



Helping Women to See Themselves as Leaders | An Interview with Dr. Susan R. Madsen

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Kurt Francom:

Have you ever tried to help youth with their mental health? Wowza, that's a tricky road to travel. I have to tell you about an inspiring presentation we recorded with the one and only Jodi Moore. Yes, that life coaching Jodi Moore. A few years ago, she recorded a fantastic presentation covering topics like normalizing tough feelings with youth, a more positive understanding of stress, how to minimize shame, and mastering the skill set of empathy and better understanding anxiety. I want you to see this presentation as soon as you finish this podcast episode. You can go to [leadingsaints.org slash 14](https://leadingsaints.org/14) and this will get you access to the entire video library at no cost for 14 days. Jodi's presentation is in the Mentally Healthy Saints library and you'll be a better leader or parent when you finish it. Again, go to [leadingsaints.org slash 14](https://leadingsaints.org/14) or check out the show notes for the link. The following episode is a throwback episode, one that was published previously and was extremely popular. To see the details of when this was originally published, see the show notes. Enjoy this throwback episode. Hey, thanks for being gentle and pushing that play button on the old podcasting app. This is the Leading Saints podcast. My name is Kurt Francom, and I will be your host. Now, if you're new to Leading Saints, this is a nonprofit organization where we have a mission to help Latter-day Saints be better prepared to lead. And one way we do that is through this podcast. but we also have awesome articles at leadingsaints.org, a weekly newsletter, and just so many ways for you to discover new leadership content, especially in the context of being a Latter-day Saint leader. Now, in this episode, it's awesome. Just like all these episodes are awesome, am I right? I had the opportunity of interviewing Dr. Susan R. Madsen. And I came across a study, I think it was actually published in a local newspaper here talking about Dr. Madsen's work and research as it

relates to female missionaries, sister missionaries, right? And the how much that helps them develop as a leader. And I saw that I thought, Oh, man, I'm sure there's a lot that Dr. Madsen and I could talk about. So I reached out to her, she was more than happy to connect. And we had a great conversation about women leadership and what we could do to maybe stimulate more women leadership in our culture, in our church, and then also recognizing the benefit that a mission has on Sister Missionary. So it's a fantastic discussion, one I hope that you share. But here's my interview with Dr. Susan R. Madsen. Today, I have the opportunity to be in the home of Susan Madsen. How are you, Susan? I'm doing great. Good. Now tell us, we're down here, what is this Highland? Is this technically Highland? And you teach a class or sometimes two at the Utah Valley University, but you do all sorts of things. So put yourself into context if the audience isn't familiar with you.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Well, my paid work is really being a professor of organizational leadership in the Woodbury School of Business at Utah Valley University. I also, I spend significant time, however, in the community, particularly in Utah, but I do publish and do global work. In fact, next month I will be nine days in the UK and all three of the countries doing a mix between church firesides, actually, and also academic presentations. So I do that, but I spend a lot of time leading social change in the state of Utah. I have for about 10 years. I was originally asked 10 years ago, almost 11 now, by the commissioner of higher education for the state of Utah to study why more women in Utah were not going to and graduating from college. And so did in-depth research around the state to really focus on that and uncovered so many interesting things. And that data is about 10 years old. But then in 2013, really took the leadership element, which I'm a scholar of women's leadership. And so we, through the Utah Women in Leadership Project, we address leadership and confidence and voice for women, but also college, encouraging girls to think about college, women to go to college. Older women to return to college, really want to strengthen the impact of Utah girls and women. So I have an interest here in Utah, do a lot of my work with that, speak a lot in the community, but also we develop resources and hold events and have a big one coming up soon.

Kurt Francom:

Awesome. Well, that sounds like a fun job.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

I enjoy it. I do teach some, but I'm really feeling, I have to say, and I use the word called often, called by God to do the work I'm doing in Utah and beyond, specifically focused on, again, strengthening the impact of Utah girls and women. And before the next question, let me just tell you about the word calling. So I've actually written and I speak often about feeling called. Now I do that in religious settings, not just the Latter-day Saint religion, but other religions. But I also talk about that in non-religious, secular settings. And in fact, a couple of years ago, I'll give you one quick example. You might find this interesting. But a couple of years ago, I flew for two days into Athens, Greece, and had spent two hours with 200 women business leaders. Now, they're

not very religious in that country. And I brought up this sense of calling or purpose. And those women connected. There were some tears. They were not religious at all. So the research says that when girls and women feel called or feel a purpose, whether they care or not to be leaders, they will step forward more than men. If they feel that sense of calling or purpose from a higher power or whatever, they will step forward. So I actually study that in women's leadership because women, if they feel called, will step forward and lead.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, no, that word is so interesting, especially in our religious culture, because it's sort of been watered down a little bit. Like, oh, what's your calling, you know, rather in the secular world or outside, it's sort of like, what's your purpose in life? What have you been called to do? Where we sometimes miss that a lot. And our tagline that we say a lot is be a leader, not a calling, because it sort of feels like, you know, basically that means be a leader, not an assignment or be a leader.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

I talk about that constantly with women, particularly in the state of Utah, because you do kind of lump it in with just being called, but being called officially to a calling in the church is so small compared to what your life calling or callings are. And I argue to women all the time that they are called to be to mother. I say they're called to mother. But they're also called to do so many other things in life, and discovering that calling and purpose is really important for women. In fact, when I do leadership development workshops, the academic researchers found this true. I actually focus a bunch of my work on helping women uncover their life calling, because I believe if they will feel called to do what they do, they will step forward more. They'll use their voices. They'll have more confidence because women have more confidence when they feel like God needs them to do something.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Right. And it's not just, you know, the Bishop down the street who needs their help in the nursery or something, right? There's gotta be more.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

the way that the church has changed with two-hour meetings and not as many callings with oomph, you know what I mean?

