

A Spotlight on Conscious Leadership:

A Modern Approach to Workplace Culture

December 2024



Jeff Patton, Gerilyn Horan, and Kim Napolitano at their panel on Conscious Leadership at IMEX.

Research Highlights

- Leaders who focus on personal development are **86%** more likely to reach their professional goals.
- 74%** of cross-industry, U.S. employees are looking for managers who prioritize empathy and team support.
- Employers that prioritize their employees' mental and emotional health are grabbing the attention of Gen Z.
- Productivity and profitability are just two of the benefits of Conscious Leadership.
- Hilton was named one of the World's Best Workplace for cultivating a thoughtful, inclusive, environment where every team member has opportunities for growth.

What Makes the Difference?

In the wake of recent global challenges and a post-pandemic work market, a profound transformation took place in how we approach both personal and professional life. Nearing the end of 2020, people began to slow down, and—in the newfound space and time—mental health came to the forefront of discussion. When society was unable to engage in external activities, individuals turned inward, leading to a widespread elevation of mental-health awareness and a reprioritization of work, life, and leisure with a focus on holistic well-being. Now, four years later, this same expectation is manifesting across all business sectors, as employees increasingly seek out conscious living and work environments. This growing demand has propelled traction around a modern approach to leadership: **Conscious Leadership**.

Conscious Leadership emphasizes self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and a deep commitment to the well-being of individuals and the collective. It fosters environments where authenticity,

empathy, and purpose-driven work thrive, creating space for both personal growth and organizational success. Data suggests that people are increasingly expecting leaders in the workplace to lead with a Conscious Leadership style. **Almost 75%** of employees indicated that they want their managers to demonstrate a leadership style focused on empathy and a supportive attitude, according to a study by The Adecco Group. But a **disconnect** exists between Gen-Z workers and their bosses in how they value leadership traits. For example, Gen-Z workers ranked empathy as the most important trait to look for in a boss, only second to patience. Alternatively, bosses ranked empathy outside of their top three traits, showing a clear disconnect in priorities. Perhaps more importantly, only 1 in 3 Gen Zers expects bosses to make changes on their account, providing an opportunity for Conscious Leadership to shift Gen Z's expectations and attract, retain, and develop new talent.

A Case of Conscious Leadership

Conscious Leadership offers businesses a competitive advantage by fostering a culture of trust, collaboration, and adaptability, but many may still be wondering: *Where do I start?* In a world where traditional leadership styles often prioritize short-term gains, conscious leaders focus on long-term value creation, integrating the needs of employees, customers, and stakeholders. To meet these spanning needs, Conscious Leadership begins with a commitment to personal development. "A study by the Center for Creative Leadership found that leaders who focus on personal development are 86% more likely to achieve their professional goals compared to those who don't." To explore a real-life example, we turned to Hilton leader Kim Napolitano, Executive Director of Industry Relations and Intermediary Group Sales, and her team.

A thriving and diverse team of high-caliber individuals responsible for Intermediary Group Sales at Hilton, led by Kim Napolitano. Napolitano's team understands the weight to perform. And yet, her leadership style has transformed her team's corporate work experience while simultaneously upleveling their skills and productivity. Napolitano's team has achieved and exceeded their revenue goals in recent years and plan on continuing the trend. Retired team member, Mary Beth Nobs, recounted that in her 45-year career across several companies, she experienced fear and performance-based leadership.

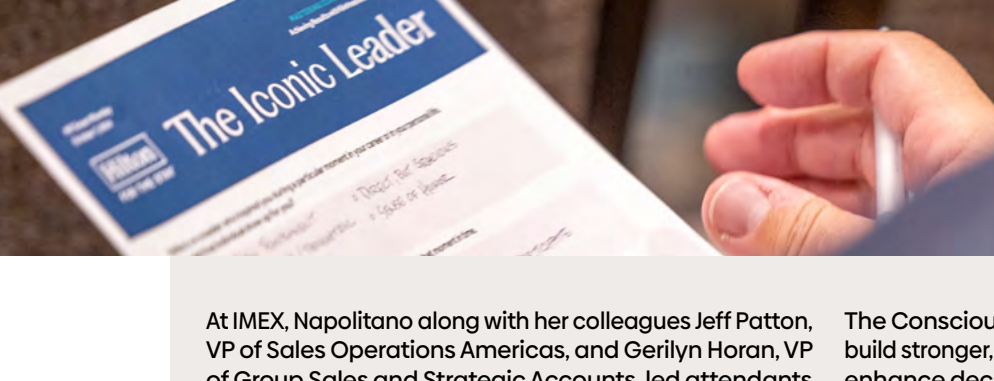
Napolitano started in hospitality at the Front Desk of a Hilton. Through her desire to become the best meeting planner she could be, she studied everything there was to know about event operations in hotels, quickly fell in love with hotels, and never left. She's a firm believer that the culture of a team is set at the top, and her Team Members easily quote a favorite saying of hers when interacting with one another, across teams and beyond: "Leave everyone with their dignity." As a mother of three Gen Zers, she recognizes that the next generation is proactively insisting on positive workplaces conducive to high performance and productivity, and she's committed to ensuring Hilton is one of them. "This generation is demanding healthy places to work," she said. "Many would rather enter the gig economy if they can't find a company that's a good fit." Keeping this in mind, through intentional work and study, Napolitano is implementing changes with her team that can be applied across any industry.

