



Leading Women podcast
Commonwealth Bank Women in Focus

Episode 1: Tory Archbold, CEO and Founder of Powerful Steps

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Interviewee: Tory Archbold

Featuring: Julienne Price, Executive Manager Women in Focus

Tory Archbold, CEO and Founder of Powerful Steps talks about how her values, passion, integrity and delivery drives everything she does and discusses the power of your networks, owning your story and trusting your intuition.

Julienne [00:00:02] Welcome to Leading Women, your place to share and celebrate real stories and access the tools and resources to help activate your leadership. Hi, I'm Julienne Price, Executive Manager of CommBank's Women in Focus and Leading Women is just one of the ways we support women at all stages of their business journey. So no matter where you are on your journey, we're here. Enjoy this episode as we redefine the business landscape together.

Shivani [00:00:34] Welcome to Leading Women, the place to ignite your leadership and redefine the business landscape. I'm your host, Shivani Gopal, and today's episode is an energetic chat with an inspiring self-directed leader. Tory Archbold, founder and director of Powerful Steps, shares how her journey started with rejection and how her values, passion, integrity and delivery drives everything she does. From launching the world's biggest retail names like Zara in Australia to coffee dates with Oprah and the White House, we cover the power of your networks, owning your own story and trusting your intuition. Welcome to Leading Women, Tory.

Tory [00:01:18] I'm so excited to be here, Shivani. Human connection is the best connection and I'm delighted that we're sitting opposite each other today for this powerful conversation.

Shivani [00:01:27] Indeed, we're doing things differently in a new way post-COVID world. And it's so lovely to have you here. Tory, there's no leadership journey quite like yours. Can you share with us your layers of leadership from your humble beginnings to now?

Tory [00:01:41] It's so hard to explain how a woman develops her career and her leadership skills but mine actually started with rejection and it started over coffee date. And I'm a big believer in human connection to build a powerful network. And when I returned from London after doing the working holiday visa in my early 20s, I set about having three coffee dates a week, one with someone who was in my tribe, one with someone I wanted to partner with and one with someone completely outside my comfort zone. So I was sitting in this cafe called Bills, which you probably know in Crown Street, Surry Hills, and it was with a man that I trusted with all my heart. And I said to him, I would like to start a media communications agency and I would like to partner with the world's top performing brands, celebrities and influencers and I'm going to start this agency in Australia and I'm going to take it global. And he looked at me and he said, why would you want to do that? And I said, because I can, because I had fallen in love with storytelling from my time in London, where I'd had the opportunity to work with the best of the best, like Viacom, Columbia Tristar, George Lucas Films because on the working holiday visa, and you've got these short bursts of working with the best of the best, which I thought was really my training ground for what I wanted to achieve in my career. And I asked him, why? Why do you think I can't do this? And he said, well, I think you're best suited to go and complete your interior design degree, to get married, have those three children, join a few clubs and just live your best life. And I remember walking out of that coffee date and I don't want to swear on the podcast, but something inside of me was like, I'm going to do this. I am going to create this powerful business. And I was sick of being placed in a box because when I was at school, my report card always said, she's disruptive, she communicates too much, she's a talker. All of these things actually became my superpower. And everything that people told me I

couldn't do, I knew I was capable of doing at a world class or, you know, world best or world first. And so when I walked out of that café, that's basically how Torstar was born. I started my first business at 24. I did attract the world's top performing brands, celebrities and influencers. I built a team of 22. I was not degree educated; I was educated through the power of my connections. And at one point in time, I had two personal assistants one to run my business with me, and another because I was a single mum for 12 years of the 20 years that I had Torstar. So, you know, it was an incredible journey, but I always say that my journey started from rejection.

Shivani [00:04:29] Isn't that incredible, Tory? Your journey started from rejection and what that tells me is that your opinion and your definition of success came from deep within you, not someone else's opinion of success and what your life should look like, but your own figure of success. So that tells me that you had this innate trust in self-leadership and that built Torstar. Can you share with us that incredible story.