Kurt Francom:

They're minimizing the official callings, right?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

And they're talking more about personal revelation, which I felt for years. And I've been saying for years and years for women, what has God asked you to do? And they're like, what? I'm like, what is your calling or callings? You know, we don't all just have one main calling. But I have to say, I'm not a fan of the various seasons in life argument for women either. Because you can have callings inside and outside the home throughout your life. And most women, it's not either or, it's and. And in the state of Utah, I have to say that we have a very strong either or mentality. I've found that in numerous studies and within the church, I think in general, I can do this or I can do this. When I have my first baby, I need to quit college and just go to school.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Yeah. That's like a, you can get in that trap really easy. Right. And so basically keep that and going, right. I can possibly do both.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Well, and men are socialized, especially in our religious setting, to do multiple things. You can be a father, but we expect you to work and we expect you to be a bishop or do your other callings. But women, for some reason throughout time, and I will argue that at the beginning of the church, specifically at the restoration of the church, when you look at the powerful nature of women and contributions in our society, they never had luxury to do either or. They didn't. They were out farming. They were taking care of their whole family, earning money while their husbands were serving missions. It was never either or. It was always and. But today we've slipped into the last few decades, really since the sixties, There's some evidence in the 50s we've slipped into, particularly in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but we see this in other settings too. This either or, I need to be only this. If I have children at home, I can't run for public office. That's breaking the rules. I'm not a great mom.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, because there's all these social stigmas, right, that we're trying to live up to that sort of keep us trapped in these, in these boxes.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

And what I say constantly when I speak is, is the issues that we face in the church in Utah, but in the church in general with gender roles, they're all over the United States. They're all over the world. There are those kinds of things. We just see them exaggerated a bit more. Like, Everyone has the wage gap, but in Utah, we have more of the wage gap and the role, you know, the putting ourselves in boxes. We see that a little bit more here in the church.

Kurt Francom:

Interesting. Well, after you explain your background and obviously just some of these points you bring up, it's no surprise that we've connected and that you're on this podcast because this is exactly sort of the research and perspective that we're always looking to share and explore. I

mean, this is a great segue into sort of what encouraged me to reach out to you and see if we could set up a time to chat because you've recently did some research about sister missionaries and their experience with leadership and especially after they return home. How did this all begin and what inspired you to go down this route of research?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Great question. I happen to have been raised in a home with six brothers and I was the only daughter. And my dad was a seminary and institute person and I was a teacher and so forth. So very strict upbringing in so many ways, wonderful upbringing. But I always, I never wanted, I was into sports. My brothers were all into sports. I was very competitive. I never wanted my brothers to get opportunities I didn't get. And for some reason I was raised with a voice and I'm pretty assertive. So I served a mission when I was young and loved it and grew so much. And that was such a powerful experience for me. So fast forward, when I'm working specifically on work on Utah, So I mentioned I run the Utah Women, I founded and run the Utah Women in Leadership Project. One of our goals is to continue to study things that influence girls and women's aspirations, their ambitions, and their decisions to become leaders in whatever setting. Some people say, are you only doing this project to get more women CEOs? I say, well, that'd be great, but no. I'm doing this to help women strengthen their impact and become leaders in their homes, in their communities, in their PTAs, in their schools, in nonprofits, in politics, whatever it is. I believe without a doubt that God needs, I get a little teary-eyed when I think about that God must have more women become leaders. to move the church forward in ways that have been predicted and prophesied for so many years. And so one of those ways to understand women is to figure out how to help them raise their aspirations. Because if we don't aspire to go to college, we're not going to go to college. If we don't aspire to graduate, we're not. If we don't aspire as women to become leaders, we're not. One of the issues is that so many women do not understand they're already prepared to lead. And so one of those connections is, and we have thousands and thousands of women who have served missions, but what we found is they don't associate often their mission experience with their confidence, their leadership. So we really wanted to, some do, but many don't, wanted to really dig deep to help at least this population in the state of Utah. really get data to show that leadership is developed by mission. And it's unique. Our report that we published a few months ago is very unique in that we haven't found studies that have studied sister missionaries specifically, and we went deep. And can I just give you a little bit of background on the study? So my intention was that we would hopefully get about 100 women to participate in, it's got some quantitative, but mostly qualitative, deep stories and experiences. Well, I shut it down six weeks early because we had nearly 700 and it's taken a whole year to get the data analyzed. So that many people wanted to, you know, share their experiences.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. So with this research, I mean, do you put out a call just generally saying we're looking for return sister missionaries to answer some questions?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Yeah, we had a Qualtrics survey, send it out. I have in the state of Utah, and by the way, many, many people subscribe to my monthly newsletter that are not in the state of Utah, but care about religious issues or women's issues in general. So I have about 18,000 who get a monthly email in the state of Utah or beyond who care about women's issues in Utah. So that spurred on most of it, but I also have contacts in the headquarters of the church and also at BYU and different. So I sent it out, they sent it out. It got to lots and lots of people. And we closed it early, like I said, because 700 pages and pages, I mean thousands and thousands of pages of data.

Kurt Francom:

So where did you begin with the, I think you mentioned it comes down to three general questions that you started with. How did you come up with those questions and how did it start you off in this research?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Well, I've just, it's similar to other studies I've done in different elements or different situations. But the first question I really felt like would be important is what are the leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities do you, or if they're the women, but do women develop through their experience of serving full-time missions when they were younger? So that's the big first question is to understand, do they, and let's help them see what they actually developed in terms of leadership skills. So that was the first question. And then the second was, how do they use those now? After all these years, and we, by the way, had so many people of different ages who had served missions decades and decades ago, like myself. I hate to admit I'm old, but two sisters who had just returned just recently. So it was fascinating. And then at the end, we also asked what other missionary experiences or opportunities specifically related to leadership do they wish they would have had? And by the way, we had tons of active sisters participate, but also about 60 to 70 who had totally left the church and then some that were mid-activity level. So we measured and collected data on all those things. So it was very interesting to get the mix of results.

Kurt Francom:

Did you feel, were the majority of these women that you surveyed from Utah or were they all over?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

They were all over, actually. So I would say most in Utah, but we had some that were not.

Kurt Francom:

Sure, just like most Latter-day Saints. This is just how we're stacked across the map, right? Yeah. Nice. So, um, so it sounds like going back to sort of the general purpose that you are trying to figure out ways that how do we even, how do we encourage women to even aspire or

consider some, some opportunities out there because you have to get them to consider it before they'll actually do it. Right.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

And a lot of people, a lot of women more than men, the confidence is different when you look at confidence research. And so more than men are more likely to just see themselves as leaders than women are. And in the church, we see that play out very strongly because of the leadership roles available. But I felt like it was important to really help sisters who have served, but also future sisters understand that missions are powerful incubators or whatever we want to call it to developing leadership. And there's so many competencies and skills that sometimes people don't think are related to leadership when they are.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And so the hope of the study was to determine, we could probably assume, yeah, it's probably a good incubator for leadership, but why or why not? And how can we make it better?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Right.

