

Executive Coach - Leadership Specialist - Speaker
Director and Founder of Dunelm Leaders Ltd
Company Founded in 2010

Welcome to the Dunelm Leaders Website

It is so great to have you along to take a look at all our leadership development solutions on the site today

My team, my collaborator network and I really hope that you find some interesting content that will help you in your leadership journey. Of course, if you're here to take a look at some of our leadership programmes or coaching offerings - by all means, give us a buzz, we will be more than happy to chat through with you how we help individuals and businesses all over the world with developing their leadership capability.

But how did I get here? People ask me this all the time! It's been a 40 year journey since I emerged from education and entered the professional world. That's where my leadership development started and that's when leadership became my life long profession.

I was always fascinated by leadership if I am honest. Even before I entered the world of work. It intrigued me how by a "slight of tone" or focus on "positioning", another person could be either motivated or left feeling powerless in one single move or sentence.

Of course, in the early days, I certainly didn't fully understand this fascinating skill! As my first entry into the world of work was in the military, however - I soon learned!

I was privileged and honoured to serve in Her Majesty's Armed Forces in the Royal Air Force. I joined in 1983 and went into an "aerospace systems" role which was essentially part of the identification, tracking and control of aircraft in UK airspace. Essentially - my amazing colleagues and I were keeping all of you safe during the Cold War!

I say "my amazing collages" as they were! They are! I met some of the most incredibly smart, professional, focussed and fun people I ever had the fortune to work with. They were awesome! As a 17 year old this was exciting, exhilarating and completely terrifying!

Imagine, being surrounded by so many "outwardly" confident, knowledgeable and unflappable people?! That's a scary place to be when you are just trying to find who you are and how you want to be perceived. I say "outwardly" as of course, that will have been the first time I saw anyone wear their "game face" and underneath that exterior, they were probably as jittery as I was! The military train you for this - they are experts at it! Controlling emotions and responses is fundamental in leadership and I still pull on these skills that they military taught me in those early days, today

During this time, I experienced leadership at work for the first time, obviously. Of course, I'd seen leadership in sport, in school and in hobbies - and that formative leadership experience is important. This though was a whole different "kettle of fish". It fascinated me and I wanted to be learn it. Fast!

So that's where it all started for me. During my time in the military I saw some groundbreaking examples of leadership. OK, I also saw the odd "wheel come off the wagon" in a few instances, too. That is just as important in learning this skill as it is being on the receiving end of great leadership.

During my career, as a result of promotion, I got to practice what I yearned to learn and like every new leader, got some things right and some things wrong. They are all learning experiences.

Importantly though, I believe it was here where I first started to practice, in those early days, developing leadership in others. This was when things changed for me. I can't put my finger on why but I knew that's what I wanted to do as a profession

Shortly after doing active service in the First Gulf War (that's another story!), after nine amazing years, I "shook hands" with the Station Commander and turned the page to my next challenge - civvy street (and that's another story) and my first job out of uniform

"I'm not a civvy - I'm Ex Forces!" I have heard this many times from colleagues and friends who have served and do I feel the same. I do! This does not mean I have not transitioned! I certainly have and love my civilian life and how I live it but there are just some things inside you that will always be a little bit military when you have served!

So how did this play out in the big, wide world of corporate working? Well, over the next 20 years I worked in Learning and Development and Training, focussing on developing personal and leadership skills in others.

It is where I took my skillset as a developer of others to the next level and essentially started to really specialise in Leadership. It has been an amazing ride! I have had the pleasure and privilege to meet and work with the most amazing people and there absolutely is nothing like seeing someone demonstrate something that helps them influence something or someone, that you were part of developing. It's the best feeling in the world. As is seeing someone grow and prosper, seeing someone achieve something they never believed they could, seeing someone be so terrified in a situation but because they believe in the development you're providing, they push on and find themselves eventually enjoying it! All these things are the joys you have when you develop leaders.

