



Attitude Intervention: Lacey Leone McLaughlin Is Coaching Hollywood's Head Honchos to Behave Better. But Are They Listening?

by Chitra Ragavan · 24 Oct 2022 · 16 min read

Executive coaching is a whole new ballgame in the era of #MeToo, COVID-19, and the Great Resignation.

For Hollywood's elite executive coaches like [Lacey Leone McLaughlin](#), there's a pre-Weinstein and a post-Weinstein era, not so much in the volume of clients as in the tenor of the coaching.

Long before the disgraced Hollywood mogul gained global notoriety as a serial rapist and sexual abuser and became a potent symbol for Hollywood's rampant abuse of

power, Leone McLaughlin had a jam-packed schedule as one of Los Angeles's most highly trained coaches, and she was relied upon to elevate the film industry's cadre of executive and creative leaders.

For more than a decade, the seasoned veteran and president of her firm, [LLM Consulting Group](#), has been handpicked by movie studios to teach their mostly male leaders how to nurture, not exploit, the vulnerable actors and actresses and the “creative underclass” that fuels the Hollywood engine.

That's no easy task given the massive compensations and seemingly limitless power fueling the inflated egos of these studio brasses and head honchos, who often misconstrue this institutional largesse.



Lacey Leone McLaughlin

From a Nice-to-Have to a Must-Have

But what has changed for Leone McLaughlin and other coaches after the Weinstein scandal broke, she says, is how executive and leadership coaching is perceived.

In the old days, especially pre-COVID, when she was regularly physically working inside these studios, McLaughlin was able to walk the hallways anonymously. “Nobody knew who I was. I would put my head down. I wouldn't talk to people,” Leone McLaughlin remembers. “And in my head, I thought, *They must be, like, who is this crazy lady just walking around?*”

But as the allegations against Weinstein and other Hollywood executives hit the tipping point, as scores of women began calling out their abusers, triggering the powerful #MeToo movement, Leone McLaughlin's talent and expertise went from a nice-to-have to a must-have.

Coaching became more “intentional,” she told me, as studios “recognized there's a whole hell of a lot of risks associated with not helping these leaders do the right thing.”

Leone McLaughlin emphasizes that she has never coached Weinstein or anyone on his team. She's also careful to parse the difference between unrepentant lawbreakers like him and the majority of the well-intentioned male and female Hollywood and corporate executives who constitute her core clientele.

“Breaking the law is substantially different than having a day when you don't show up and demonstrate the leadership behaviors that we all need to see in people running big crews, big teams, and things to that extent. But it definitely changed the way organizations and individual leaders approach coaching,” Leone McLaughlin says.

A Second Trial with High Stakes

The conversations around justice, fairness, and equity will be back on the global news as [opening statements](#) begin this Monday in Weinstein's second rape and criminal sexual assault trial, this one in Los Angeles.

Prosecutors have [increased](#) the evidence and number of witnesses who will testify, a sign of the [high stakes](#), both for Weinstein and those he allegedly abused. Those stakes were raised late this summer, when New York's highest court ruled that Weinstein's lawyers could appeal his first trial, which resulted in a twenty-three-year sentence.

Throughout the trial, Weinstein has claimed he's innocent of the charges. Weinstein's team's surprise NY appeals court win has given the seventy-year-old disgraced mogul—who is in ill health—a long-shot chance of walking free. This puts added pressure on the LA prosecutors to keep Weinstein behind bars for his alleged crimes and bring justice to his victims.

Autumn of Accountability

The Weinstein trial is one of many in this autumn of accountability, what the Associated Press has described as a "[season of trials](#)" for Hollywood moguls "as high-profile sexual assault trials play out in courtrooms from coast to coast." It's also a key moment for the #MeToo movement to rediscover its voice, as evidenced by a recent sobering article by [Ashley Fetters Maloy](#) and [Paul Farhi](#) in the Washington Post analyzing what has happened to the "[Men of #MeToo](#)." The reporters concluded, "A few went to prison. Some have disappeared. But many are rebuilding their careers. And some were barely affected."