Kurt Francom:

Perfect. So what did you find out? Where's a good place to start understanding these, the results that you found?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Well, I, we had extensive participants, like I said, and it was interesting that we broke it down really to 38 competencies and then we lumped them together. But the top one, like 40% of people that participate specifically mentioned public speaking. And we knew that, you know, I kind of knew that. I didn't know that would be the top that you get pushed into public speaking and just learning how to, how to speak in, in groups of different sizes, including large one. But you'll be, you'll smile at the second most common one, almost 40% was conflict management.

Kurt Francom:

Oh, the companionships, I would guess that's maybe where a lot of that is.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Absolutely, or district leaders or whatever. But companionships, we're talked about the most in that. Wow. But that they really, you know, they grew up, you know, they grew up in a home that had some conflict and so forth, but they really had to learn how to manage and get over conflicts and work through those. And when you look at public speaking and conflict management, I mean, there's such important leadership skills. And by the way, I have a whole set of research

for another show on motherhood, what motherhood actually teaches you and prepares you to be leaders. Our third one was courage.

Kurt Francom:

courage.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Wow. Just being brave. I mean, think about it. You, in fact, a few years ago after the mission age changed, it was probably three or four years ago, I went and did some speaking of Croatia and a dear friend of ours was the mission president there. And I remember meeting sisters and, and thinking, okay, they were 19 and 20 and they were in Croatia learning unique languages. And they just had, I mean, you put somebody in a community, put them out with another sister and they learn how to live in ways that they've never, you know, room with, I mean, meet people on the street. I mean, talk to people who they'd never met before. I mean, you just don't get to do that in life. I mean, you could, but you don't typically reach out and do that. I mean, many of these things are going to be similar for elders, right? Yeah, sure.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And I mean, even just the, just the concept of taking somebody out of their comfort zone of where they live or, you know, and this is, that's the beauty of this mission program that you think, well, why doesn't, why don't we just have them serve here locally? But removing them from, you know, I went to Sacramento and even though it was much like Salt Lake, I mean, or it's still the United States.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Florida, Tampa, Florida. So I didn't learn another language, but you know, you learn a ton.

Kurt Francom:

you're just out of your comfort zone just enough, right? Or some to an extreme level to where they can really grow and develop some courage.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

And all of those things, when you develop yourself, human development is so similar to leadership development. So anything you get better at can be used as being a leader. Let me just read real quick a few others. I'm going in order of top to bottom. Interpersonal skills, problem solving, planning, organization and accountability, confidence. Spiritual growth. I mean, that's got to be up there, right? Empathy was 10 out of 38. I thought that was interesting. Feedback, like learning to receive feedback and give feedback. Today, the research is clear continuously throughout time that the number one problem in workplaces today is that managers cannot give and receive feedback well. And people don't receive, so learning how to

do that and not being offended at that, because we can be offended, especially women. I mean, men too, but we're a little more sensitive. I'm saying that based on research for things like that.

Kurt Francom:

And you have your radical candor book, right?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

It talks a lot about that, right? It does. So the number 12 was hard things, grit, resilience, challenges, just doing hard stuff. I mean, and some people would say, how does that relate to leadership? Oh my gosh, it relates so much to doing hard stuff, right? Learning how to mentor. Fourteen was teaching, but we found that constantly. In our second question about how they used it, that was one of the biggest elements that tracked through all of our questions, the powerfulness of learning how to teach and how they use sisters, where many of them were attracted to career fields that were in the teaching and education, primarily because of their mission experience. Do you want me to keep going? Give you a few more? I think it's interesting. Yeah. Okay. I'm at 15 now. Critical thinking, listening skills they developed, personal growth and awareness, accepting others. You know, that, that's really big for young folks that haven't left Utah or haven't left their homes. Time management, training others, teamwork. The foreign language was very profound. Just learning a language that related to hard things and courage. I mean, it related to all kinds of things. Intercultural competencies, learning how to deal with people or help thrive in environments that are so different from what we've experienced. Goal setting, managing people, work ethic, serving others, taking direction, independence, like being independent. Patience. Patience. A few more. Decision making and judgment. Standing my ground. That's powerful. And actually we'll get into question two in just a minute, but learning to stand their ground. When they talked about how does that apply to me today in my life, in the roles that I'm doing, many talked about standing their ground and really defending their children for resources. Autistic children, for instance, they got that from the mission. They got that courage from their mission to stand their ground and really not be pushovers. So that was a big one. Leading by example, using my voice, self-discipline, being adaptable, and just lifelong learning. So that's a whole, we grouped them into five main categories, but I thought your listeners would enjoy hearing- Yeah, that's interesting. And there's 38 total that you came up with, right? There's 38 total. And the bottom was 5%, which is still a good number of people with nearly 700. Yeah. So, those were so interesting. Most, you know, from positive, but some of those are from the hard times, from even like being offended, learning not to be defensive anymore by receiving feedback and so forth. So, I would expect elders would be somewhat similar. There's probably some differences though.

Kurt Francom:

So with this, I mean, I think most people looking at the list could probably guess that, you know, yeah, sure. I kind of expected for them to go on missions and, and, and acquire some of these, uh, some of these characteristics. And I think one thing that is surprising, just maybe how they stack up, you know, what's higher, what's higher than the other.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

So what's the, just being aware of that's the biggest thing is people do not, and men more than women, because you're socialized to as men. is that these are actually leadership skills and abilities. So I'm hoping that proactively in the future, mission presidents and other folks at the Missionary Training Center and stuff will actually do tighter connections between what they're learning and leadership skills. That's what we know from the research in general. that if we help people understand that their development of certain competencies and skills definitely do link to leadership, then more sisters will see themselves as leaders and they will inspire, but aspire to, to lead in different ways.

