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I was 30 when I landed the opportunity to lead a team of 15 HSE professionals, most with more life and industry experience than me. I remember thinking, what am I doing here? I felt out of my depth and worried I wouldn't be taken seriously. I had to keep reminding myself I'd been given the role for a reason and to just get on with it. That role shaped how I lead. In those early months I tried different leadership styles, looking for the "right" one, and eventually realised there isn't a one-size-fits-all. Different things work for different people. Leadership is about balance.

One barrier I've worked to break is the idea that you need a certain age, personality or background to lead well. Confidence doesn't always arrive fully formed, sometimes you grow into it by doing the job and backing yourself along the way. I was lucky to have a manager in a previous company who influenced me hugely. She knew what she was doing, held everything together and led with clear direction. She also showed me that you don't need to know it all to lead well. Watching her gave me permission to be honest about what I didn't know and to focus on bringing people with me.

Giving in leadership, to me, is about building others up, recognising strengths and investing time so people can grow. I feel most proud when a team is happy, functioning well and excited about what we're trying to achieve together. The IWD "Give to Gain" theme lands for me because when we

give time, trust and support to others, everyone benefits. Strong teams are built when people feel seen and supported.

One action I'm giving in 2026 to help others gain is building others up and supporting our emerging professionals and leaders.