



**My Leadership Credo**  
**By: Nicole Townsend**

**The Beginning**

I grew up with parents who planned, saved and dreamed to give their children the best possible lives. Their goal was to offer us a childhood that was more full—of love, laughter and fond memories—than theirs had proven to be. They were determined that, together, they would have a happy family.

Life doesn't always go exactly as planned. That's how you learn.

And I did learn as I watched my parents. They were focused and driven to achieve their goals. My dad excelled in his career, well-known in the business world. My mom worked much of my childhood, in banking, sales and bookkeeping. Her favorite job was being a mom to me and my little sister.

My childhood memories are a whirl of the sound of bellowing laughter and the sight of a worried, burrowed brow. My parents faced challenges that can come with love, marriage and raising a family. And they came out stronger in the end.

They were fearless; sidestepping the conventional to go their own way. They were hard working; grinding out assignments at work and projects at home. They were proud; they believed in each other, in us and their dreams.

When I was nine, my parents decided to leave a neighborhood on the edge of the burgeoning Silicon Valley so my sister and I could have a more peaceful life among acorns and oak trees. We packed up a moving van and moved to Placer County, just outside of Sacramento. I was then a shy, smaller-than-average fourth grader. That year, I changed schools three times as we moved to eventually settle into a home that my parents meticulously and lovingly architected. I had a new room with a view of those oak trees. But I deeply missed my family and my friends. I had to find my way in this new place.

It was my childhood shyness that led me to express myself through words on a blank page. I wrote poems, scripts and stories. I recorded my own radio shows on a cassette player, getting really good at pushing the "play" and "record" buttons simultaneously. By junior high, I had set my sights on reporting—on being the next, brazen and modern Lois Lane. In high school, I dove into my studies and into journalism, leading the school newspaper. There, I found another love: leadership. Assigning people to beats and stories that matched their interests and strengths was exhilarating. I blazed through high school as an awkward teen bent on social justice, leaving with dozens of by-lined stories, a valedictorian medal and a plan to get a journalism degree.

It was then that I got my first real job at Raley's. Dad was fond of the local, family owned company. He beamed when I got the job—which was no easy feat. While I had gained some confidence in writing and leading the school newspaper, shyness and insecurity lurked at my core. I pushed through. I traveled every few days to a store in the next town to express my interest in bagging groceries. The perseverance paid off and I was hired. Besides the steady paycheck, there was another benefit: Exposure to new



people, thoughts and beliefs. While my parents gave us safety and security in our home, what my community lacked was diversity. I craved knowing the world outside our tightly wrapped cocoon.

This feeling only fueled my pursuit of journalism—learning and telling people’s stories. Leaping outside of my comfort zone. I worked at a community newspaper and earned my degree. When I graduated, I asked for what was known as the toughest and roughest beat, one of the highest crime areas in town. Mom’s response was mixed with pride and chagrin. Her daughter, “always walking on the edge of danger.”

Every day, the girl who graduated at top of her high school and college classes, braided her hair and put on a plain shirt, baggy jeans and black combat boots. I went to places where the city had gated crime in; where there were stories that needed to come out from behind the iron rods. I saw things I never before saw. I heard tales I never ever imagined. I found my purpose in connecting with people and their hearts.

Reporting gave me the confidence to head into the unknown. It also allowed me to mimic what I was taught—to be fearless, to show grit, to have pride. My goal was to tell the stories of those who didn’t have a voice. Sometimes, it was just a subtle whisper to make people think as they read the news over their morning coffee. Other times, the words screamed off the page to spur people to action. Eventually, I became too emotionally connected to the people I met and the stories I told. I actually began to feel people’s sadness and pain. I had to find another path.

Life doesn’t always go as planned. That’s how you grow.

It was time to move on to a new career, still connected to people and their stories. I eventually returned to a familiar place, Raley’s. It was a place that would ground me through my career and bring me both the comfort and discomfort that leads to growth.

What I most remember in these years is a whirlwind of moments, an important time in life as I found my true love and we grew our family. While many supported me, those who stand out most are the strong women who have shared their lives and learning with me. I am grateful for:

- The former boss, so smart she was envied; so optimistic as she fought unfairness. “Stay positive. Believe in what is good,” she said.
- The brilliant friend and coach who has supported me through career triumphs and tribulations and kept me focused on staying true to myself and following my path.
- The leader with moxie who gave me the freedom to venture, but also reminded me to temper my constant enthusiasm because, “It can’t always be your idea.”
- The unforgettable mentor, taken too soon. She was resilient on the outside but unknowingly fragile on the inside. She got my attention. I only wish I had given her more of mine.
- The gift of light, an independent and fearless nomad who sees goodness in all.
- The most essential woman in my life: My best friend, my mom. She is the strongest woman I know—there, with my dad, by his side, until the end.

While my time at Raley’s recently came to an end, I will not ignore the opportunities I had to learn and grow. I will not forget the experiences and the people who shaped me. I will not look back.



Life doesn't always go exactly as planned. Yet everything happens for a reason.

### **My Purpose and Values**

I believe in people. I also believe that people often don't realize the strengths and talents they can offer the world. I've found great fulfillment in helping others make this realization. I deeply value genuinely connecting, openly sharing ideas and transparently communicating. I believe this is the foundation that unites us and brings us happiness.

### **My Point of View**

True leadership starts with a true heart. It is built on meaningful relationships. It comes from a willingness to listen, understand and serve others. Only then can leaders help their teams uncover their unique talents, find their strengths and discover their individual purpose.

### **What You Can Expect from Me**

Those who work with me can expect and hold me accountable to leading with:

- **Belief.** I will express my belief in you. I will help you find ways to amplify your strengths and talents and encourage you to seize your potential. *You will know I believe in you.*
- **Authenticity.** I will speak to you from my heart. I will give you clear expectations, constructive feedback and meaningful recognition. *You will know what I expect and appreciate.*
- **Optimism.** I will look optimistically for good intentions. I may use humor to bring us together and focus us on the positive. *You will hear me laugh every day.*
- **Commitment.** I will commit to you—through success and challenge. I will show consistent dedication to you, the team and our cause. *You will know I care.*

### **What I Expect from You**

- **Speak Up!** Share your ideas, fears, hopes and dreams. Share your perspective and your recommendations with confidence and pride.
- **Respect.** Respect others' ideas and perspectives. Encourage an environment where we can all learn from one another.
- **Positivity.** Give off light. Have a positive outlook, even during challenging times. Inspire those around you.
- **Commitment.** Be committed to your responsibilities in your role and to your team. Do what's right for your team and your company.

### **How I Will Set an Example for You**

I will set an example for you by staying true to my leadership credo: True leadership starts with a true heart. I will build a meaningful relationship with you—I will work to hear, understand and serve you. I will support you as you uncover your unique talents, find your strengths and discover your purpose.