Kurt Francom:

So really, I mean, the point is that, yeah, we can assume that, you know, that these things are going to develop, but it's making that connection to, well, now they're actually leaders. So, so use them as leaders. Absolutely. And any, like, how, how do we sometimes miss that? Is there, I don't know if there's an anecdote or an example of this, of just where, you know, there's no surprise that those characteristics on our list, but how do we sometimes miss making that connection?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Well, you know, well, first of all, most people don't talk about leadership to their daughters and more to their sons. We know that not just in the church, but generally. So, as I mentioned before, boys are socialized much more often to see themselves as future leaders than girls. And so if they're just not discussed, you don't even think about it. So when I talk to women, when they're older, many women in the church, I talk about leadership and so many say, I'm not a leader. I'm not prepared to be a leader. I get that every week. And I say, basically, that's crap. I have actually said that in a chapel doing a fireside meeting before. I'm like, it's just not true. Being a mom prepares you for leadership. So when that conversation is not there, especially for girls, you just don't make those connections. And I would argue that sometimes that's true for boys too. Yeah. But again, the leadership research outside religious research at all, you know, in general says that when we help people see themselves as leaders and it's called leadership identity and boys have higher leadership identity than girls. So as we help women see themselves as leaders, they will increase their confidence to become leaders. And if you you've served missions, many of the listeners have served mission, you know that you do lead, you know, just going out there with two people and trying to find that's leadership. Talking and teaching is leadership. And bringing it back to today, we have to be leaders when we're in our homes, raising our children. We need to be leaders and examples when we're in the community trying to move, you know, defend the proclamation to the family and those kinds of things. So. I still from time to time have women in the church and actually more than I would, I would say, you know, say it's not our role to lead. It's not our role to do these things. And I just say, Oh my gosh, that's crap. God needs us to lead and influence and even more today than ever before.

Kurt Francom:

So it sounds like that disconnect that's sometimes there is sometimes present in the women themselves, right? And I don't know if it's a self-confidence issue. And I like some of your research found that coming out of the mission, there may be going to be higher on the scale of feeling self-confident, but maybe that sort of diminishes over time when they're sort of thrust back into the rigmarole of life and, you know, starting families and whatever it is. And so leaders need to be more aware of just encouraging that self-confidence.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

But I will say though, And I wish I had a control group for this study of people in the church who had not served missions. Because one of the things that really surprised me, we had nine quantitative questions, a scale from one to seven. And two of the questions I said, women need to be prepared to influence people around them. And number seven, women need to be prepared to be leaders. Now that's pretty straightforward. Out of 7.7 being the most strongly agree. Of all participants, it was almost 6.7, which is very high. meaning these sisters or, you know, return sister missionaries of different ages said, women need to be prepared to be leaders. And so that was striking to me because I believe that if we, and things are changing the last two or three years in the church, So I think women more feel like they have, they're starting to feel like they have permission to be leaders. But if I had that general population, I don't think that mean would have been nearly as high. So I believe, I don't have the evidence, but I believe that sister missionaries are seeing themselves probably more as leaders than other folks.

Kurt Francom:

And now with that age change, I mean, there's more women serving, right? And so that's an encouraging thing because the, you know, that, uh, demographical feed into our, back into our, our church and our culture.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

And hopefully, as you know, as you know, you know, there's that new position that came to be, maybe what, five years ago, the sister training leader. Yeah. that actually gives sisters a bit more of the responsibility to see themselves as more formal leaders. One of the things that came up in other parts of our research study was the, you know, lack the perception, the continued perception of the lack of leadership roles because women generally can't be, you know, zone leaders and district leaders. Although I need to make a comment about that because it was so fascinating that sisters who said they were in all sister zones, so for instance in most of them were, from the comments we've got, were in like visitor centers. Oh, okay.

Kurt Francom:

I was like, I didn't even know that was a thing, but in visitor centers.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

You have women district leaders and zone leaders and different things. I will tell you that the empowerment of women's perception of leadership was so much higher with sisters that were in all sister zones. They felt empowered. so much more than the other sisters because they were there. And, and actually it links with research more generally outside the church on, on women who went to all women colleges. And there's an empowerment where all the women, you know, you see that in Girl Scouts too, where all the leadership roles are, are girls and women. So you really see that play out differently. So I was, they were so empowered and felt like they had more leadership roles when they were in all sister areas, particularly visitor centers.

Kurt Francom:

Isn't that kind of interesting? Get the male ego out of the way and things.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

And many of them active in the church said, I just don't understand why women can't be district leaders or zone leaders. And still the church does have women reporting to just women, right? And men reporting to, or not reporting, but having women and men report to them. So it's interesting.

Kurt Francom:

So, I mean, what encouragement, I mean, how can we, when the scenario is, and it's almost impossible to get away from where men are in the mix, and of course, we don't have these maybe former leadership roles, is there anything we can do that would still encourage women to act with confidence in some of these leadership roles, even when men are present?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Absolutely. Well, one thing I guess, I guess there's two elements. One is, and I talk about this outside, you know, the church context is that when I work with women and systems, I mean, there's two elements. One is internal. So we work with women themselves, right? Girls and women themselves on confidence on using their voice on, you know, doing things that will prepare them to lead, to lead. Now we can make some movement on that, but if the processes and systems in society or even in mission fields are the same as they've always been in tradition, you know, then you can just go so far to help women. So you can encourage them to use their voice, but we can also make changes. And actually at the end of the brief, and by the way, people can find this brief at utwomen.org under the research tab. So you can get it. It's six pages, a little bit more than six pages, but, and that will give them a lot more details about different things. Now, where was I going with that?

Kurt Francom:

As far as like encouraging women when, when there is a male, you know, male presence in their leadership opportunities.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

what I was actually going to say with the process as a system is I think in terms of what the church is doing is great and I think it can be done in the mission field, is to really look deeply about the opportunities that are available and do men really need to be doing that? We've seen the recent changes of witnesses in the temple. Great change. Women can do that just fine. So looking at the opportunities within missions, and mission presidents can do this and the church as a whole can do this, what things really do need to stay male only? I would argue that so many things can be changed that give women the opportunity to do that. So back to the individual question that you mentioned, helping women see themselves as leaders and using their voices and so forth is going to be really important. We can encourage that. But even more important than ever, it is male, what we call male allies. So we have a whole brief on that and a study that we did on that as well. But when mission presidents, zone leaders, assistants to the presidents, you know, folks in wards that run that understand and really value, look at their own unconscious bias on how things have been through the years. And I still have sister missionaries come home and say they were told to be silent in ward councils and different things. And I'm like, that's not acceptable anymore. So we need to help women themselves. But there's so many great men today in the church that I'm running into that are like, we want to be more inclusive. We want to help women. And so helping men have tools Helping men understand and women understand our unconscious biases and how we might react differently to men and women is important too. So does that make sense? I'm rambling.