And a recent [story](#) in the Hollywood Reporter concluded that tinsel town’s most famous and once powerful advocacy group, Time’s Up, has “imploded” and turned into a “leaderless ghost organization, undone by conflicts of interest (and straight-up conflicts).”



Leone McLaughlin

“I Know They Are Listening”

Do these mixed verdicts bode ill for women? What message does it send to the bad boys of Hollywood and to powerful male and female executives the world over? What impetus do they have to listen to the voices of reason, like Leone McLaughlin’s?

She says—again separating the lawbreakers who “touted power as a currency” from her typical portfolio of career-focused clients—that yes, they are listening. “How I know they’re listening is because the conversation that I happen to have with these people, whether they’re men or women, is, ‘Do you like your job? If you like your job and you keep acting this way, you will no longer have a job.’ And the reason I know they’re listening is because they actually do things differently.”

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Leone McLaughlin describes herself as a cup-half-full kind of person, who believes that people want to do the right thing and care about their employees and the people they work with. "I think they came up in a very different culture, and they're trying to figure out what that looks like now and, for the most part, doing a really good job trying to figure it out," she says. "I think writers demonstrate to showrunners now how to develop the talent underneath them. I think producers and directors know they don't get to have the fits that they did in the past. I mean, you can see the incremental change. Now, is it enough? No, probably not. Is it slow? Yes, probably it is. But, are our expectations different? Yes. Are people being held accountable differently? Yes. And do I think that's exciting? I do."

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"This Action Versus That Action"

The tone and tenor of Leone McLaughlin's conversations depend on the type of client, she says. Corporate leaders, she points out, are constantly getting feedback from the people they work with, compared to their counterparts in the entertainment industry.

"And it's more around, 'Help me understand what it is you're trying to achieve. Let's think about the best ways to do that,'" Leone McLaughlin says. "And what does this need to look like? What are going to be the implications if you do this action versus that action?"

On the other hand, with her Hollywood executive clients, she says, "When I have the conversation around 'Do you want to keep this job?' These tend to be people who fall

into high-profile, high-risk-high-reward jobs. These aren't, you know, the people I'm working with in more corporate environments. With those folks, there's not a whole hell of a lot of people speaking the truth."

Often, these conversations about actions and consequences can become very difficult. "So with those difficult conversations, I tend to come in as the person who doesn't pull punches and as the person who truly believes I'm saying what needs to be said to them for the benefit of the work they're doing and for the benefit of whatever output they're trying to put into the world—whether it's film or music or whatever it is—because I have no skin in the game other than helping that individual be successful," Leone McLaughlin says.

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One positive outcome of the Weinstein saga and other Hollywood accountability debacles that Leone McLaughlin has observed is the change in the ratio of her clients. "Early on, it was almost exclusively men," she says. "Now the ratio has changed and more women absolutely seek me out."

And while many of her male clients have been told by the studio that they need to do the coaching, many of Leone McLaughlin's new female clients want coaching, they want to become better leaders, she says. Many female showrunners, for example, hear about or read about Leone McLaughlin and meet with her proactively and then ask to have coaching sessions written into their contracts by their studios.

From Small Town to City of Angels

In some ways, it's an unexpected journey for Leone McLaughlin to have made it to the City of Angels and glitzy-glossy Hollywood from her roots in blue-collar, small-town

Lakeside, California, near San Diego, where most people “just stay put,” she says. “We had a rodeo. And a Future Farmers of America attached to our school.”

It’s where Leone McLaughlin and her seven siblings from her parents’ blended marriages grew up. It’s where her dad was a welder, where her mom was a hair stylist, and where her stepfather worked at Goodyear. It’s where she met her husband, Kris McLaughlin, when she was in second grade (his mother was her softball coach), whom she started dating in high school, married when she was twenty-eight and he was twenty-nine.

After attending an exchange student program in Copenhagen, Leone McLaughlin, a star lacrosse player, spent time in London, playing lacrosse for the English Lacrosse Association while teaching at an all-girls school.

