

FINDING BRAVE

with Kathy Caprino

Transcript

Finding Brave Episode #29

How to Navigate Gender Bias

And Lead Powerfully in Tech, with Angie Ruan

- Kathy Caprino: Hello everyone. This is Kathy Caprino, and welcome to my podcast, Finding Brave. I've created this show for everyone who longs to create something bold and brave in their life, to rise up, speak up, and stand up for who they are, and to reach their highest and biggest visions.
- Kathy Caprino: Each week, I'll be speaking with inspiring guests from all walks of business, leadership, entertainment, the creative arts, and the entrepreneurial world. They'll be sharing their intimate stories of finding brave, and offer their best strategies for building your most rewarding, joyful, and meaningful life, business, and career.
- Kathy Caprino: Hello everybody, Kathy Caprino here, and welcome to another episode of Finding Brave. I hope you're sitting down because today is going to knock your socks off with my amazing guest, Angie Ruan. I'm pronouncing that right, Angie, right?
- Angie Ruan: Yup.
- Kathy Caprino: I can't wait for you to hear what Angie has to share. She's so inspiring and so strong. I cannot wait. But before we bring Angie on, I want to give a Finding Brave tip, which I'm beginning to do and love to do. When you listen to Angie, I think you're going to be very inspired about what strength is in the face of odds, and what it is to ... I don't want to give away your lead, Angie, but be in control of the direction that you're going in.
- Kathy Caprino: So, I just want to share one quick tip about that, which is something I learned in therapy training. Here's what we learned: greater awareness equals greater choice. I have to say, those simple words have been a real life changer for me because what they remind me every day is you cannot choose. You cannot openly direct and consciously direct your life if you have no awareness of yourself, or of the culture you're about to deal with, or of the integrity of the people around you. You have to have your eyes wide open so that then the

more aware you are, the more you have choice. To me, choice is a key aspect of a life well lived; that there's as much choice. Now, we can't control everything, but that we are choosing and we're directing in an empowered way. So, that's my tip, greater awareness equals greater choice, so try to open your eyes and be as aware as possible of yourself and what's going on.

Kathy Caprino: All right, enough said. I'm thrilled to invite onto the show, Angie Ruan. Welcome, Angie. Thank you for taking time out of your crashingly busy new job. So happy to have you.

Angie Ruan: Yes, new job.

Kathy Caprino: Yes. All right, everyone. Let me tell you all about Angie. Angie is Senior Vice President of technology at NASDAQ. Previously, she held various key executive positions at American Express, PayPal, and eBay. She has successfully helped American Express, PayPal, and eBay transform technology offerings and deliver incredible business results.

Kathy Caprino: One of Angie's passions, I love it, and I know this to be true, is to contagiously inspire others to make a difference, especially in the community of women. She served as the president of eBay Women in Technology, EWIT, from 2012 to 2014, a grassroots organization that promotes the interests of women in tech with 2,000 members globally, and she was recognized as a woman of influence in 2014 by Silicon Valley's Business Journal. Wow.

Kathy Caprino: Angie's a mother of two, an engineer by heart, a leader by training. I love this bio, a podcast fanatic, and a lifetime learner. Welcome, welcome, Angie. All right, so let's jump right in. You know, when was it that we did the Forbes interview, Angie? Was that maybe 2014, or even ...

Angie Ruan: 2014, yeah. 2014.

Kathy Caprino: Gosh, so I've known you 14 ... four years, and I've been so inspired by everything I'm seeing you do. I remember when we talked for that Forbes interview, you talked about your beginnings in China, and your math genius. Can you tell us a little bit about how you started out, and how that experience shaped you? Would you?

Angie Ruan: When I was a little girl in China, I just found a love of math. I remember the first day in the class, when we get a math book. In the first week, I finished the whole book.

Angie Ruan: I said, "Can I have more?" I remember, I was so bored--

Kathy Caprino: How old were you?

Angie Ruan: Pretty much since I was little. Like there's no [inaudible 00:04:55] a course book is the only thing. It's just that math is so interesting, so fun, and I've always loved math, and my teacher always been really, really encouraging me of pursuing anything that's related to math area, so--

Kathy Caprino: And would you say you really pursued it and devoured it and loved it and went to the equivalent of MIT for us, but for all of China? You went to the top-rate educational

institution, is that right?

