

what we heard

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& Leaders 2017  
Daughters

# Leaders & Daughters

*"It's about the journey, not the destination."*

Shanghai

March 8, 2017



EgonZehnder



## what we heard

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The Egon Zehnder Leaders & Daughters event in Shanghai convened some 30 senior executives and their teenaged daughters at the Peace Hotel, located at the famous Bund promenade, on March 8th. The leaders were mothers and fathers who occupied top management roles in Greater China for some of the world's leading companies. Their careers spanned decades in diverse sectors such as consulting, investment and financial services, hospitality, pharmaceuticals and fast-moving consumer goods. Meanwhile, the daughters were still in middle and high school and eager to discover how their lives would unfold. The gathering provided a great opportunity for both generations to come together for a candid conversation about life's important values and how the next generation can begin to think about their future. These are their stories.

### On the future of work

As China is one of the world's fastest growing economies, the next generation faces unprecedented opportunities and uncertainties. One daughter raised her concern about how artificial intelligence and robotics could change the future of work and the job market. She asked: "Was it still a good idea to become a doctor if robots can one day perform surgeries?" Her question invited a reassuring response from a father, who said that a robot may have "a smart brain" but it does not have a "loving heart" and that makes all the difference for patients.

### It's about the journey

In every generation, new opportunities may arise and young people can often have more than one career over a lifetime. While this sounds exciting to some, others may feel bewildered. One daughter expressed her apprehension at the times when her teacher would ask: "What do you

want to be when you grow up?" She asked the leaders how she should go about making a career choice. One leader explained that life is not about making definitive plans, but rather it is about a journey of discovery. Instead of laboring in vain to try and control every step of the way, the leader advised this young woman to learn how to be open to change and explore through creativity and experimentation. In fact, one leader even said that women can sometimes "overthink" their decisions and are 'too cautious'. They should have greater confidence in their abilities and believe in themselves."

### On independence and perseverance

The leaders strongly encouraged their daughters to develop a sense of independence as well as perseverance. One mother acknowledged that motherhood and taking maternity leave can pose a disruption to one's career, and that it can be challenging to return to work after taking time off. Another leader also pointed out that it can be a struggle to juggle the multiple demands of professional responsibilities and set aside enough time for spending with family, and this can result in a lack of work-life balance and feelings of guilt. However, the lesson to the next generation is still to aim high, not to give up too easily or quickly, and persist through their challenges to fulfill their aspirations for success.

One mother expressed her passion for work and described how it gave her tremendous satisfaction. She said the rewards come in many forms such as meeting extraordinary people and having worldly experiences. One father also added that he personally admired women who dedicate themselves to pursue a stimulating career and nurture a happy home. He said such individuals were exemplary role models for the next generation.

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### On leadership

As the daughters have yet to graduate from high school, they looked to the parents for leadership models. The evening produced contrasting opinions about what makes a great leader. One mother said a great leader was someone who could give the right directions to her team. But another father disagreed and said a great leader is someone who leads by example.

He shared a story from his own experience with a near-disaster at work. This father worked for one of the world's largest consumer electronics goods companies. Once he was tasked to open a new store with his team. However, on the night before the opening, his team told him that all has gone wrong; the place was a mess and they were not going to be ready. Instead of calling it quits and shifting blame, the father said he 'rolled up his sleeves' and by his own example called all hands on deck and turned the situation around.

Furthermore, the leaders were all in agreement, collectively, that their daughters should strive to 'enjoy life', be 'curious' and be 'passionate' about their personal pursuits. Not once, surprisingly, did anyone say the goal was simply to be 'successful'. Instead these parents emphasized the importance of learning how to lead oneself, and not just follow other people's ideas or expectations for fulfilment.

### A daughter's appreciation

Sometimes it is difficult for young people to take advice from their parents. One daughter who is a promising artist shared a story about how she used to be "very rebellious" when she was young. She shared with her peers that she used to refuse to listen to her mother. As time went by, she realised that "the best leader" she knows is "sitting next to me," referring to her mother. In

this touching moment, she told her peers that it was important to "listen to your parents and learn from their success and struggles."

Other daughters also expressed their gratitude to their parents for the exposure they have received from a young age; some said they had flown on airplanes and traveled abroad some 20 years before their parents did when they were growing up. And with such worldly experiences – and dedicated parents – this group of China's next generation is poised to become leaders of tomorrow.

### Quotes from the daughters:

"I learn the most from watching what my mother does, not just what she says, but from seeing how she interacts and communicates with others, and handles her ups and downs."

"I have become more open to exploring new ideas and different alternatives from watching my mother take risks in her own career and the choices that she makes."

### Quotes from the leaders:

"It is difficult to be a leader. You tend to start by trying to instruct others on what to do, but you quickly find out that it is more effective to be inclusive and get everyone involved with their input. That is what makes great leadership."

"Change can involve a great deal of frustration but it can teach the next generation how to adjust to new environments, whether they have to move from one country to another or attend a new school. These transitions force them to reflect on who they really are."



## what we heard

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*Group photo: Leaders and daughters at the Shanghai event*



*Emily Chang*

## what we heard

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*Dennis Ku*



*left  
Cecily Gu*

*right  
Lilian Chu*



## what we heard

below  
*Maggie Chan*

right  
*Xuemei Bai and her  
daughters Emma and  
Charlotte Bennink*



above  
*Po Hou and his  
daughter Nadia*

below  
*Mason Lee and his  
daughter Katrina*

above  
*Group photo*



## what we heard

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## Hosts

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### About Leaders & Daughters

To mark International Women's Day, Egon Zehnder conceived Leaders & Daughters, a global series of events that bring the world's most admired leaders and their daughters together to uncover the motivations, challenges and opportunities that face the next generation of professional women.

In 2017, we went further. In celebration of International Women's Day, we hosted Leaders & Daughters events in more than 40 cities worldwide – bringing together the voices of more than 3,500 participants to share their stories of success as well as the obstacles that are preventing progress. We share one common goal: to collectively pave a better future for the next generation of women leaders.

In addition to the events, we have also launched a campaign, “To My Daughter,” in which leaders write letters to their daughters about their hopes and dreams for the future. To participate, please visit [www.leadersanddaughters.com](http://www.leadersanddaughters.com).

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