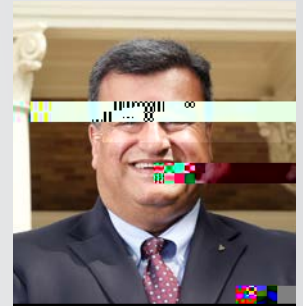


## Leadership in the Age of AI

By: Frank Ghannadian, Ph.D.  
Dean, Sykes College of Business



Frank Ghannadian, Ph.D.

Man of us have become accustomed to using data to make decisions for almost every aspect of our lives. From the products we buy to the services we use, data is everywhere. In the business world, data is used to analyze market trends, customer behavior, and operational efficiency. However, as we move into the age of AI, the way we use data is changing. AI can process vast amounts of data in seconds, identifying patterns and trends that humans might miss. This raises the question: How do we ensure that AI is used responsibly and ethically? As leaders, we must be vigilant in ensuring that AI is used to enhance our decision-making process, rather than replace it. We must also be transparent about our use of AI and ensure that our data is secure and protected. In the end, the key to successful leadership in the age of AI is to embrace the technology while maintaining a strong ethical foundation.

How do CEOs and VPs of leading companies lead with AI as part of the equation? Authors Anderson and Zettlemeier say in their book *Leading with AI and Analytics*, AI and analytics are not just fads and are here to stay. The message that in addition to being responsible for budgets, strategic planning and accountability, in order to succeed, leaders need to make calls on tough decisions based on the data on hand. The authors realize that understanding data is hard and those with a Ph.D. in data science are better equipped to understand what the charts and indicators show. However, successful leaders are able to look at the data and the analytical output and ask the right questions leading to a better decision with that understanding.

PAGE 7

> 2025 Leadership Summit  
February 12, 2025





70 to the high 40s when I did a 3-minute mindfulness exercise through my Fitbit device - that evidence convinced me.

Mindfulness cultivates focused awareness and decision-making acumen. Emotional awareness, resilience, fosters a deeper understanding of emotions, facilitating learning and growth even in challenging circumstances. And this emotional awareness is not just an individual's emotions, it also includes understanding other's emotions. Learning from feelings can help one remember that discomfort can mean growth. One of the findings from our U.S. Navy SEAL study was that one of the keys to success in SEAL school (Called Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training, or BUD/S) was that SEAL candidates learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Humor, a hallmark of resilient individuals, reframes crises as opportunities for growth and fosters a positive outlook. Without being asked about humor, over one third of the candidates in our BUD/S interviews mentioned humor as a key to their

On paper, the morning of March 16, 2020 should have been my dream come true. I had finally reached the peak of my ambitious career climb: I was named the new chief executive officer (CEO) of Girl Scouts of West Central Florida (GSWCF). Soon after, I plunged into reality of the enormous challenges to come.

As a first-time CEO, I found myself at the helm of an organization dedicated to building girls of courage, confidence and character, just as the world was plummeting into unprecedented chaos. The COVID-19 pandemic instantly changed the landscape for my role in the thriving organization I inherited as descending to record a 33% membership loss and substantial revenue decline.

The pandemic was reshaping every aspect of our lives. But I believed that our core mission remained as relevant as ever. While many organizations scrambled to pivot in 2020-2021, we chose a different path. We rallied around the word **resilience**. We pushed forward with mission-deliver methods that embraced digital and outdoor experiences, and encouraged our Girl Scouts to support essential workers with their kind

cdhL-35-5a121-11(c)-11(cdh-4.1-14.2 (c7)-10n)--4.5 t9BcLh95.5 lh5-9E1 42h0.4sdd3 arh-132o614.2dro(t1 1-14.2 (c)-92 J T 0.95125(r(4a)--1. lhn)-2).6 (.4e..6 k.52 7-1)-11

## Chapter 5 Leading Change From Perseverance to Growth: A Full-Time CEO's Journey

training resources, after action reports, and more. As passionate and committed as they were, I could not ignore the exhaustion too many people were experiencing. Sadly, we lost some great people to boot that year. I knew I needed to inspire a healthier pace of work and encourage even more streamlined execution.

