



PT WORK Force®

The Global Power of One: Enabling Change, Strength in Adversity Through Diversity

Wednesday, June 7 | 11:00–12:00 PM

Lesra Martin, Attorney and Motivational Speaker

Once you begin to try, you begin to achieve. Circumstances don't define you; they challenge you. How you respond is what defines you.

Lesra Martin grew up in poverty in the Bronx, experiencing a rough childhood, constantly avoiding gang members in his high school. At a very young age, Lesra suffered major injuries and trauma as a result of a fall sustained while playing with friends. During a lengthy hospital stay, he began questioning the value of living in a community where violence prevailed. Hospital staff didn't give up on Lesra, helping him heal and understand his life was, in fact, worth living.

Inspirational strangers from Canada came into life to provide him with love, hope and an education. Taking Lesra under their wing, they brought him to the Board of Education office in Toronto to have him tested. Lesra became despondent when after graduating 10th grade he tested at a 2nd grade reading level. He thought he would never make a difference or contribution to society and was told he would never achieve his dream of becoming a lawyer.

Lesra was encouraged to achieve and reminded to reach back to lend a hand when and where he could. He promised himself he would never give up. Hope and dream provided him with the importance of making and keeping promises. You don't have to be perfect, but you must try to get a few things right. Do your best and be willing to try again.

Lesra had conviction and refused to give up, changing the negative voice in his head to a positive one—“flipping the coin.” He began to conquer his fears and gained a new perspective, advancing from being illiterate and living in the ghetto to earning an education, and ultimately achieving his dream of becoming an attorney. He attributes his success to the people he met along his journey and who believed in him. It all happened because strangers invested with him, partnering with him, and gave him access to means to be successful.

Lesra believes his life experience can serve as inspiration for anyone feeling overwhelmed or hopeless in the face of obstacles and challenges. He shared these suggestions:

“Flipping the coin” and making a difference in life.

- Make a promise to yourself when your back is against the wall.
- Look on the other side of situations and embrace the importance of coming together and sharing ideas.
- Bring the human element to the work our members do.
- Understand the purpose of life is to lead a life of purpose.

- Don't discount the power of will and determination.

Your future doesn't need to be determined by your past. Success comes down to how we perceive things and is determined by your focus—don't let others get in your way; if they do, alter your focus. Imagine the best, you never know unless you try.

Themes to embrace the future:

- Hope
- Heart
- Human Spirit

It all comes back to attitude and believing in the power of the human spirit will either make you or break you. With the right attitude and belief, small doors can open into very large rooms. Strangers can provide true access to opportunities.

Everyone faces challenges in their personal and professional lives, getting lost in the daily grind of our lives. Remind yourself of who you are, and your contributions matter. Pay homage where it's due.

Don't be deterred by the challenges and difficulties that lie ahead, instead remain passionate and committed to dealing with adversity; do not let yourself be detoured. Change is difficult but be flexible in your approach. and challenges head on, you cannot. Start where you are, work with what you have, do what you need to do. And remember the importance of the human element—building and maintaining relationships.

When asked what policy/approach can impact economic mobility and to help employers be more successful, Lesra shared that **DEI goals = smart business sense**.

- More diverse boards are more successful, and diversity brings greater employee engagement.
- Diverse teams substantially outperform. They are better problem solvers, more creative and more profitable.
- Different cultures and backgrounds create a diverse team that is more intuitive, leading to innovative solutions and, in turn, business success.
- Diverse workplaces present a strong foundation for attracting talented employees. Employees enjoy a strong great sense of belonging, are happier and stay.

People are afraid to talk about DEI issues. While you may not be against DEI, ask yourself, "Am I for it?" Inclusive policies mean you create a safe work environment where people can share what bothers them and what's impacting their abilities to be successful. Make sure everyone feels like they matter—everyone's opinion is important. Recognition is half the battle.

Recommended motivational books:

- "Who Moved My Cheese?: An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life," by Spencer Johnson and Kenneth Blanchard
- "The Power of Promise: Life Lessons Encountered on My Journey from Illiteracy to a Lawyer," by Lesra Martin
- "The Right Words at the Right Time" by Marlo Thomas, a compilation of heartwarming personal revelations from today's greatest luminaries whose lives were changed by hearing the right words at the right time, ultimately attributing to their success.