

Founding mother

Fellow judges and audiences, let's kick off the speech with a quick experiment.

When I say movies, I want you to close your eyes (or not) and think of the characters or movie posters AS the keywords pop up - explorations! Secret missions! Superheroes! Wallstreet! Suit and ties! Winners of the Olympics! What gender do you see? Or Who do you see? Now, when I say desperate housewives, lovers, happy ever after, witches, yearning and weeping for love, begging partners to come back, NOW, who do you see?

I am not going to reveal the answers in your mind, but I bet everyone knows what point I'm trying to prove here. Well, if you think movies and mass media aren't the whole picture, let's take a look at the historical narrative, too.

If I were to let you guess the "founding father" of Wi-Fi, who comes to mind?

- A. Thomas Edison
- B. Elon Musk
- C. Michael Faraday
- D. Hedy Lamarr

Some of you might wonder, "Who's Hedy Lamarr?" - but that's the correct answer! SHE invented Wi-Fi. Soooooo, surprise, surprise, Wi-Fi's "founding father" is actually a woman!

Hedy Lamarr's life is a remarkable story of beauty, brains, and innovation. By the age of 16, she went to Europe alone to become a movie star, it was her role in the film *Ecstasy* where she appeared nude that sparked controversy, and the Catholic Church condemned her, but Hedy responded calmly, "If you use your imagination, you can see anyone nude."

While she had no formal training as a Hollywood star, she teamed up with a composer to develop a communication system that could guide torpedoes, which prevented enemies from intercepting

and jamming the remote guidance.// Their technology was the basis for GPS, Wi-Fi, and even Bluetooth.

Hedy's story is a powerful reminder that women are often seen only for their appearances, and often go unrecognized for their inner talents, especially when they defy traditional roles. // She was a professional inventor, but her beauty overshadowed her scientific genius for most of her life. // Yet, her legacy lives on today, as what she brought to the world is still the backbone of much of the wireless communication we now rely on. //

Just like what Hedy experienced, society tells girls what they can and can't do all the time. Growing up, I'd hear things like, "You are too outgoing for a girl," or "No amount of hard work on your own can compete with a good husband". It's like putting a glass ceiling above our heads and saying, "Aim for the stars, but don't expect to break through." Ironic. But don't get me wrong here; I am not trying to give another speech about imagining a world where every gender is equally encouraged to dream big; it is just kinda out of date. What I am trying to say here, is that, women, with our unique perspectives, resilience, and creativity, have the power to do business too.

I believe almost everyone grew up hearing the names of Elon Musk----founder of SpaceX and Tesla, who also helped create PayPal and Neuralink; Bill Gates----co-founder of Microsoft, the company that created Windows; Steve Jobs---- co-founder of Apple. But how many of you have heard the names of Oprah Winfrey---- founder of Harpo Productions, and later expanded into publishing, film production, and her television network, OWN; Maye Musk----a distinguished model of over five generations, an entrepreneur, nutritionist, and author; Melanie Perkins---- co-founder and CEO of Canva, founding the company at only 19 years old. **You see, although we are all about gender equality, the female entrepreneurship stories are still left untold.**

That's why I want to tell more of the stories of seemingly impossible female startups. In June, I visited Chengbu County in Hunan Province, a mountainous area that has recently been lifted out of poverty. There, I interviewed Wang Juan, who returned to her hometown to boost its economy

by starting a business. Her so-called "market research" began with posting random items on TikTok to identify potential products or services. Eventually, she started with the logistics industry, aiming to transfer goods from cities to the mountains. However, being a female employer, her employees were all men. No one listened to her, and her family members convinced her to give up, all believing girls can't boss over a male-friendly area. She always wanted to prove she could be the one who broke the barriers. And she did, being one of the first people in her hometown to start logistics, introducing the biggest logistics company in China---SF Express, making delivery more convenient for everyone in the village.

The constraints that limit women to thrive in entrepreneurship or many other fields often stem from societal expectations placed on their roles as caregivers. These expectations don't just limit women but also affect men, who may feel the pressure to be the sole providers, leaving little room for both genders to explore their full potential. When women are expected to take on the primary responsibility for child-rearing, household duties, and emotional labor, it becomes much harder for them to pursue careers or business ventures at the same level as men. Specifically, women entrepreneurs often work twice as hard to be seen, even when they reach the same milestones as their male counterparts. The lack of recognition isn't because women aren't succeeding—it's because society hasn't trained us to see women in these powerful roles.

It's time to change that narrative. Women have the same capacity for success, and it's time we start acknowledging their hard-earned achievements and maybe be part of them. Now, you may say – Well, society isn't stopping women! It's the 21st century; women can do anything they want!

I don't think that's how things really work. Let me put this in reality: if a successful 35-45-year-old businessman has a full-time stay-at-home mom as a wife, nobody bats an eye. We don't question it because, in our minds, a middle-aged businessman is expected to have that power and influence while their wife takes care of the family. Now, let's flip it—imagine a 35-45-year-old businesswoman with a young, handsome guy with abs, but not nearly rich enough to be the breadwinner, who has to spend more time taking care of house chores or supporting his partner's needs. We're likely to think, "Wait, something's off here, does she pay him a salary or sth?"

This is why we need to actively rethink and reshape how caregiving responsibilities are shared and supported. It's not just about pushing women to break free from traditional roles but ensuring that men are also free from the expectation of being the sole breadwinner. **We all have a role to play in driving this change.**

At home, it's simple: share the load. Let's stop pretending laundry has a gender. If one person cooks, maybe the other cleans up—or orders takeout, whatever works. Let's normalize dads who can fold a fitted sheet without applause, ok? Allow dads to appear at ballet recitals and moms to lead board meetings. And maybe, just maybe, let's stop high-fiving dads for “babysitting” their own kids. They're parenting, not running a marathon. And while we're at it, let's teach our kids early that there's no such thing as “women's work” or “men's work”—just work. Because seriously, anyone can multitask when snacks are involved.

In the workplace, let's push for common-sense policies. Paid parental leave? Yes, because parenting is not a “vacation.” Flexible work hours? Also, yes, because no one wants to be the person Zooming into daycare pick-up, and yes, human beings do have lives outside work. Gender-blind leadership opportunities? Absolutely. Can we finally stop asking women in interviews, “How will you manage kids and a career?” No one's asking your friend Steve that question.

Oh, and let's tackle hiring biases while we're at it. Talent and drive should matter more than outdated assumptions like, “What if she gets pregnant?” (Spoiler alert: it's not 1950 anymore.)

And mentoring women in leadership roles? It's not a charity; it's about giving talent the shot it deserves. But it doesn't stop there.

Outside the office, we can do more, too. Support women-owned businesses—yes, even the ones selling homemade candles on eBay. Together, we can break old patterns and create a future where everyone—regardless of gender—has the freedom to thrive.

Next time you hear of a female entrepreneur, close your eyes and think—who do you see? Is she leading missions, breaking barriers, shaping industries? Or do old stereotypes still cloud the vision? Next time, you have the creativity to make something new, dare to act, to lead, and to

challenge. Next time you feel fear or doubt, remember—it's not the obstacles that define you, but your courage to overcome them. Keep repeating—not just the names of the women who have led the way—but also the conviction that you, too, can rise and lead with power, passion, and purpose.