In 2023, our word for the year was STRIDE. I challenged staff to seek their own personal stride. I encouraged them to set boundaries, decrease duplicated efforts, and streamline systems so that we were working smarter not harder for our mission and members. Collectively, we defined our values, desired leader behaviors and strategic priorities. We stopped reinforcing wheels and started emphasizing the value of time. We acknowledged the fact that most of our programs and commitment engagement happens on the weekend, so we need to make it a norm that the hours our staff are required to work outside of typical business hours.

To be honest, I think we are still working on our

stride. I know I am. My passion and commitment to our cause both fuels and nags me. That's why I keep practicing positive intelligence techniques because they help me keep my stride and lead with stride.

### Lesson #4: Uplift as You Grow

By 2024, we began to see the fruits of our labor. Our pace of work was improving, and we were building momentum. It was time to celebrate a remarkable achievement: we had become one of the fastest-growing Girl Scout councils in the country. This realization sparked our theme for the year: UPLIFT.

The concept of 'uplift' became our north star, guiding our efforts to elevate our people, our mission, and our impact. We implemented a multi-faceted approach to include positive culture, rebuilding experiences, professional development opportunities, and more employee recognition.

We also amplified the impact of Girl Scouting across our communities. We generated a continuous drumbeat of stories that celebrated our amazing Girl Scouts and volunteers and showcased the many ways they are using their courage, confidence and character to make the world a better place.

Uplifting our people has created more engagement and stronger relationships, which are essential

ingredients for continued growth.

### Lesson #5: Progress Transforms

Looking back, I see a pattern in my approach to change management since joining Girl Scouts of West Central Florida. Each year's theme built upon the last, creating a narrative of resilience, purposeful adaptation, and sustainable growth all in service to our mission to empower girls.

We persevered through the initial crisis, believing in our ability to emerge stronger and more diverse than ever before. We found our stride, creating systems that allowed us to work efficiently while expanding our reach. We uplifted our staff, our volunteers, and the girls we serve, fostering a positive and more collaborative culture for all.

I also see that as my team and our organization evolved, so did I. Fear of failure has been replaced with confidence, clarity, and determination to keep doing the work that I have to practice and recommit to everyday.

Finally, this journey has taught me that effective change management isn't about grand, disruptive gestures. It's about consistent, purposeful steps guided by a clear vision that builds on momentum. With so many leaders seeking to make transformational change, I have to wonder: what if transformation is not about the change at all? Perhaps it is simply progress multiplied.



Na'ama Veltri, Marissa King, Dean Frank Ghannadian, Deirdre Dion and Bella Galante in a live-streaming 2024 Leadership Showcase event.



For more information, contact the TECO Energy Center for Leadership:  
(813) 257-3782 | [info@ut.edu](mailto:info@ut.edu) | [ut.edu/cfl](http://ut.edu/cfl)



## TECO Energy Center for Leadership, Advisory Board

**Laura Simon**

*C | M | O*  
B&B Protector Plans Inc.

**Ed Valaitis**

*M | P*  
Edison Advanced

**Emily Fletty**

*F | P*  
Lots Growth Solutions

**Tracy McPhail Reed, Ph.D.**

*H | R | B | P*  
Tampa Electric Company

**Erik Ronne**

*V | P | S | M*  
T. Rowe Price

**John Townsend, Ph.D.**

*V | P |*  
Ascensus

## TECO Energy Center for Leadership, Faculty and Staff

**F. Frank Ghannadian, Ph.D.**

*D | S | C | B |*  
Director

**Bella Galperin, Ph.D.**

*D | P | M*  
Senior Associate Director

**Deirdre Dixon, Ph.D.**

*A | P | M*  
Associate Director

**Stephanie Thomason, Ph.D.**

*P | M*  
Associate Director

**Dominique Walker**

*C |*  
Sikes College of Business Operations