

# Gail Tracey

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It happens to be my birthday today, the perfect moment to reflect on my life and career so far...

Over the years, I've learned a great deal about leadership, and one truth stands out - you don't have to be the smartest or the loudest person in the room to lead well - in fact, it often helps if you're not. You don't need to be dominant or confrontational to achieve outcomes, and strength doesn't have to come with volume.

There are many ways to lead, but integrity and authenticity are qualities shared by the very best leaders. I've also come to realise that influencing, not controlling people is my 'superpower'. I'm motivated by genuine human connection and naturally lead with energy, optimism, and enthusiasm.

Early in my career, I was fortunate to have an exceptional mentor who set the benchmark for what great leadership looks like. He was inspiring, self-aware, emotionally intelligent, and listened far more than he spoke. He never raised his voice and never asked others to do something he wouldn't do himself. He rolled up his sleeves, earned trust through action, and never took the respect of his team for granted.

In my mid-twenties, I also read *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey, which further shaped the leader I aspired to be. A day doesn't pass without me returning to Habit 5 - "seek first to understand, then to be understood." At its heart, it's about empathetic listening and

truly understanding another person's perspective before trying to explain your own. Too often, people listen with the intent to reply, judge, or fix, but real effectiveness comes from listening to understand, not to win. When you listen first, your voice carries more impact later.

Another skill I've learned and refined over time is having difficult conversations. They're rarely comfortable and often require courage, but they do get easier with practice. Strong leaders address issues directly rather than leave them unresolved. When approached thoughtfully, authentically, and with a genuine win-win mindset, difficult conversations can lead to growth, stronger relationships, and better outcomes.

For me, leadership is ultimately about giving; showing up for my team and contributing to their success. It means doing my fair share, listening, supporting, motivating and caring.