Angie Ruan: I went to Tsinghua University in computer science department, which is probably, yeah, one of the kind of MIT-type of engineering school.

Kathy Caprino: And another thing that I remember you saying, which floored me. You said, back then, and don't let me put words in your mouth, but that you didn't experience gender bias regarding girls and what they should do or shouldn't do in STEM. You said, "That's just not what was happening there." Can you tell us more about that because that's so different from the US.

Angie Ruan: Yeah, that is quite interesting. I've never thought about the gender thing in terms of girls not going through math or computer science until when I was at job at eBay and I was at this training, and I realized, "Oh, that's right!" It's just sort of the difference, and there wasn't girls not going through engineering. That's actually engineering is a cool major. Math is a cool major at a time when I was a kid.

Kathy Caprino: Wow. So there was no ... how do you think, I mean this is asking you to speak as a cultural expert, and that may be out of your comfort zone, but what do you think is the key difference that the US can learn from about how we treat girls and boys about this? Why do you think it works so well and we're still floundering with-- apparently the research shows girls and boys start out expressing the same interest, but starting sixth grade, seventh grade, eighth grade, they start falling back out of STEM. What is the key, do you think, about how kids are raised in China, that that doesn't happen? What do you think?

Angie Ruan: So, I think there two part. One is the generation that I grew up that might be different than where it is now. I think at that time that there's actually one thing that I see because I have a daughter who's in teenager as well, the distractions and the social media definitely wasn't there in terms of, I think we painted, you know honestly, in the society we paint the job of being engineers are kind of a man's job. Every time we think about engineer, we think about [inaudible 00:07:41], we think about man, right?

Kathy Caprino: That's right.

Angie Ruan: And that's, we think about people only wearing jeans and tee shirts, and that has been something really, really difficult thinking about for girls growing up when you see the engineering. We always see engineering with dorky look and wearing glasses, and that has not been to me, it's not a good portrayal to be an engineer because certainly, when I look at workspace, a lot of women engineers, they look like just anybody in any other jobs. And I think when I grown up by the time, engineers was such a glorious career for men and for women, so I definitely think it's something I am really helpful with a lot of social media will be able to really change that, like the look.

Kathy Caprino: I get what you're saying. So we've kind of created a caricature of what an engineer looks like. And I bet anyone listening, close your eyes, and imagine what an engineer looks like, and I bet you if we all drew it, it would be very similar. And we're getting those images from the media, from social media, from books, so, good point. We have to change that from day one.

Angie Ruan: I'll give you the story. I was Girls Who Code, who is an organization. I taught when I was at eBay, I taught one class, and I did a little test. I said, "Okay. Draw an engineer for me." So that girls high school, and then when I read everybody's drawing, I said, "Is that you? Or is that somebody else?" And everybody draw a guy with glasses on, and when I say everybody, it was 80% of people. This is Girls Who Code. This is 100% girls class, and that's the image. You know, I told them, I said, "Look at me. Do I look like what you draw?" And then they said no. I said, "I want you to see yourself in the future of job."

Kathy Caprino: That's beautiful, Angie. I think that's such a quotable. I mean, that's a tip for life, for your whole life. See yourself doing what you envision. It's you. Oh, I love that. What a thing you're teaching. How beautiful.

Kathy Caprino: Alright, let's talk about your trajectory. You're a senior leader at amazing organizations, and we're going to talk about NASDAQ and why you took it and why you love it, and I know that you're a humble person, but I love it that you're not overly, I think, humility for women can be a very negative thing because it can be about suppressing your light, hiding your light, and I know that you don't do that. But what I'd love to talk about is the trajectory, how you choose and have chosen the jobs that you have chosen, and why. What you're looking for, and if you can share three tips about how you have been so successful. We're just sharing how you've transformed a lot of these organizations or certainly catalyzed great progress or innovation. So how do you choose these jobs, or do they just fall in your lap?