Kurt Francom:

No, this is good because I'd like to highlight that, that, you know, speaking as a man, like it's not like I want to, you know, uh, not hear from women or do these things, but they're just being aware of it and be given skills and application ideas of like, Oh, I could do that, you know, to, to, uh, get more involvement with women in, in a council or whatever it is.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

And so just being aware of it is... And to bring their voices out because the research is very clear. that when there's only one or two women in a group of a lot of men, their voices are silenced, both from themselves. They're like, I don't belong. And it's not conscious, but absolutely talked over by men. I didn't let people get away with that because I was raised with six brothers. So I'm pretty assertive. My dad, before he passed away a couple of years ago, said, you do know you were the most assertive of our children. So, but, but people that weren't socialized like me, you know, a lot of times we just were socialized as girls in elementary school to wait our turn, to keep our mouths closed. We get socialized for being kind and nice. And so we wait our turn. And 20 years later, we're, you know, in the mission field or the workplace and we're still waiting our turn.

Kurt Francom:

As we tell, you know, as I'll probably tell my, my son when he's playing basketball to, you know, be aggressive, penetrate, you know, you know, do these things that are more aggressive and, and that the message is coming that that's okay. Right. And, and which is good, but we need to make sure that message is going to our daughters as well.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

And we need to be conscious. A while back, I had a mayor say to me, I raised my sons and daughters exactly the same. And I said, no, you didn't. And he said it again. And I said, No, you didn't. We don't. We just don't. I mean, I can't and I know gender really well. And because we, there's so much importance between gender, wonderful things that men do, wonderful things that women do and understanding the differences in gender. So if a mission president or a mission leader of some kind said, says, you know, let's just treat everybody the same. Actually understanding the differences in gender, not that every woman is the same or every man is the same, can actually, I mean, the research is clear that when you have men and women working together in teams, all using their voices. The most creative decisions are come to the most innovative, the best decision making. So a bunch of men making decisions in talking about the mission field right now, a bunch of elders making decisions or teams with a mission president and just his assistants, if they're not sisters, are not going to be the best for being creative and really moving the gospel forward. The research is very clear on this. That's a diversity case.

Kurt Francom:

you need a mix of both genders to find the best decision. Or the best revelation, I would say.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

You know, that's true because we can't get revelation if we don't even have the ideas in our head, you know, to come forth. Occasionally we can. But, oh no, the research is so clear that if we engage both women and men, girls and boys, the best things will happen for society, for businesses, and I would argue for the mission field and the work of the Lord moving forward.

Kurt Francom:

But, and I love how you say that it's not as easy as, you know, I'm just, for an example, maybe a mission presence hearing this thing, Oh, great. You know, I'm going to make sure we have men and women present when we make decisions. And then I'll just stand up and say, let's make sure we treat everybody the same. That's not good enough. you have to actually be aware of gender differences and then try different tactics to stimulate both sides of that.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Absolutely. And that's one of the recommendations at the end of the brief, I actually make some recommendations for the church in terms of, and by the way, I used to teach at the MTC after my mission. So I'm very, much aware of what happens. But one of the recommendations is that mission presidents, and I would say mission presidents including their wives, but I would call

them mission presidents too, because they are doing the same kind of work, and area 70s and leaders really need to have some good unconscious bias training. I have worked on myself and my own biases for many years in learning how to teach unconscious bias training, and I'll tell you, I am so much better than I used to be on being more Christ-like, on being less judgmental, on all of those things. So if we have more training for mission presidents when they're going out for anybody on the differences between gender and how we can pull that confidence out differently for men and women, sisters and elders, But, you know, understanding the difference in confidence between women and men is so interesting. And so, you know, for anybody that's raising kids, I mean, this stuff is just so important to understand.

Kurt Francom:

That's great. And so what advice would you give to even, I'll just stick with the mission president example, I mean, because there isn't a formal training that they're going to get per se. So what resources or where would you send them if they were on their own to information?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Well, I would hope at the missionary training and their gatherings, there would be, this could be a focus, but there are some resources, like there's a book that's very good called Everyday Bias by Howard is his last name. No, Ross, Howard Ross, I guess is his name. For people that are just interested in maybe their own children and the gender differences, there's a great book called Why Gender Matters out there really for educators and parents that really talk about how you teach boys and girls even differently and how our brains work differently and how it's wonderful actually. But the more we understand about gender, the better.

Kurt Francom:

just in general, as far as mission presidents, any advice that you'd give? Because we now have, you know, sisters are in their mission, we recognize that they're on a great fertile ground for training development, anything they could do extra that would help stimulate that and make some of these characteristics more highlighted at the end of the mission.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Well, one of the things that I do talk about quite a bit in this brief, and by the way, I had a couple of great co-authors of this research and brief as well, Robin Scribner and also Dr. Wendy Fox Kirk as well. So we had a whole team and some other people as well working on this. But one of the things that is so clear and came out in the comments, but also the literature is that to develop leadership identity, girls and young women and women who are serving missions need to see women leading. And what we call developmental relationships are so important. And that mission president's wife, the ones that really, so it was really divided. Some had mission president's wives who were not strong forces, that just did more of the subservient stuff, which is important in a lot of ways. But the ones that had individual connections, mentorship, interactions, with their mission presence wife did see themselves more as leaders, because they viewed her not just a wife. I have this in quote marks, because a mission presence wife is

so much more than that. We need a good title, because it doesn't do justice. They could see themselves. They saw this strength. And it's so good for elders to see the strength in a woman, too. So the treatment of mission presence, I mean, that and giving more opportunities for sister missionaries during their mission to actually be in contact with strong women leaders, be trained by women, not just elders and brothers, that whole thing. And by the way, they asked for that in the study, but it's very clear in the research that developmental relationships are key with other women. Men too. I mean, you still want that good relationship with the mission president, but that's important as well.