On her return to Lakeside, Leone McLaughlin got a job supporting the VP of Development at Viejas, one of the three lucrative casinos surrounding her town. She wound up in the coaching industry after she was recruited by a leadership development firm called Personnel Decisions International (PDI) in Los Angeles (later acquired by Korn Ferry).

“I couldn't even figure out what the company did. I actually called the company headquarters in Minneapolis and I was like, ‘So, tell me about this company,’—pretending to be like a client—because I couldn't get a sense of what this organization did,” Leone McLaughlin says.

It turned out to be serendipitous. At PDI, Leone McLaughlin earned immaculate street creds in executive coaching and leadership development and trained under none other than one of the founders of the field of executive coaching, [David Peterson](#).

After seven years at PDI, Leone McLaughlin then spent nearly a decade managing the consulting and business arms of the Center for Effective Organizations at the University

of Southern California (USC). Her “faux-faculty” status at USC, as she describes it with a chuckle, gave her the time to start her own leadership coaching business on the side. And her experience at PDI coaching aerospace and automotive engineers gave her an in at one of Los Angeles’s animation studios, which led to a plethora of other coaching opportunities in Hollywood.

“About ten or twelve years ago, I started with my first showrunner, and that’s a very small world. And once I started working with one showrunner, I started working with several, and then studios and heads of studios and departments. And it all kind of went from there.”

“Smacked Me in the Face”

Nearly two decades into her coaching career, Leone McLaughlin thought nothing would truly surprise her. But two years ago, the emotional impact of the COVID pandemic began to hit her clients, and then, it hit her even harder. “My change with COVID smacked me in the face one day, and I didn't even know it was coming, she says.

Working twelve-hour days, often meeting with the same leaders multiple times a week as they tried to navigate highly emotional issues—from employees quitting, getting sick or dying, even as they grappled with the impact of the pandemic on their own families—Leone McLaughlin says she was stripped bare emotionally, especially after she had to counsel one of her East Coast clients who had lost two employees to COVID over a forty-eight-hour period.

“I got off the phone and I was like, Oh, I might be done. Like, this is really, really, really hard. And I sat there and I reflected and I thought, for me to do this and to do this well, at this time, I’m going to have to be a thousand times more present than I’ve ever been in my coaching work and a thousand times more of just being a human. I’m just going to be

affected and impacted in a different way than before when I think I was always really able to keep my work and my life separate. All of a sudden, I realized after this call that just wasn't the case," Leone McLaughlin says.

Looking back, Leone McLaughlin recognizes that pre-COVID coaching was about the business, about the leader. Now, she's often inclined to start her calls by asking people how they are doing.

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Sobering Realization Post-Great Resignation

Now that COVID has gone from epidemic to endemic, Leone McLaughlin says the pendulum has swung back a little as her clients have had some semblance of emotional recovery. But the human resources issues still loom large, both for employers and employees. And they're only likely to grow worse, especially for those coming to a sobering realization about a looming recession, the end of federal COVID-relief funds, the exuberance of the Great Resignation ebbing in the face of the economic downturn, and a job market tightening like a vice.

"This group of employees just hasn't felt that yet. They've been able to leave jobs because they don't have quality work-life balance, have been able to leave jobs because the company doesn't represent the values they had—all really, really good things," says Leone McLaughlin. "But at the same time, as a group of people that needs to be employed and wants to be employed, I get nervous that some of the behaviors that are

Through all these roiling changes in society, and the demands it has placed on executive coaches to keep up with the emotional roller coasters that their clients are riding in this millennial, Gen-Z, #MeToo, and post-COVID era, what keeps her grounded, Leone McLaughlin says, is a different type of coaching. She does a ton of baseball, basketball, and lacrosse camps, including serving as the [Pony Baseball](#) GM and Head Coach for the La Cañada 10U Travel Team, which, she notes, “is not a job held by many women.”



Leone McLaughlin and the Pony Baseball La Cañada 10U Travel Team

So both on and off the field, Lacey Leone McLaughlin is coaching boys and girls to become leaders, to play well, to play fairly, and to play with accountability and integrity.