Angie Ruan: So, I actually hope they fall in my lap, but I think almost none of the jobs that I have, it's just, you know, it's destiny, but I think I'm actually in the driver's seat. So, earlier in my career, I felt that I was just working really, really hard. I think that something happen, would just happen to me, I would get a promotion, etc. etc. And it wasn't as much as definitely taking a much longer time, and I think that's one thing in my journey that I definitely like to thank eBay who created a lot of gender awareness, gender training, and I remember coming out of the training, I realized, "Oh my God. I have not yet asked those questions to think about this." So, a couple things that what I learn and which I practiced throughout later years in life, which really helped me where I am.

Angie Ruan: So, a couple things: one of them is that I think you were, you mentioned about being aware. I think being aware is probably a number of things. I have been aware of myself, I have been aware of surroundings. You know, in this American corporate world, women in technology definitely are not being considered as the type of people, the type of people that [inaudible 00:12:01] this career. And women in leadership is also not the typical category for the leadership. And having the awareness is very important.

Angie Ruan: And then the [inaudible 00:12:11] that I was told, one of them is that, "You need to not assuming that things will happen to you. You have to say, 'I want it. I need it, I love it.'" And you know, I call, raise your hand high, and voice your opinion, and be the purple cow. You have to be different so people can actually see you. Otherwise, people will not see you, will not hear you. And so that's why, being the purple cow and being the brave--

Kathy Caprino: The purple cow? [crosstalk 00:12:39] Rather than trying to fit in, rather than being so confused and insecure that I'm not like what people think I need to be like to succeed,

you've taken the other tact, right?

Angie Ruan: Yeah. I remember this one, it was one of the story I was told during this training, is there's this one person who was so good at her work, and she was really, really happy for her boss as well, and one time she was passed over by a promotion. She was like, "Why? I'm the number one employee in this group. Why wasn't?" So she went to talk to her boss. She said, "Hey, you know what," whatever his name, let's say it's John. "John, I'm curious. That was a great opportunity. I am really, really good at my job. That probably would be the best for me to take the opportunity. Why are you giving it to another person?" And his boss was surprising to say, "Mary," let's assume this person's Mary. "Mary, you never asked for it, and the other guy really wanted this job. I thought you were really happy about this."

Angie Ruan: So that was the story I was told early in my career, and I was like, "Wait a second. I have to be purple cow. I have to tell my boss or whoever, 'I want that job.'" And even though that was uncomfortable to say that, that was sort of against my culture, against being a woman, you're supposed to be modest, you're supposed to be collaborative, cooperative and be the team player, but important thing is that you've got to really making sure your voice is being heard. I think being that raise your voice and saying that, "This is what I want, this is what I like." It's absolutely important.

Kathy Caprino: Let me ask you something, Angie, about two pieces about that. I'd love your thoughts really. And we're making this up, folks, on the fly. We didn't script this. Do you know what this does say to me, however? I think that so often opportunities are given not necessarily to the person with the merit but with the person who asks. And, you know, unfortunately I think there is a bias in that in and of itself. It shouldn't be just who comes forth and asks. It should be who's the best person for that role, and the leader should identify that and go and talk to the number one person on the team and say, "Do you think ... why aren't you coming forth?" It shouldn't be just who raises their hand, but it is often. So that means we do have to stand up and say, "Boy, I would love this," and build the case for it.

Kathy Caprino: But let me ask this, Angie, because you've made it really to the top, and you are someone we're all aspiring, women in tech want to be. So here's another thing. The research shows, we've talked about this, that assertive women, forceful women, confident women in the US are still punished. Not everyone, not every time, it's changing, but a great number of women have spoken up and asked for what they wanted and are punished or thought ill of because they were so bold enough to ask.

Kathy Caprino: Have you ever had that experience?

Angie Ruan: Absolutely. I think that's one of the things is that's being aware of that situation what happened is also very important. So the technique of how to raise your voice, how to describe what you wanted is also very, very important. And there were times, I think I remember one time I was passed over by a promotion, and one of the leaders told me that I would just, I was too assertive.

Kathy Caprino: Too assertive.