Kurt Francom:

So it sounds like, I mean, really taking the steps to empower the mission president's wife to, you know, you're a leader here. You're, you're part of this. You're not just the one that makes the meals for when the new missionaries come into the mission. Like you, we need to, these sisters need to see you leading.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Well, you know, and another thing that came out very clearly is that certain mission presidents invited sisters to those primary leadership meetings, especially the sister training meeting. But many of them just yearned, and I could just feel, I'm getting a little teary-eyed because I could feel their yearning to be included in those meetings. They looked around and the elders were just in those meetings more than they. And also, not just at those leadership meetings to dig into the gospel more deeply, which is so important. You and I both know that, right? but to actually have leadership development content on how to develop leadership, how to move forward, how to really help the elders and sisters in their own districts. So really funneling, even a 15 to 20 minute segment. So really looking at their zone meetings, zone meetings, and it's been a long time since I've been on a mission or taught at the MDC, I'm forgetting my lingo here, or really looking at mission training in general, because everybody needs to lead. I mean, missionary is a leadership role. Being a senior companion is a leadership role as well. So those are a few things. But, you know, just looking at expanding those roles are important. I mentioned already unconscious bias workshops and gender training to provide those to missionaries, but especially mission presidents and area leaders. I see training and development for missionaries at missionary training centers and within missions can be strategically designed to include consistent curriculum for those moving into leadership roles. So many of them said, I wanted more information about leading as a senior, you know, being the senior companion, like, give me more, give me really specific kinds of things with that. And then back to an issue that I was talking about before, mission leaders can also create and support additional sister-only learning opportunities, including trainings, conferences, developmental networking, and relationships like I talked about, one-on-one mentoring. So the research is very clear that that is really helpful to sisters. Not everything should be women-only. Right, right. Yeah.

Kurt Francom:

And that's, I made that note earlier. It sounds like, you know, the wife of the mission president would be very intentional of making sure that a sister only training is happening on a regular basis. But again, we don't, when decisions are being made, we don't, that there's benefit to mixing the genders, but when just taking a regular time to get all the sisters in a room and train and so that again, they can see sisters training, they can see that mentorship happen and that's going to stimulate.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

And sisters need to see that for themselves, but also having, you know, the mission president's wife, I hate to call her that because she's so much more, I don't know what to call it, be such a strong spiritual force in the mission. Elders need to see that as well. And many of the elders have seen maybe a mother that's really strong, but many of them have not. And many young women have not either. And so that personal revelation that the wife and the husband can gain needs to be really obvious to all elders and sisters in the mission. There's just a strength that you can develop when you really understand gender and understand how both men and women can work together. And when you look at the doctrine of the church, when you look at even the website that the church puts out on a mother in heaven and, Oh, it's powerful stuff. We need to be talking about that more. And I, and my heart just leaped for joy when the young women, the young women theme, that's right. said, parents, that to me, because this identity of, there's a piece of your identity for young men, for boys, that is formed by looking at their fathers or other men in the church. There's a piece and by, and let me finish that thought, and by thinking about their connection with Heavenly Father. For women, there is a connection with girls to seeing women leaders and for women to see women leaders, but also not really talking about for so many years, the impact of our mother in heaven has been, in my opinion, a disadvantage to the identity of girls and women, because you cannot fully see yourself in a man. We like to think everything is the same, but it's not. But envisioning and we don't pray to her, you know, right, or whatever, but we can have full rights to envision our mother in heaven and who she is and how we can be like her and picturing her not just as a subservient person to Heavenly Father, but as an equal to Heavenly Father in creating worlds. And I know we're getting a little deep here.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, well, just like the point you made earlier that women need to see other women leading and women need to see another woman being a God, right? And that's- Because we know that that's the truth.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Yeah, exactly. Truth. I mean, some priestesses, I mean, those words are used in the scriptures and in documents and it's exciting to me. It is so exciting. And I say the word exciting, and then I'm crying. To know that we are equal to our husbands. I know there's still some things that make us people struggle with that concept, but I absolutely know with everything within me that God loves women just as much as men. And he needs women just as much as men. And he needs them sometimes in different ways, but many times in similar ways. And moving forward in

this world, I believe that it is the women's voice engaging in our communities, engaging with their homes and families, but using our voice and public policy and so forth. That is going to change things for families throughout the world and for the gospel to move throughout the world. I mean, to me, it is just clear that women's voices and women can do things that men cannot. And men can do things sometimes that we cannot. And there's lots of things we do together, right? But there are unique things that women are innately, you know, use and inherently with us that we can use in different ways than men can. And people will hear us. Women of the world can hear us if we are strong and use our voices and move forward with the work that Heavenly Father needs us to do.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. So I want to make sure we move on to question two, but also, you know, we've talked about a lot of these things in the context of, of a mission, right? With a mission president and his companion. But what about in the context of just an everyday ward, right? Where, you know, because obviously we have the Relief Society, so it's opportunities for women to get together, but where can we better manifest some of these principles in a traditional Latter-day Saint ward?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Well, I'll just move to question two because this is part of it. Let's do it. So my question two really, like what other, or what are returned sister missionaries currently using the knowledge, skills, and abilities they gained on their mission? So one of the K, we've got five categories that we uncovered through lots and lots of data analysis. And one of those is very specifically within church callings. One of them is in the family. So, a lot of those they talk about within the family. So, leading their children, but conflict management shows up. You know, you practice that on admission. It shows up in most families. Maybe yours is perfect, but mine isn't. You know, interpersonal skills, all those things we talked about, doing hard things, being a parent is hard. You know, mom is hard. You know, time management, all of those things are present that they learned and strengthened on their mission and then moved into their families. So there's a lot of data on families and the way that they integrated those skills and abilities of leadership into their homes. Now in the church, Yeah, that I've served as a Relief Society president, they would say, or a Young Women's president, or this and that. They were able to, in their deep stories that they told us in answering this question, to really talk about very specific things from their mission and how they translated that into word callings, especially leadership callings, but even things like, I'm a scout committee chairman, you know, but a lot of them talked about being a Relief Society president or primary president or in a presidency, right?