Tory [00:04:54] I just trusted that I could do it. And I had this manifestation board about what brands, what people I wanted to connect with, what countries I wanted to visit, what I wanted to achieve along the highway of life and I never questioned that I couldn't do it. And I built that business brick by brick. You know, I started off with a hand-me-down computer in a one-bedroom studio in Paddington. I then begged my dad for some space in his office, which was in the CBD, because I knew that if I wanted to attract the right brands, I needed the right address. I needed to be in a hub where I was able to have more coffee dates and connect with other people. And so he actually, ironically, gave me the IT room in his office in the city, and that's where the first four staff that I employed, we all worked from the IT room. So this is crazy, like Torstar was literally built in a room that had technology everywhere with hand-me-down computers. And then eventually I bought my own office space in Pitt Street, and then Hunter Street, and then we had bigger premises out in Rosebery, you know, as we built the business. But along the way I never said to myself, this is hard or I can't do this. I always said to myself, I want to work with the best of the best, which means I need to be the best of the best and to be the best of the best, you need to be agile. You need to have an open heart, an open mind, but most importantly, you need to understand what's going on in the world. So when you look at the roll call of businesses that I launched into Australia and I guess the greatest example of that is Zara. You know, it's the number one retail brand in the world. How did they find me? They found me through my values of passion, integrity, delivery and you know, when you start with nothing but self-belief, when you start with nothing except your values, your intent and your purpose, you can achieve and build a really extraordinarily powerful business. And people start to take note and people want to connect with you because they can see that energy, that passion, that integrity that you work within that delivery. And so I always say, you know, people ask me this one question. How did Inditex find you? And I say through my values, because they're aligned, they're passionate, they work with integrity. But most importantly, every customer that walks through that door anywhere in the world has an experience. And so, you know, Torstar ended up being this extraordinary business. But when it was time to shut the doors on that and create Powerful Steps, I wanted to benchmark myself against a brand. And I said, what was the best brand in the world that I ever worked with? What was the most extraordinary experience? And it was that day when 22,000 people walked through the doors of Zara. We did \$1,000,000 in sales, and it goes down in retail history as being the number one retail launch in the world for Inditex. Amazing! But that wasn't me that was teamwork that was us. It was me working in partnership and in alignment with another company's values to create that magic.

Shivani [00:08:01] It's all about that, isn't it? It's all about that value. And we hear that so often, right? Live your life in accordance with your values, not someone else's, your values. And it's so much easier said than done. You've displayed that so powerfully because it's hard to take those actions and you've done one very big action off the back of that, haven't you, Tory? You built this incredible business Torstar. You've achieved these incredible milestones with one of your clients, Zara, as you've just said. And then you had to have the courage to dig deep back into your values and pivot and say, hang on, I'm going to shut this all down and start again. What happened there?

Tory [00:08:38] I think as a woman in business and definitely a woman in a leadership role, you need to trust your gut instinct. And I knew for three years before I closed the doors on Torstar that something new was starting to bubble within me and I was just waiting for the right timing. And I'm going to share a little story with you, Shivani, because I think this is really important for women in leadership, women in business, whether they're an entrepreneur, a corporate warrior, whatever it is, trust your gut instinct, but also follow the