Angie Ruan: And that, if it happened to a guy, is like right leadership, right? And one of the women, she actually told me it was completely biased during the promotion process because, and she shared some of the insight, and I feel like, and she told me how to really handle the situation, which is by the way, women helping women is so great in the tech world. So where something that I feel like, even with a hard situation because it's not like consciously people hate women, it's really unconscious bias. So I have to be aware of the situation. How do I deal with it when I approach people who feel like I shouldn't be too strong, I need to find another way to have the same result but not too forceful in the conversation. So that's something I've learned throughout the years is that knowing I need to tell people what I want but at the same time be tactical about how to say this.

Kathy Caprino: You know, I just want to reinforce that. To anyone who's hearing, I don't believe that we are saying, "Back up and do back flips to soften and be demure." I don't think we're saying that, but I think this is what we're saying: when I was a therapist, what I learned is, if you want to help someone or make a connection or get through, you have to meet them where they are. So we even talked about matching, matching language. If you have a guy who comes in and he swears every other word, start swearing. And unconsciously, that person thinks, "they're like me. There's a connection there. They get me." And I don't mean to be fake, and I don't mean to be manipulative. I mean to match, that's all. To be a little more like. And I don't mean you should give up your integrity and be fake. I mean be flexible. So if you have someone who you know has a real problem with women with a strident voice, and I think we've talked about this. There were times in my high-level job that I was like a buzz saw. I would get things done, but I'd leave body parts. Well, that's not going to work so well. So I do think it means be aware of the ecosystem you're in and where you can be flexible in where you're meeting that other person.

Kathy Caprino: Does that sum up what you're saying, Angie?

Angie Ruan: I think you're absolutely right in this. I believe one of the professors from Stanford, Dr. Gruenfeld, who actually taught us when I was at eBay, taught a lot of women leaders about how to handle the situation. There's a class called "Playing Low and Playing High." It's really about matching because when you are actually having conversation, the other person depends on the situation. You have to adapt, like matching.

Angie Ruan: Sometimes you want to play high, sometimes you want to play low, and that's--

Kathy Caprino: I love that. Wow, these are great. Leadership course! You need to teach.

Kathy Caprino: Now tell us, as you've kind of progressed. You've had amazing successes, but have you had a failure that really stands out that rocked you, but you learned something, kind of a favorite failure that really was pivotal for you? Anything that you'd want to share there?

Angie Ruan: So I think what you are saying is that, "Okay, I was in the driver's seat." I think the challenge being in the driver's seat, you don't want to fail because you want something and you may not get them. So I remember I was really, really passionate when eBay, when they started training women leaders about how, what really means in this society and there's a lot of unconscious bias out there. When I learned about this, I felt so passionate about this, and at the time, there's a job in eBay, it's the Women's Initiative Director, and I

applied for that job. It's really a lateral from Engineering Director into almost like a HR role.

Angie Ruan: So I took job all the way to the other side. So I prepared for my interview, and I thought it was going really, really well. It's like great chatting with [inaudible 00:20:14] with everything else, you know, how to really help eBay to learn just for women's career. And of course, I got declined. I got a lot of executives supporting this to me and at the same when I got declined, and I went back to one of the VP, and I basically cried. I said, "How could you even decline me? I'm really the best candidate. I got all that." So one of the things I realized is that it's not necessarily failure is a bad thing. It's actually at the time, I was saying, it was perfectly failure. They declined me for the good reason. They understand my passion. They also need me to be in the line job, because to be a better person, to really help the company on women's initiative, at least be the role model in running the technology, not necessarily running the processes.

Angie Ruan: So it took a little while for me to actually understand the reason behind the decline of me being getting that job. So a year later, and there's another job comes, it is the President for eBay Women. They actually reached out. I didn't even apply, they reached out to me. They said, "actually there's a job. You can do your line job, and same time, you can actually do [inaudible 00:21:27] time to contribute your passion." So I become the eBay Woman President for three years.

Kathy Caprino: Oh, I love that story. Can I ask you if this sounds like what happened here? You're a brilliant engineer and leader of engineers in tech, yet you have a passion for helping women. And I call it essence versus the form. Sometimes we go with an essence, but we choose the wrong form of it. So, in other words, tell me if this is right. They saw in you that you would better advance and support and lead women forward by doing the engineering gifted work that you do, and the leadership in technology and living and breathing and walking and talking the leadership piece for women, rather than moving you out of what you're gifted in.