Kurt Francom:

And they felt more prepared for those things.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Oh, absolutely. Yeah. And they used specific skills in public speaking and, you know, conflict management with young women leaders and stuff and, um, you know, teamwork and just being patient. Oh, I learned on my mission to be patient. I'm a young women leader right now. And man, does it take some patience.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Yeah. So anything else about that same question that any other principle that was found that maybe we could apply a certain way?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Well, the other categories really that they use them. So they talked about home. So they use those competencies in the home. They use them in their church and they use them actually a lot of these women are working women. in their career. About half of them, at least, were working and have worked full-time. And many of them, and a number part-time, but we were surprised at how many women who are returned missionaries were working full-time. And oh, very specific, like I I, because of the confidence I got on my mission, I'm in leadership roles today because I'm very comfortable with hard things. I've learned how to take feedback. I can give feedback. I can handle conflict and not go to pot, you know, like, like, you know what I mean? Sometimes we like, ah, we don't like conflict. So a lot of them talked about the applications of their mission skills with their workplaces today. Now, interestingly, One of the areas that surprised me was I really believed, and of all, like almost 700, probably four or five people, that's not very many, said that they used their knowledge and the skills and abilities, their competencies for community work. So that is really my passion, that we need to take this work and go out to the community. And what we found in the church and in Utah in general, we see that women do serve and are civically engaged, but not necessarily in leadership roles. So you go out and you're in a soup kitchen and you serve meals and you make packets and all of those are great. You make packets, you know, what are those called? Not packets. Yeah. Well, the humanitarian packets. I don't know. Okay. We'll call it that. But in the state of Utah specifically, I have other reports that we've been low on women serving on boards and commissions and doing those more leadership roles. So we had only a few women say, took those skills from my mission and now I'm using those in running for public office or serving in public office or engaging in really being down at the Capitol and using their voice to move forward, you know, efforts and policies and laws related to the homelessness or education or those kinds of things. We saw very little of that, which continues to tell me, and I've studied the research for so many years, that we still got work to do in terms of helping women aspire to be leaders, but leaders also in the community and really using their voices that are so needed today in terms of really important public policy, right? And running and serving in office. And I know if you look at the encouragement by top church leaders, women officers, as well as, you know, the apostles in seventies, They are asking us to get involved in the community and to use our voices to move forward really responsible legislation that will benefit families and keep those principles set, those doctrines and principles that we believe in so strongly in the church at the forefront of conversations for public policy moving forward.

Kurt Francom:

And maybe this is sort of a tangent of the question, but I've often thought about that, that in our religious culture, being in a lay ministry, like we have another item on the list of priorities that maybe other Christian churches or other denominations don't have because we're given a calling or we're expected to give more of our time and effort to our church. And so by the time the community opportunities come around, we're like exhausted, like, Oh, I don't, I don't got time for that too. You know, is that, do you think that plays into it?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

I think it does, but one of them also is that we just don't envision ourselves doing that. But if you look at the changes, and they're not, I mean, one of them is not a change. We're always asked to have personal revelation, but you see that the tweak and the language that that's more important. And I've always believed that, that it is our choice to receive revelation from Heavenly Father on what He needs us to do. And some of those are within the context of our own homes, but also in our wards. But there's so much in society. You know, I work in the state of Utah and globally as well, but I work in the state of Utah with most majority of the nonprofits. And so many people don't understand the needs. I mean, one in six women are raped or girls or women are raped in the state of Utah. I mean, there's so much work to be done in social issues in the state of Utah that we need to, I still think for us as women, many of us just have been taught throughout time to do things for our neighborhoods. And that's so important. I'm not diminishing that at all. But we need to see ourselves as, and I'm seeing evidence in the talks and the conference, I expect we'll see more in conference talks in future months, that we need to be using our personal revelation, not just serving. I mean, callings are lessened now, you know, and especially in Utah, there's a million people that could do every calling, right? But that we have time that we can make. We can make time to actually engage in deeper and more impactful ways in the community that we haven't seen in years past. When I do firesides, I read a couple of quotes to start it off. And one of them is, I mean, Sherry Dew says in her book from, I think it was 2013 or 14, that when we unleash the impact of women in this church, things will roll forth for the church that we've never seen. And we're not unleashed the impact yet, but we're moving in that direction. But even the prophet has said in talks in the past, that we're not going to keep doing things as we've always done them before. And Elder Bednar has said that in a talk as well. But the prophet also has this quote that I use in my firesides, that women of this generation are distinctive from women of any other generation. Now, I talk about that when I do firesides. I do that first and then I do the Bednar quote on that things haven't happened. I mean, things, you know, can't be done as they've always been done and we see the evidence of that. And then I share Sherry Dew's quote about unleashing women. But back to that, it's a powerful combination, but you didn't get it here very well because I didn't have the exact quotes. But one of the things that, you know, we judge each other in the church, women judge other women very harshly. We are judgmental. And one of the things that with that quote from our dear prophet, that women are distinct from women of any other generation, that means there's expectations that are different for women. And that we can't say, well, you don't look like the typical Mormon mom that's been out there. You know, maybe you don't cook as much or whatever. I have a funny slide I show that what does an ideal Latter-day Saint Mormon woman look like? And I

share my box and that is loves crafts and sewing. So I don't like crafts and sewing. So I'm not in the box. I don't, I judge myself based on that. Right. But it will look different. Women of this generation, it will look different. And I can't tell you what that's going to look like. But I believe more and more that every woman is going to be distinct in the way that she can contribute in this world. And when we as women to each other and men and, you know, the leadership of the church really help in different ways to unleash women, that we're going to just see amazing things moving forward. admissions back to the study. I got off track a little bit, but, um, I, yeah, I was a little discouraged by that. Only a few saying that they are using their skills in public work, visible public work. I think that we've got to really help girls and women understand that's okay. And they, it's not even, it's not just okay. It's actually something we need to do.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, it's very neat. And I love just how you articulated that, you know, especially with more and more of these official callings going away, I think a lot of bishops are struggling with how do we get calling for everybody and to have a bishop or a leader or a Relief Society president stand up and say, Actually, this is up to you to go. I don't have a calling for you right now. So it's up to you to go to your knees and figure out where you can contribute. And that very likely may be in the community and that community effort. You can consider that your church assignment, your church calling, but I'm not going to officially call you to that, but maybe God will. So take that question.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