signs. So I was launching Kate Spade into Australia and it was a big company that was licencing a whole lot of other high profile brands around the world. And I remember my team, because I had taken a step back and I trusted them to run the business, had said to me, I know you're not a morning person, but will you come in because all of these people are flying in and they'd like to meet you from the senior leadership team? And I said, yes, of course I'll come in. And I remember speaking to these women. It was so distinct in my memory, and she said to me, who are you? Now at that point in time, I had been responsible for some of the biggest launches in Australia, but also responsible for taking Australian brands and transforming them into global brands overseas, where they sold for, you know, tens of if not hundreds of millions of dollars. And, you know, I can give Sukin and Seafolly as an example. And I said, my name is Tory Archbold and she said, I've never heard of you. And I said, oh, well, let me tell you a little bit about how I started my business and what brands we've brought into the country. And I said to her, tell me a little bit about your business and what brands you're launching. And at that time, L Brands' Victoria's Secret was a billion dollar brand that everyone wanted to work with and she said, oh, we're launching Victoria's Secret into Australia in six weeks. And I said, oh, have you appointed an agency? And she said, no. And I said, I'd love to put myself forward. And she said, there's no chance that you will win this business, but send your credentials through and let's see what happens. So I went back to the office and I said to the team, I don't know what's going on, but we're not connected. No one knows who we are. We're not visible in a virtual world or in a human world. Let's put our credentials together. I'm going to send them off. I want that business. Now, I sent the credentials off at 7 p.m. that night. I got onto LinkedIn because most of my brands I represented were around the world and I found out who knew the woman that was a key decision maker. And I started connecting with people on LinkedIn and I said, listen late to the party, but I really want this piece of business. Can you advocate for me? Now of course it's a waiting game and I just thought, I'm just going to leave this up to the universe, let's see what comes down. 11 o'clock at night, you are one of two agencies shortlisted for this business. So it's like, boom, Shivani, you just need to own your story, you need to own your power and you need to connect with other people. And what had happened when I was building that business and taking time out for myself, I trusted other people to do that, whereas I should have kept that human connection. Now, the moral of the story is within a short space, six weeks we won Victoria's Secret. And I landed Drew Barrymore and launched Flower Beauty into Australia. And so I said to myself, guys, we've got to show the market that we're relevant. So we put a trade release out. We said Torstar has won three big American clients, the best of the best within six weeks. And then I waited for it to unfold. Now each brand that I launched, every experience that I had, whether it was backstage in New York for the Victoria's Secret show, you know, working with the best of the best and that team was incredible. Or whether it was working with Drew out here, a little part of me was dying and I was like, you know what? It's time to trust my gut instinct. You have created and built powerful brands for other people. It's time for you to do that for yourself. And this is where the power of the story actually lands because throughout my entire career, I wore black. I was the one that was pulling the levers for CEOs, for board directors, for CMOs, you name it. I was doing nothing for myself. And that valuable lesson about reaching out and showing people who you are and what you're capable of doing because we've all built those credentials, is what made me say, if I can do this for myself, surely I can do it for other people. And that's how Powerful Steps is born. It was by saying, you know what? I'm going out on top of my game. I've worked with every single brand in the world that I want to. I have worked with the best of the best, but it's time for someone else to do that, and it's time for the new journey to begin. And so here we are today. And I could not be happier. I'm, you know, stepped into my purpose. I understand the reason why I've got this business, but most importantly, the work that I've done over the last 20 years is now what I teach other people to do, understand their power, their story, how they can become better leaders and better people.

Shivani [00:13:34] There are so many resounding, similar messages that come through in your story, Tory and that is you keep digging back into your values and your courage. You did that for the best of the best. You wanted to be the best of the best. You did it, and now you were going to do it for yourself. And one of the ways that you did it, just going back to that earlier theme that you talked about, and funnily enough, you and I have done this as well previously, is you capitalised on the power of your networks. You talk so much about bringing humans together. You've talked about it just now in this podcast. You and I have done coffee dates together, but you also have used those power of networks to land that Victoria's Secret deal. Go you. Tell us more about capitalising the power of networks and what else you've done with it.

Tory [00:14:20] Yes, in my entire life, I was always taught coffee, not lunch. So for less than \$10, you can have a mutual exchange of energy. And you and I've done this with a coffee date, is the power of connection, the power of sharing your story, and most importantly, the power of asking someone else, how can I help

