

# Alison Levine: learning to lead to the highest peaks

Business lessons for today's leaders from best-selling author Alison Levine.


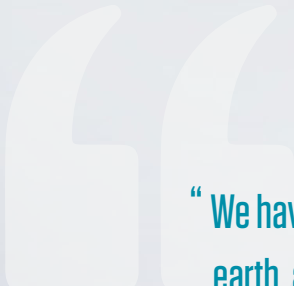


She's a mountaineer, explorer, best-selling author, and has survived two trips up Mount Everest and a career on Wall Street. Despite her many incredible achievements, including climbing the tallest peak on every continent and skiing to both the north and south poles, what Alison Levine may be best known for is her ability to translate those experiences into leadership lessons that truly resonate with business leaders of today.

While we would all agree that what Levine has accomplished in her lifetime is extraordinary, she'd argue that she isn't better than anyone else out there. She just keeps going. Whether she's weathering a snow storm at the summit of Mount Everest, walking across shifting ice boulders on a rickety aluminum ladder, or deciding whether to turn back 300 feet from the top of a mountain, she simply puts one foot in front of the other.

Attendees at this year's Thrive Summit in New Orleans got to hear Levine's inspiring stories firsthand. Listeners walked away with a better understanding of what makes a great leader and how to empower people to do their best, even when facing the worst. For those who missed Levine's keynote, fear not — we sat down with her and asked her to share her thoughts on wellbeing, workplace culture, and who's responsible for leading an organization.

**[Read on for our exclusive interview with Alison Levine.](#)**



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Alison Levine

**VP:** Fitness is clearly a big part of your life, but why are health and wellbeing important to you?

**AL:** **We have a limited number of days on this earth, and without health and wellbeing, you will never live your best life.** Being healthy is not just about eating right, getting enough sleep, and exercising (although that is a big part of it), it's also about being happy with who you are, being comfortable in your own skin, and living life with purpose, passion, and compassion.

**VP:** Between speaking engagements, expeditions, and family time, you have a pretty packed schedule. What steps do you take to maintain work-life balance?

**AL:** **Packed schedule is right — sometimes I'm on planes five days a week, or even more.** There have been months where I was only home for three days! And when I'm on the road, I want to make sure I am delivering 1000% for my clients.

I'm a huge introvert, so I need time to be alone in a quiet space and just “be.” Luckily, having downtime in hotels works well for me. And on the days when I'm not traveling, I'm fiercely protective of my time

at home. I want to be present for my husband, my friends, and my dog. So, when I'm home, that time is all mine and I don't allocate any of it to work. That means saying no to a lot of requests. I hate saying no, but I have to in order to protect my sanity and my health. There are only so many pieces of the pie, so to speak, and I don't have the bandwidth to help everyone who asks me for my time. And the truth is, many of us don't! Saying “no” can sometimes be one of the best things you can do for your health.

**VP:** In your opinion, who is responsible for creating a workplace culture that supports health and wellbeing?

**AL:** **You are. Yeah — I'm talking to you! If you're reading this, listen up. Each and every one of us can make a big impact on the organizations where we work.** We all need to make a conscious effort to focus on health and wellbeing. Be proactive. Be creative. Be part of the path to good health. Come up with fun ways to engage others in the process of forming new healthy habits. Make suggestions to senior management. Don't wait for this to come from others. A healthy organization is a happy organization and a more productive organization that can better serve its customers. But I am preaching to the choir because you know that already, of course!

**VP:** In your keynote at Thrive, you said that the most successful organizations are the ones where all employees are leaders. But how does an organization get there? Does it start with the C-suite or does it come from the ground up?

**AL:** Well, it's a little bit of both. Senior executives should empower all their employees to think and act like leaders. They have to give people plenty of reign to make decisions and act on them, and most importantly — support them even if things don't go according to plan. Every mistake or failure is an opportunity to learn and grow.

On the other hand, employees need to realize that they're already in a leadership role — regardless of title or tenure. Everyone has a responsibility to help the team move in the right direction and everyone has the responsibility to look out for one another.

**VP:** If you had to offer business leaders a few pieces of advice, what would they be?

**AL:** Work toward creating a culture that tolerates failure. If you don't, you'll stifle progress and

innovation because people will be too scared to take risks. Also, never underestimate the value that a few kind words can have on someone's career or life! Words matter. Even the best, strongest performers need to be reminded that you value them and care about them. So, tell them!

**VP:** Do you have any strategies for pushing past obstacles, big and small?

**AL:** YES. The strategy is always the same. Put one foot in front of the other. You don't have to be the best or the strongest or the fastest — you just have to be the most relentless.

**VP:** Anything else you'd like to add?

**AL:** If there's something that you've been waiting to do, wanting to do, but haven't done — go for it. Whether it's going back to school, taking a trip to the other side of the world, asking for a promotion, or adopting a dog. And when you're on your journey, remember that backing up is not backing down — as long as you're moving, you're making progress.

## Leading by example is one thing, but do you know how to really motivate your employees to deliver their best at work?

Learn what drives employee satisfaction, the most common factors among disengaged workers, and expert insights on good habit building from behavior-change expert Dr. BJ Fogg.