Kathy Caprino: Is that right?

Angie Ruan: Yeah.

Kathy Caprino: And don't we often find the failures, the "failures" that we think we're seeing are not failures at all, but they're often blessings? Don't we find that?

Angie Ruan: Yeah. I think with sometimes little failures and the big ones. I think with each one of them, it's some bit of great learning out of that experience. I have to say that I'm really, really glad with every failure, so-called failures, coming out as a much better person.

Kathy Caprino: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's so obvious in how you talk.

Kathy Caprino: So let's hear about this last step you've taken. NASDAQ. Tell us what you're doing there. What's the role?

Angie Ruan: Okay. I am Senior Vice President for Technology. And I don't know how many people know

NASDAQ in a way that I know now, and I certainly have a completely different perspective when I knew NASDAQ before versus during the interviewing process, and also join NASDAQ. So there are two or three things about NASDAQ, why I joined NASDAQ. Number one is, so NASDAQ as you probably know, that you [inaudible 00:23:27] this, this really enable company to go public, which is really helping the capital market and helping the two things. Helping individuals to have the prosperity, meaning that if you have stock options, the company goes public, and your stock options worth a lot, and then also enable people to do the tradings. The other part is really enable this capital market to have company to go public, helping the company to be successful. And this is actually so critical. That's what I thought NASDAQ was about.

Angie Ruan: So my [inaudible 00:24:01] story is really interesting that in 1995, if you are old enough, you probably know a company called Netscape. Netscape is a company really enabled pretty much the first Internet browser, and my husband invited me. He was an engineer, early engineer at Netscape. He invited me to Netscape IPO party as our first date.

Kathy Caprino: Oh my goodness!

Angie Ruan: So NASDAQ has always been sort of a love story to me. It's like, "Oh, NASDAQ really helped Netscape to go IPO." And that's sort of the story, and that's sort of number one.

Angie Ruan: So number two, what I actually learned during the interviewing process. So NASDAQ is also a technology company. So I'll be the VP of Technology. The technology not only empowers NASDAQ to enable listings, all the technologies on going public and the data and the trading, everything, but also the technology empowers more than 90 markets around the world. It is a technology company, so how great is that for technology like me, who love this company, this brand, and also be able to contribute to helping this mission?

Kathy Caprino: Oh my gosh.

Angie Ruan: But the third one. Let me share it, the even very, very, very inspiring one is that the CEO of NASDAQ, Adena Friedman, is a woman. Just think about that. Adena Friedman, and she interviewed me. She's inspiring. She's sharp. She's amazing. It just, that's like, I am in. So I think Adena just inspiring. I think this is my second time to join a woman-led company. So when I joined eBay and James Paresi who was my head manager. Later on, he was the CTO of PayPal. And he asked me why I joined, "What is the reason you joined eBay?" I said, "Because Meg Whitman was the CEO." And this is my second time joining a company with a woman CEO, and I'm just really, really blessed that I'll be able to work with Adena or Meg Whitman who really help women to really entire generation of help women to be the leader and transform. And I'm hoping that I can be the role model for anybody else, being a technology woman leader.

Angie Ruan: So I'm inspired by this company.

Kathy Caprino: While you're talking, we're having a massive thunderstorm here in Connecticut. I hope it's not interfering with your inspiring words. They're so great. And would this be safe to say, Angie, you seek out what the next opportunity is for you, and you go for it? Is that right? And finding a culture that is going to naturally support women because who's in leadership

and how they feel, that's something that you look at. That's something that's incredibly important. Is that right?

Angie Ruan: Yeah. I think this is absolutely right. I think we talk about being the purple cow, like ask what I want. And I see my trajectory is that every time, I was like, "What is my next challenge? What is my next opportunity that I can make different?" And who I wanted to work for, and what company. And it's extremely important I think, and I feel very, very blessed. I have so many great mentors, so many great [inaudible 00:27:24] who helped me throughout this journey, and sometime I feel ... you mentioned about I growing up in China, and being a woman and leader. And all of them, it's really against the odds of in the corporate world, becoming a leader, and I am here. And the reason I'm here because all so many people helped me to be here, including a lot of people in my team who helped me where I am. So I'm really, really blessed with [crosstalk 00:27:52].

