.”