Jeff Patton, VP Sales Operations, added, "The younger generation has definitely shown up with a preference for this [Conscious Leadership] style. I have two young men for sons in their mid-twenties, and they are getting started in the working world right now. It is fascinating to hear how they and their friends thrive under a more Conscious Leadership style than a more old-school management style. With this said, I am extremely excited about the future and the next generation. I frequently hear about how the future generation is not as well prepared or will not work as hard as my generation. I see enormous potential in so many people starting in this business today. I think they are going to be absolutely vital to ushering us into the next age of travel. My desire is to develop a leadership style that allows my generation and the next one to work for a common goal but do it in a way that accommodates each, no straight lines."

“Leaders were hard on people, and it's just the way it was. But Kim had an open mindedness—pushing and wanting everybody to succeed—which was an amazing experience,” she said. “I will always be grateful for that.”

—Mary Beth Nobs, retired team member

Napolitano shared her work at IMEX America 2024, where she took participants through curated exercises designed to introduce Conscious Leadership.



At IMEX, Napolitano along with her colleagues Jeff Patton, VP of Sales Operations Americas, and Gerilyn Horan, VP of Group Sales and Strategic Accounts, led attendees through two workshops: "The Iconic Leader" and "The Me They Need," encouraging participants to reflect on leaders they admire, identify key personal strengths, and develop conscientious ways to apply their reflections in the workplace. "The most profound takeaway from the audience was their reflections on their Iconic Leaders. The emotions were palpable as they spoke, with a common sentiment that these leaders saw them as people first and employees second. Because their leaders recognized them as individuals, they felt motivated to do more and to support their teams in reaching their goals," she said. "The feedback was heartwarming, and it was evident there is a strong outcry for conscious leaders. It's clear why this approach has such a profound impact on business."

The Conscious Leadership approach helps businesses build stronger, more engaged teams, reduce turnover, and enhance decision-making processes by incorporating diverse perspectives. Aligning business goals with ethical practices, Conscious Leadership also strengthens a company's reputation and drives meaningful success in today's socially cognizant marketplace.

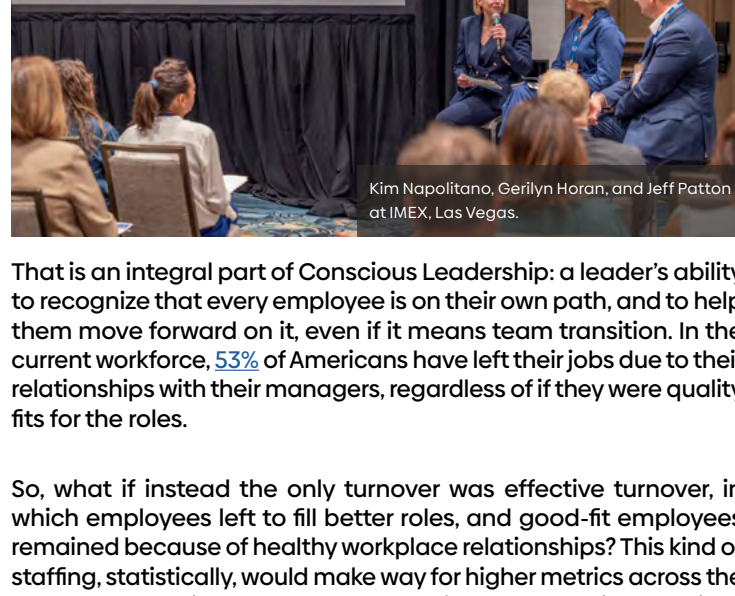


Kim Napolitano speaking at IMEX, Las Vegas.