Kathy Caprino: I love that. And I'm just going to say it for you, because you won't say it. Yes, it's because people support you, and you're amazing at your work, and you help other people ascend with you. But it's also who you are, and we co-create what happens. I do believe that. And I want to say this because it's really on my mind, and I think you're a perfect illustration of this. I just hung up the phone with my amazing career project folks, and one woman was sharing, she's in another country, and she's had two jobs that basically she's getting verbally abused. This is abuse, and it's in a very male-dominated industry, and it's in a very patriarchal society. And what we talked about is, "Why are you allowing yourself to be abused?"

Kathy Caprino: And I want everybody to listen to this kind of from a deeper perspective. You know, it's clear what Angie has done. This is what I think is going on here. You tell me. You know that you're talented and gifted. That was infused in you, and a recognition of your gifts.

Kathy Caprino: So number one, we have to know what we're gifted at. Number two, we have to have enough confidence and belief in our ability to make a difference and an impact that we go for the things that are going to light us up with the culture that's going to support us. You have to have all of those elements, I think. Otherwise, you're gifted and talented, but you get crushed down and abused or whatever. Or you're in a great culture, but you don't have the confidence, the confidence and the self-identity to say, "I am worthy of this advancement or worthy of this plum assignment." So there's so much going on that comes together to build an amazing career, and you know, you seem to have it all, Angie, and you're an amazingly generous, wonderful person.

Kathy Caprino: So, you are an incredible role model. Tell us any last parting words. Maybe advice you'd give to teenage girls, who you want to hear this? What would you leave them with?

Angie Ruan: I mentioned about, I think the two things. One, I talked about being a purple cow. You want to be special. Your passions, your skills. You want people to know about that.

Angie Ruan: And second, I know that people talking about the glass ceiling. It's not just a glass ceiling. I call it a sticky floor.

Kathy Caprino: A sticky floor.

Angie Ruan: It's not a glass ceiling. It's the sticky floor. You need to let yourself to driving your destiny, even with the environment. And you talked about, I think you said it in the great story, is that, you know, there's one part abuse coming to you or coming to the people or a gender bias or whatever biases. And how do you take that, the sticky floor is that you need to be in the driver's seat. Getting out of that place if you need to, or learning the skills to learn how to deal with that. I think that's something that always helped me to get off that. It's not a glass ceiling. Sticky floor. You are in control of that.

Kathy Caprino: And so you mean, just so I'm being a little dense here. Maybe other listeners aren't ... when you say sticky floor, it means you're stuck to where you are for many reason? One is you don't know how to navigate. Number two is you don't realize that you don't deserve this treatment, and that you need maybe legal help. Maybe HR help. Maybe a new ... you've always had mentors and sponsors. I remember when we talked for the Forbes interview, you've always done what networking gurus say to do. You find mentors, but also who are at a much higher level. The President. The CEO. Who has the power to, when you're not in the room, to change your trajectory. That's how you get off the sticky floor, right?

Angie Ruan: Yup. Yup.

Kathy Caprino: That's it. That's beautiful advice, Angie. Where can everyone learn more about you? Where can we send them? NASDAQ?

Angie Ruan: Yeah, so NASDAQ.com or LinkedIn, absolutely.

Kathy Caprino: Can listeners connect with you? I think they're going to find everything you say and share so inspiring. Thank you, Angie. I just love speaking with you, and you're just so, you're really walking what we need. You're walking that talk in a way that is so joyful, you know? We can see that you embody and enliven what you do because there's so much joy in it, and how blessed we are to have you as a senior tech leader today. Thank you for being here. Appreciate it.

Angie Ruan: Thank you, Kathy. It's my pleasure.

Kathy Caprino: And everyone, I hope this inspires you. Get off the sticky floor. And that might be reaching up and pulling up, getting your feet off that floor. Do it any way you can, and I hope these strategies are helpful. Have a wonderful week, and we will see you here back next time. Thank you.

Kathy Caprino: Thanks so much for joining us today, and please don't forget to check out FindingBrave.org for more programs, resources, and tips. And tune in next time for your weekly dose of Finding Brave.