you? is what builds a business. So whether you know you're a start up, whether you're in corporate, whether you need to land that big project, the power of your network cannot be underestimated. And, you know, so often people have the most incredible connections that they've met along the highway of life, but they don't know how to use them. So I'll break it down for you. So you have one coffee date a week with someone that you know, so it could be someone in your team, right? Well, when I talk about someone in your team, do you know what they eat for lunch? You know how many kids they have? Are they married? Are they divorced? Are they struggling? Like, what is it? Get to know them because the power of that connection and those memories that you create together forms a bond. The second one that I always do is partnership, and I value partnership because in Torstar, you know, Nespresso was one of my biggest clients for 11 years, and on average in Torstar on my partnerships lasted eight years. So when I form a partnership, I value it. So that coffee date that you reach out every week for a partnership, don't just think that I'm just going to meet them and nothing's going to happen. You're meeting them for a reason. Understand the offering between the two of you, what you can give to each other to build it and form a powerful partnership because that's where you can actually elevate and amplify your business and theirs to the next level. And the third one is always someone completely outside my comfort zone. So in my Powerful Steps programs with women in corporate and entrepreneurs, I always say to them, think big. Now I can't say to people, think big if I don't think big. So last year I said to them, I would like to meet Oprah. I would like to somehow be in her tribe, be on her podcast, be in her magazine, because I feel such a powerful connection to her. Now, guess what? I can't just call up and say, hey, Oprah, I want to have a coffee date with you. So what do I do? I tap back into my network, and I connected virtually with her former Chief of Staff on a virtual coffee date when she was in Toronto, I was in Sydney. And we just said to each other, how can we help each other? We've had the connection through someone that we value, but what can we create together that's going to actually deliver impact to others? And I was lucky enough to interview Libby Moore, her name is on my podcast a couple of weeks ago, and we both just said to each other, this is an outside of the comfort zone coffee date. Then it became a partnership coffee date. But now she's in my tribe. So when you actually elevate those three coffee dates, you can actually build not only a powerful network, but you can deliver global impact. And so I put out to the universe again, I'd love to do something with the Obamas. And yesterday, I was lucky to interview Marissa Lee, who worked with the Obamas and got insight into, you know, how do you work with someone who works in the White House for a presidency? So never, ever think just because you're the girl that grew up in a normal household that you cannot connect with anyone in the world because you can. You just need to believe that someone, somewhere in the world has a connection that can connect you to what you want.

Shivani [00:17:46] If I think it, I can do it. If I believe it, I can make it happen. I love that so much, and I love that the power of your network becomes your tribe and the way that you intentionally have coffee with people and you change the dynamics. You're not sitting there saying, hey, this is what I want from you. You're saying, how can I help you? And really bringing that person in, you're being so externally focused on that other person, which has had phenomenal impacts for you. Tory, I wonder thinking back to, you know, my world when I was in corporate life and I wasn't trying to catch the attention of the Obamas, mind you, I would have loved to have thought of that back then or Oprah. And who doesn't love Oprah? But I was trying to catch the attention of some of my peers, some of my leaders. How could I use this power of coffee dates and networking to really maximise the way that you have in corporate world?

Tory [00:18:38] Such a great question, so I created the coffee challenge because when I worked with Nespresso for a decade, I learnt about the art of conversation. Now if you work in corporate, you obviously have a brand message, corporates also anchor to values intention purpose, which is exactly how I built my business. So it's streamlined across corporate and entrepreneurial and you need to be really, really focused. So some weeks I have 22 coffee dates. They're virtual, they're 15 minutes each because I just want to connect with people. So the coffee challenge is this, you can go to my website, it's powerful-steps.com, download it and map out 12 weeks of coffee dates. So it's intentional building of not only your personal brand, but the brand that you represent. Now, what I do is every two weeks I go back to the first coffee date that I had and I say to myself, have I commented on their social media? Have I sent them something that's of value to them? Is it something that I want to take further in terms of a partnership or a project or a deal, whatever it is? And I keep the conversation going so at the end of the 12 weeks, when you've literally coffee dated with so many people, we're talking 36-new connections, right, something out of those connections is going to give you the most extraordinary opportunity. So if you're in corporate and you say I'm invisible, I keep getting passed over for a promotion. I want a pay rise. I'm not getting it all. My team is not listening to me

because all you need to do is shift your mindset. You need to connect with others, and you need to show what your superpower is. Show your value.

Shivani [00:20:21] Isn't that incredible Tory? Showing your value by meeting with so many people? And if I think about that, there's one thing that is a great enabler to achieving that. And that is, as you've said, really owning your personal story, owning your personal brand, because otherwise, if someone were to approach me for coffee, one of the things that I'm thinking is, why am I going to have coffee with you and so how is our stories connected together, which takes me to your power and your belief in storytelling, because you use that to maximise your life and all of these coffee dates and all of those outcomes. How do we do that in everyday world? How do we create our stories and share that and own our power?

