

4 Leadership Lessons I Learned While Fighting the Housing Crisis

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If, like me, you're an impact-driven entrepreneur looking to solve one of the world's most crucial problems, know that you face a long, uphill journey – but one worth doing. For example, let's take something I'm personally working on and passionate about: the housing crisis.

I think we can agree that the way we have been building houses is no longer working. The industry cannot keep up with demand, construction takes forever and everything is impacted by materials and labor shortages. In addition, there is a dramatic lack of affordable housing – and 3D printing technology is our best bet yet to address the global housing crisis.

As the CEO of Apis Cor, I am one of a handful of people – and likely the only woman – in the world to have constructed buildings robotically using concrete additive manufacturing technology, also known as 3D printing. We have 3D printed full-scale concrete buildings around the world and plan to construct them soon on Mars and the moon. This technology is capturing headlines, rapidly evolving and revolutionizing how we live.

Here's what my team and I have learned so far, even beyond just 3D printing. Whether you're a young student exploring new possibilities, a budding entrepreneur looking to make a global impact or a woman executive considering an unconventional

career path, I hope these insights inspire you.

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1. Solution for a world in crisis

In 2022, in the U.S. alone, more than 500,000 people are homeless. Last year, 1.2 million new homes were built, while the housing demand was 5 million. In addition, 80% of home builders can't find labor, retirement is in record numbers and millennials such as myself don't want to do jobs that are dangerous, dirty or physically demanding. On top of that, 90% of builders across the country struggled with material shortages last year. Globally, more than 1.5 billion people lack access to shelter or affordable housing.

Whether you're working on alleviating the impact of climate change or on ending child abuse, your biggest challenges won't be solved overnight. And yet, that doesn't mean you can't be a pioneer. Ask yourself what critical piece of the puzzle you can attempt to solve today and begin where you are with what you have.

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2. Build a unique perspective

The construction-technology space is rapidly evolving. The construction industry, in general, however, remains male-dominated; I'm the very first female founder and CEO in the sector. There's room for a great deal of innovation and there's a lot to be done.

I often have people asking if 3D printing really is the future, and it is. 3D-printed houses can be created for every type of housing need, big or small. More so, what was previously impossible or expensive with traditional methods

now becomes a valid architectural possibility. With technology that is portable and mobile, construction becomes a viable career opportunity for women, retirees and anyone else who wrote off the industry due to the physical hard work needed.

Anyone can start a business – including a construction business – and the time is now. But to stand out, be prepared to “work like hell,” as Elon Musk puts it. If you want to be an entrepreneur, and especially if you want to be a role model, I believe you will soon learn that there’s no substitute for on-ground experience. The more you’re on the field, questioning existing systems and asking if XYZ is the best way of doing it, the more you’ll learn to think differently. Learning to find answers no one is looking for, and applying yourself fully where you are most needed, will set you apart.

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3. Empower those in need

We can’t build a future without education. We can’t solve the world’s most pressing problems without equipping enough young people. You may not be an educator, but even as an entrepreneur, manager or leader in your field, there will be a great deal you can do to empower those who want to learn and grow. You just have to look for the best ways to help.

For example, at my company, we try to bring more women into the fold of the industry by working with Girls Club Capital and with organizations that are women-focused. We’ve also partnered with former NFL player JT Hassell and the Hassell Foundation to guide children on working with construction robots, emerging technologies on Earth and space, and foster positive mental wellness.

Whatever you’re passionate about, partner with the right people and organizations, and you can merge your business with

your passions, too.

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4. Be the right kind of leader

I'm grateful that I got to do a lot of very difficult things at a very young age. One of the most challenging projects of my career was a construction venture supporting the infrastructure for the 2014 Olympics. I found myself in charge of a multimillion-dollar project at the age of 22. Shortly thereafter, I was a key member of our collaborative teams that won NASA's 3D-printed habitat competitions to create sustainable shelters that can be deployed on Mars.

In committing to a challenging mission, there will be several moments where you will doubt yourself. But as my journey has taught me, we don't know what we're capable of until we try doing something. Be an "I can do it and I am doing it" kind of leader. Push yourself to try, no matter what, and trust that you will find a way.

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