It's a hard job, it is a complex job. People rightly expect a lot from you. They put their money and more importantly their trust in your hands and this is a huge responsibility. Trust, honesty, care, confidentiality - all these things are at the centre of my focus with a client and I take it very, very seriously. The job of developing leadership is not for the faint hearted but this is where I draw from my experiences and learning and trust me - I am very serious about getting it right for my client. Our relationship is important. It is key that there is open and honest communication and of course "the will to develop" on BOTH sides. Enjoying the process is also so important to me - for both parties. We're at work and focus on this for a long time so it must not be tedious.

During my corporate career, I worked for some incredible leaders - and probably like you - worked for some catastrophically awful leaders. I won't dwell on the good or bad experiences but both parties were part of a master class of what we should and should not do in leading others. Values are at the centre of our leadership skill and when leadership is not working, it is often that there is a misalignment with values. Not always, sometimes it is just about learning skills, models and approaches but if the person has issues, the leader will.

Towards the end of my corporate career, I started to begin to think about going it alone. Many people had suggested to me that I could run my own business and be master of my own destiny but to be honest with you, I think often a bit of imposter syndrome got in the way and I dared not believe that running my own business could be possible - but it was.

In 2010 I set up the business with a secondhand desk and an A4 pad, not a great deal of money and what was in my back pocket. I was terrified.

I had no idea where to start and questioned my motives and myself every day. Whilst I knew how to develop others and develop leadership capability, I had no idea how to run a business. Finance, Marketing, Sales - they were all new territories for me. Gradually though, the business grew and I started to have the time of my life helping others develop their leadership prowess. I knew then that this was where I added most value and where I had the most fun! I don't feel as though I have been to work for the last 12 years and I have never worked so hard in my life!

So now, within the business, sometimes solo and sometimes collaborating with other leadership specialists, I have the privilege of working with business owners, entrepreneurs, CEOs and senior executives using diverse coaching, leadership training and development solutions in order to respond to the leadership pains and challenges that we all recognise within growing and changing organisations.

Sometimes I work with leaders on a one to one basis and sometimes I am commissioned to work with a senior team. The things I see are common to me and there is always a way to resolve a difficult situation or challenge. I use the DISC psychometric profiling tool to understand the communication and leadership wiring and preferences of my clients. This helps us both understand the best way to approach and work with each other and of course their team and other stakeholders

Developing female leaders is very important to me and I was approached in 2015 to become a Chair for the Women Presidents Organisation (WPO). This is a global entrepreneur peer learning network, supporting

female entrepreneurs owning multi million dollar businesses. Over time, I have worked with some amazing women all over the world and I have learned so, so much from being a Chair in this organisation. It was also my absolute privilege to be named as the winner of the WPO global “Adrienne Hall Award in 2017”, awarded for “Breaking down Barriers” for female entrepreneurs. In addition to this, for our work during Covid19, myself and all my other WPO Chairs across the six continents of the world were named co winners of the WPO “President’s Award” in 2021. I mean - that just takes my breath away! If you had told my 17 year old self that I would write that paragraph, I would never have believed you. But that is the power of leaders leading others, and I am so thankful to those that led me.

Since 2015, I have also sat on the “Women in Enterprise All Party Parliamentary Group” in the UK Parliament. In this group, as members we discuss, lobby and make recommendations to improve the landscape for female entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom. In the time I have served on this group, we have released two reports, both containing recommendations for Government to improve opportunities for women who own businesses. I am proud to say we have “moved the needle” on quite a few things and we are determined to carry on for the next generation to reap the rewards of this most important work

Finally, coming full circle, as a military veteran, I actively support the Not for Profit Organisation “X-Forces Enterprise” as one of their Ambassadors. The organisation was set up to help veterans and their families start their own businesses and become entrepreneurs and as an Ambassador, I play a small part in this work. I really do wish that this organisation existed when I set up my business. It really is a game changer for new, veteran business owners

Everything for me is about leadership. It is my “common denominator” and in doing the work I do, I know I don’t only impact my own journey and life but also others. For me - it is the greatest privilege.

I hope your leadership journey is as enriching and rewarding as mine has been and continues to be

Warmest wishes

Karen