



NADIA SOOD

THE LEADERSHIP LESSONS OF...



NADIA SOOD was born in the US, where she studied international affairs at university and started her career as a speechwriter at the UN. After serving as director of Nestlé's strategic wellness unit for three years, in 2005 she became executive vice-president, south Asia, at SN Power, a Norwegian company investing in green energy projects in emerging markets. In 2011 she co-founded Impact Investment Partners, a provider of investment management services. She is also CEO of fintech company LendEnable, which helps SMEs to obtain finance, and a trustee of the Green Belt Movement, a conservation NGO based in Nairobi.



Nadia Sood is a fellow of the IoD. To hear more inspirational stories from the IoD network, visit iod.com/ingoodcompany

The former UN speechwriter held senior roles at Nestlé and SN Power before co-founding Impact Investment Partners. She shares what she's learnt about collaboration, negotiation and leading in male-dominated industries

Interview Ryan Herman Photograph Sebastian Nevols

Resolve to make a positive contribution.

My father was an engineer. He was always trying to create solutions for problems that made people's lives difficult. It was built into me that, if you have the intellectual capacity, you should at least try to do something meaningful for others. Throughout my career I've chosen jobs that have revolved around that idea.

Enter partnerships with full commitment.

People often ask me: "What's it like to work with your husband?" I married Varun [Sahni] two years after we founded Impact Investment Partners. We have a shared vision of where we're trying to get to – it's in both of our interests. I think it's rare in business to have a partner who is just as invested as you are.

Kofi Annan was brilliant at building consensus.

While I was taking a master's degree in international affairs at Columbia University in New York, I became very interested in conflict resolution. Because of that, I was lucky to get the chance to be a speechwriter in Annan's office when he was secretary-general of the United Nations. The theory and practice of conflict resolution differ greatly. Getting things implemented on the ground is challenging when you think about the sheer number of countries that have completely different priorities and perspectives. But the things you can achieve together are 10 times more powerful than what you can manage individually.

It would be very damaging if we couldn't co-operate internationally any more.

There has been a bifurcation in the world. At the political level there is more and more isolationism – you see it everywhere. Yet collaboration is increasing at the civil level. My personality and choices in life have been built on collaboration and partnership, so my question is: how can we move into less isolationist positions?

The original purpose of business should be to deliver social good.

Whatever you do, you can make a positive impact by how you treat employees, serve customers and deliver goods/services that people need.

It's vital to supply more capital to SMEs.

There is a huge market for SME credit: about £6.2trn worldwide, of which £3.4trn is unmet demand. If you were to unlock this, it would have a global impact. When SMEs receive capital, they employ more people and make the economy grow, but this market simply doesn't work properly. Small businesses that are creditworthy can't obtain the loans they require to fuel their growth, while banks can't find them. They're both sitting in the marketplace, but it's a case of "never the twain shall meet".

I developed a thick skin early on.

I have never contemplated the notion that being a woman somehow means that I can't achieve something. I worked in the energy sector and now I'm running two fintech firms. There are very few women in leadership positions in either of these fields. It is a challenge to get your voice heard, so for me it's always about presenting a clear case for what I'm trying to achieve, being very professional and taking things with a pinch of salt.

You shouldn't need to look at a contract more than once.

When you're negotiating a deal, it should be so good that it enables you to put the contract away and never look at it again. You should have spent so much time getting to know the other party that you should be able to solve any issues arising together. Only if you fail to manage the relationship in a healthy manner would you need to consult that document again.

Experienced people will have made a number of mistakes over their careers.

It can be easy to forget this about the seasoned campaigners around you. If they are able to share their stories with you, it can help you to avoid making the same mistakes and create a valuable efficiency.

Be tough, be just and be caring.

Being tough on someone means helping them to improve. It's the leader who can say: "You did really well, but if you can do this small thing differently next time it will take your performance to another level." Sharing practical insights to help people improve is integral to great leadership. **d.**