Tory [00:21:07] So I teach others to own their story, to own their power. Now, when I was running Torstar, you know, I was seen as this glamorous publicist around the world, you know, responsible for all of these extraordinary launches and results for other people. And I have to step in and say to myself, well, I am my own brand this time. And if I want to teach other people to do this, I have to do it myself. So, number one, get rid of the black dresses, right? I don't want to be invisible, but also I really need to understand the power of who I am. So when you're looking at storytelling, you break it down into five segments. Number one is this, when you grew up, what kind of family life did you have? You know, did you have a loving family? Was it a broken family? What were you like at school? What did people say about you? What were you feeling? When you leave school, who did you want to become? So at the start of this conversation, I said everyone wanted to put me in a box, say, you're going to be an interior designer. You're going to go and get married. And this is your life path, Tory, suck it up. This is what it is and I said, well, no. So I booked myself to London, yeah, which becomes the third part of my story, because in London I fell in love with media, with storytelling, the power of creating and building brands and delivering impact, right, because people are avid readers. People want information. So even if you go on a holiday, you research the best places to eat, to stay, all that stuff. It's the same when you connect with a person; you're researching them, which is digital footprint. So number three, it's like, you know, I started Torstar because no one else was doing it. I wanted to do it. I knew I could. Part four of your story is always a game changing moment. So for me, I was working 80 hours a week. I was a single mum. I was running on adrenaline. You know, like so many people in business and you're exhausted and you literally are like, how do I make this happen? How can I keep building this empire, right? And you feel that you just have to keep chasing the dollar. Well, guess what happened to me, 72 hours before I was due on a flight for London, I had all this media flying over with me for one of the biggest retail brands out of the U.K., my appendix burst unexpectedly. I got septicemia. I was in a coma. I lost eight kilos in five days. And it was basically I was at ground zero, like I was burnt to the ground. And so what I had to work out was, who am I? Who am I surrounding myself with and what do I want to become? And I quickly realise in stage four of my story that I'd gone off-piste. I wasn't in alignment with so many things I value and I had to reinvest in myself, to rediscover myself, to work out what it was that I truly wanted. So I always say that near-death experience was actually the best experience because it was my biggest challenge, but it gave me the greatest possibilities to step into who I am today, which is point five saying goodbye to a successful career, not selling my soul, and taking the millions of dollars that were offered for Torstar and saying to myself, I can and I will do that again, but I'm going to do it my way, learning from the challenges that have become possibilities. So when you pull the power of that story together, you can see the different patterns throughout my life, right, I'm passionate about following my path. I'm definitely resilient, I'm agile, but also I'm not afraid to conquer a challenge. So I looked at that and I said, the timing's right to share the power of that story. But also, if you're corporate woman listening to this and you're saying no one's seeing who I am. Everyone saw me as a girl in the little black dress, as a single mum, so I went to Marie Claire magazine. I said, listen, guys, you've been my client for eight years. I would love to do, you know, a story on my career. And Nicky Briger at the time, who was editor, said, I'm going to include you in the single mum running global business, you'll be a part of these four women. And I said to her, Nicky, that's not my story. And she said but that's who you are, that's who we know you as. And I said, who's the journalist? And all of a sudden, my intuition kicked in and she was like, it's Ali Pascoe. And I said, I want to speak to her. And I said to her, I don't know what happened but I said, this is my actual story. And she was like, Tory, I can't believe that all of these extraordinary things happened to you and you've never spoken about it. I'm going to go back to Nicky, we're going to translate this into a three-page story. It's going to be about success and survival, about what happens with women in leadership roles where you're one face to the world. But when you walk in the door, something else is completely the opposite of what people think. Now, that story transformed my life. It was the hardest decision, to be honest with myself, but most importantly, be honest with everyone else. But what it did was it gave me freedom to

actually anchor myself in my truth and propel forward. So for anyone listening out there in corporate thinking that your story doesn't matter, let me tell you it does because when I released that story, I had women and actually more men in powerful positions from all around the world reach out and say to me, Tory, I can't believe that you did this launch for us, or you created this brand strategy and you delivered these results when that was going on in your life. Now, that's a brave woman that owns her story and owns her power, and that is how you become a great leader by anchoring everything that you do to your truth and not being afraid of being judged.