A Holistic Approach with Holistic Benefits

Conscious Leadership offers measurable benefits for businesses by balancing productivity with employee well-being. Data shows that companies making employees feel well and respected through Conscious Leadership experience a significant increase in **profitability**, making these organizations 10 times as likely to achieve high levels of customer satisfaction, 11 times more likely to have high employee retention, and 20 times more likely to say they adapt well to change. For example, **research** highlights a 23% rise in productivity and financial performance for companies practicing mindful leadership, this rise due to improved emotional regulation, team collaboration, and stress reduction. Employees also experience lower burnout and higher engagement when they feel valued and connected, fostering both innovation and retention. These outcomes contribute to a healthier workplace culture and **stronger organizational performance**.

By aligning leadership practices with employee well-being, businesses can sustain long-term growth while enhancing their workers' mental and emotional health. Take for example Maureen Nyamongo, Director of Sales Worldwide Accounts, who recalled the impact of Conscious Leadership on her work at Hilton. "We can struggle to have our voice heard as women in the workplace, especially as women of color, but what [Conscious Leadership] has done for me is to open doors through mentorship and leadership that reinforced my value and talent," she said. This eventuality led Nyamongo to make the jump from working on-property to the corporate office. Nyamongo's colleague, Anesa Martin, Director of Sales, Worldwide Accounts, agreed, "In a leadership role, Kim doesn't always accept the comfort zone but pushes you outside of it. The key part is that she gives you everything you need to succeed."



Kim Napolitano, Gerilyn Horan, and Jeff Patton at IMEX, Las Vegas.

That is an integral part of Conscious Leadership: a leader's ability to recognize that every employee is on their own path, and to help them move forward on it, even if it means team transition. In the current workforce, **53%** of Americans have left their jobs due to their relationships with their managers, regardless of if they were quality fits for the roles.

So, what if instead the only turnover was effective turnover, in which employees left to fill better roles, and good-fit employees remained because of healthy workplace relationships? This kind of staffing, statistically, would make way for higher metrics across the board. Companies that employ Conscious Leadership financially outperform those that do not by a 10.5-to-1 ratio, **notes** Raj Sisodia in *Firms of Endearment: How World-Class Companies Profit from Passion and Purpose*.

How? Lessons for Practicing Conscious Leadership Skills

When interviewed, practicing professionals maintained that these five learning principles rose to the top for leaders seeking to grow in their own Conscious Leadership practices:

- Seek guidance**
Prioritize learning Conscious Leadership through reading and listening from trusted resources including: *The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership* by Jim Dethmer, *Dignity: It's Essential Role in Resolving Conflict* by Donna Hicks Ph.D., and *The Ideal Team Player* by Patrick Lencioni. Identify other leaders who are practicing Conscious Leadership and consider joining external networks that prioritize empathetic and intention-driven leadership practices.
- Cultivate self-awareness**
Understanding your own communication triggers, weaknesses, and tendencies is the first step toward effective leadership by becoming aware of areas for improvement.
- Learn who your team members are**
Conscious Leadership recognizes and respects the unique attributes each individual brings to the team.
- Embrace mistakes**
Celebrate mistakes along the way as milestones; share your journey with your team and respond with transparency.
- Allow time**
Be patient with the process, and commit to small, consistent efforts.

“The most important piece of advice I could share would be to fall in love with the process of developing people and meet them where they are. Do not obsess over the numbers, the results, or the expectations. Obsess over the fundamentals required for each person on the team to be at a level of excellence, and all the metrics, results, and desired outcomes will fall into place. The job as the leader is serving the team and not having the team serve you or your company's bottom line.”

—Jeff Patton, Vice President of Sales Operations, Americas at Hilton

One of the Best Places to Work in the World

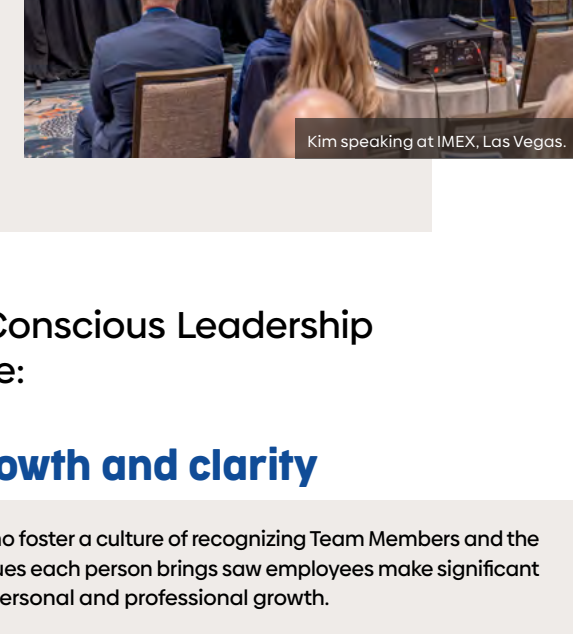
At Hilton, Conscious Leadership goes beyond Napolitano's team. That culture is the driving force behind Hilton's business success, and they've earned recognition to prove it in the last few years. In fact, being named the Best Place to Work list for the first time in 2016, Hilton has received over 560 awards and nearly 60 #1 wins around the world, including Turkey, Italy, India, and the U.S. In November 2024, Hilton was recognized as the #2 World's Best Workplace, and its' eighth consecutive year as the top hospitality company to work for in the world.

These accolades reflect the Hilton commitment to building a strong culture through inclusivity and opportunities for growth at every level of the company.

“It is about you as a person at Hilton. Being conscious about investing in people, helping them show up as themselves, and giving them the tools and resources to be their best selves allow them to take care of the customers.”

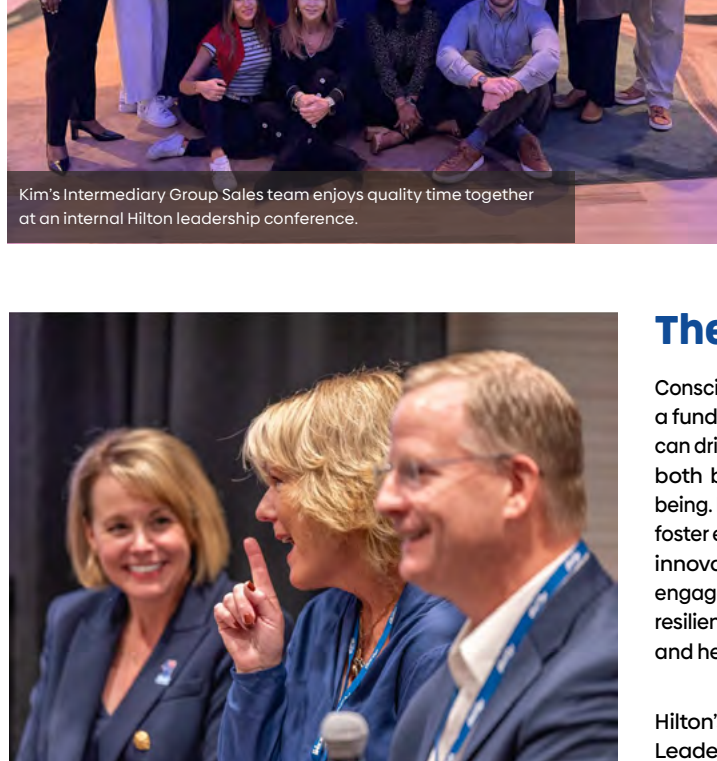
—Maureen Nyamongo, Director of Sales Worldwide Accounts

Team Member Mary Beth Nobs shared that she feels Hilton truly upholds their commitment to the culture of sharing the light and warmth of hospitality. "Everything you do and say should go back to how you are upholding that culture," she adds.



Kim speaking at IMEX, Las Vegas.

Team Members at Hilton highlighted elements of Conscious Leadership that significantly impacted their working experience:



Kim's Intermediary Group Sales team enjoys quality time together at an internal Hilton leadership conference.

- Growth and clarity**
Leaders who foster a culture of recognizing Team Members and the unique values each person brings saw employees make significant strides in personal and professional growth.
- Support and empathy**
Leaders who supported and empathized were instrumental in helping Team Members navigate challenges and build confidence.
- Team dynamics**
Leaders with an ability to read people and uniquely lead Team Members were able to build strong, loyal teams, which benefited the organization overall.



Kim, Gerilyn, and Jeff at IMEX, Las Vegas

The Future of Conscious Leadership

Conscious Leadership is not just a trend but a fundamental shift in how organizations can drive sustainable success by prioritizing both business results and human well-being. Leaders who embrace this approach foster environments of trust, inclusivity, and innovation, leading to higher employee engagement, retention, and organizational resilience. Business leaders like Napolitano and her influence are proof positive of this.

Hilton's commitment to Conscious Leadership exemplifies how this model can have a transformative impact. By centering leadership on empathy and purpose, businesses have an opportunity

to prioritize mental well-being within their organizations and eventually pave the way to good business that lasts. As businesses continue to navigate evolving challenges, incoming generations, and shifting employee expectations, adopting Conscious Leadership will be essential in helping ensure both organizational success and a thriving workforce.

It's reported that **92%** of workers believe it is important for their workplaces to value their emotional and psychological well-being. The question is, which employers are listening?

“When your company has an inspirational vision like ours and leads from the top down with a people-first approach, rooted in a culture built on credibility, respect, and fairness, it's easy to see why we've earned so many accolades. We've made it a priority to ensure the whole person shows up at work—not just the 'employee' part.”

—Kim Napolitano, Executive Director of Industry Relations and Intermediary Group Sales at Hilton