Shivani [00:26:39] And what I really got from that Tory is so many people will make assumptions on who we are, on what our story is, how it relates to them, why it matters to the world. And you went, no, only I own my story. I own that power. And I will tell it and I will show you how you should share it with the world. And by doing that, you've got a powerful outcome of not being mixed in with a whole bunch of other women. Nothing wrong with that but you had your own three-page story because you owned it for yourself. Let's talk about advice now, Tory, at Leading Women, we're committed to activating women's leadership. What tool has ignited your leadership so that you can share with us in our Leadership Toolbox?

Tory [00:27:21] Okay, the best advice I ever got was from a Buddhist monk in Thailand.

Shivani [00:27:27] Oh, I'm loving this already.

Tory [00:27:29] So for all of you burnt out career women, you just need to stop. So he said to me, Tory, what do you do for yourself? And I couldn't actually answer the question. I was not doing anything for myself. I was pleasing everyone. I was not investing in self-care. I was just investing in everyone else's best outcomes. And I said to him, I'm too busy to meditate because he said to me, you need to meditate. And he goes, no one's too busy to meditate. He said, this is what we're going to start with. When you drive to work, what do you do? And of course, because I was a mum, I'm running a business; my clients are placed all over the world. I was probably like many people listening to these podcasts, calling people, making stuff done, briefing in, delegating the whole way to work. So if you're like, boom, boom, boom, get into the car, boom, boom, boom, get into office, boom, boom, boom, you've got no time, right? And he said to me, switch off everything in the car and just become aware of your surroundings. So that was the first thing that I did. And I was like, wow, people are really aggressive on the road. People have got anger issues. Oh, a little birdie landed outside my window. I just started to notice things. And then I went back to the same health retreat and I went back to him and I said, okay I have mastered the art of doing nothing on the way to work. What is the next thing? And he said, who do you have a shower with? And I said myself. And he said, this is going to become your sanctuary. And this actually has been my saving grace. It's shifted energy. It's built powerful businesses. It's built me into the woman that I am today. And it's very simple. I have lavender oil, I get three drops of lavender oil on my décolletage and I inhale, exhale three times really deeply in the morning. And then I just listen to what ever pops into my head. And it's normally like, oh Tory, today do this or maybe connect with this person or this would be a great idea. My creativity is at an all time high and because I take that time every morning to do that, my day flows. So it gives me the ability to see what doors are meant for me, what doors are meant for others. So you walk through the right doors. You make less mistakes. You're in flow. But most importantly because I've slowed down my mind and my existence and I put myself first because I believe a happy heart is a magnet for miracles, I'm able to see the miracles that come into my day, which is a most extraordinary thing for a woman, who said that she was too busy for herself. My eyes are wide open. I end my day in the shower, which I hope you do too.

Shivani [00:30:02] I do.

Tory [00:30:02] With the same.

Shivani [00:30:03] We're getting personal now, Tory.

Tory [00:30:05] With the same ritual but I end it with gratitude. Now, the gratitude piece is so important in leadership because you've got to look at when you face a challenge, how to translate it into a possibility but when the possibility becomes reality and it delivers you that golden nugget that you have been waiting for all your life, you have to remember, thank you.

Shivani [00:30:30] And I think that ending note on thank you and gratitude is so apt because we're coming to the end of our time together. And of course, this podcast is for Leading Women. And I'm so grateful that you've shared so many insights into how you lead yourself, because here's what I got. You can't lead women unless you lead yourself, unless you tap into your values and your courage and you dare to walk your path on exactly that, dictated by no one else but you. Tory Archbold, thank you so much for being part of Leading Women's podcast.

Tory [00:31:00] Thank you for having me.

Julienne [00:31:02] Thanks for listening to Leading Women, where we can all activate and redefine the business landscape. So now it's over to you, access the links, tips and tools discussed in this episode at womeninfoocus.com.au and subscribe to Leading Women so you don't miss an episode. Leave a review, spread the word and let's commit to keeping the conversation going at [#leadingwomensaus](https://twitter.com/leadingwomensaus)

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