And that calling just means so much to that broader sense of calling. And you know, that, that term was really, it started being used by Martin Luther in the day, you know, in the 1600s with calling and vocation. Yeah. and really spread to women. And that personal, I have a book, it's not a Latter-day Saint book, but it's called Let Your Life Speak by Parker Palmer. And I love that book on just listen to your, he comes from a Quaker perspective, but it's so interesting on let your life speak, like, you know, hear that personal revelation. Then follow what you're supposed to do. This putting people in a box and judging them based on their decision to work part-time or work full-time or not work at all. Sometimes you get judged in that way or to run for public office. years ago when we had a real prominent Latter-day Saint woman run for Congress, one of the things that I heard kind of around was how many Latter-day Saint women actually didn't vote because they expected vote for this particular person just because they expected that she still had kids at home so she should not be running for public office. So that expectation that I know what that person, but I just say, I mean, how do we know what's in each other's patriarchal blessing? Right. You know, how do we know what God's calling is for anybody else? Maybe our spouse, we know, maybe our kids, but so how do we know If, I mean, we have to have more women running for Congress or the state legislature or whatever to benefit families and homes here in Utah and to really defend the proclamation to the family and do the things that we need to. So I used to be a lot more judgmental. Maybe it's my age. Maybe it's having some hard kids in my life that have learned me. You know, I used to think everybody, why don't people keep their kids quiet in church? We've all been There.

Kurt Francom:

You know what I mean. Have we hit on the final question?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Yeah, I think we have. In those quantitative questions, 6.5 people, there were some that said they weren't glad they served a mission, but the majority of course said that it was a transformational um, experience in their life and it taught them to lead and it taught them to, to, um, just be strong and so many different things that I, sometimes I say, I'll just say this to you because sometimes I'll say to, to young women, um, if you're the most selfish person in the world, you would serve a mission. because it gives you so much. You learn and develop so much. And if you're the most selfless person in the world, you serve a mission because it's all about serving and changing others. And you know what, when I've looked at the research, not in the church, other research on the experience that rivaled the mission, maybe being in the Peace Corps, you know, can give you or something like that, where you're encompassed by 18 months of pure leadership development and spiritual experiences. There's not many things that can give you the opportunity in such a short amount of time. I mean, motherhood can, but it takes a lot longer to gain leadership, to gain confidence, to do hard things that, and this is true for boys, you know, men and women, right? There's not much, it's such a good, one of the best that I've ever seen leadership development experiences and opportunities for both men and women to develop who you are in yourself.

Kurt Francom:

So on that note, I know since the age change, I know that the stigma that women should serve a mission is sort of increased, which on paper and the research, that's sort of maybe a good thing, but you know, this is a stigma that men have been battling for years and years. And I have a sweet niece, Haley, who, I think she's 20 right now, and she decided not to serve a mission, very prayerful. And I was sort of, from her experience, I was shocked about how heavy of a decision this was for her. And as I talked to her, I realized, wow, I didn't realize there was such this stigma of like, now everybody expects women to serve, right? It's like, oh, when are you going, you know, type thing. And so it was sort of a tough decision for her to make not to go.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

It is kind of rivalry. I mean, because you do. And that the natural unconscious bias that we have when a young man doesn't serve is what's wrong with you. Right. Or what did you do or whatever. So what I've heard is that we do the same thing now, maybe not quite as much, but more with young women. And, and I do it. We all do it, you know, cause we're looking, why? It's the same element as if you have a couple that's five years and they don't have children, you start thinking and assuming what's wrong with them or whatever, you know. Why are they waiting? Yes, yes. We judge so much.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. So what do we do? I mean, what, what encouragement would, what do we do about the women who don't serve? Cause you've, you've articulated so clearly, like how powerful a mission can be. Well, what about those that don't? What should we consider with those that don't

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Well, we, we have to be careful with judging anybody because there's reasons. And if you have prayerfully, you know, really, you know, I would encourage any young women to be very prayerful about the decision to go or not to go. And we didn't use to do that before. Right. Yeah. But if they choose not to, and Heavenly Father has confirmed, we just need to be careful to not judge. We really need to be careful. But I would encourage those young women to really be thoughtful on what experiences they will, you know, because there's experiences going to college that you can engage deeply with the service and learning center on campus or running, running for student council or doing things, you know, that can help develop those leadership skills as well. So I guess that's what I would say as it comes down to judging each other again, right?

Kurt Francom:

We have to be careful. I guess the question goes, like, just how do we help them develop similar leadership skills? And like you say, you just, you know, look at this list and say, well, how can you have to be intentional now? A little bit more intentional, right? We're not just thrusting you into this experience.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

You have to do hard things because it's the hard things. It's the things that are out of your comfort zone. And this is not just mission stuff. This is my global research studies that I've done. It's that getting out of your comfort zone, it's doing hard things. It's putting yourself in situations that are, will just push you. That's where leadership development is. And if we stay in our comfort zones, if we just, you know, go to normal college and stay comfortable or do that, we're not going to develop the leadership. So it's being conscious, more conscious than ever before about saying, I do want to develop leadership. I want to develop leadership in general so that I can be ready for my family, but also that I can serve God more. We need that. So what do I do to push myself? Yeah. you know, do I, you know, a lot of women, we don't want to be rejected. So we don't run for student council or do all of those things because we're afraid, but actually getting rejection is really important.

Kurt Francom:

And on the mission, you get the, you have more opportunity to get it. And so look for, maybe do run for student council or, you know, go for that job you feel unqualified for. Right. And just get used to the rejection.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

The tech industry uses fail fast, that term. Actually, it's the more that we let our daughters, like our sons, actually be okay with failure, the more we actually get more confidence. There's more to that. With girls, it takes a while to give you the logic behind that, but with girls, the more we teach self-compassion, the more we teach, because girls are more perfectionistic and women than men, so we're expecting ourselves to be perfect, the more we actually say, Be good to yourself, forgive yourself, the more we actually try and then we get more confidence. So trying to be careful as we raise girls to give them opportunities and don't protect them from failure, but help them learn how to reflect on failure and what they have learned from failure. So, I would say to young women, if you don't serve a mission, be very intentional at having experiences that make you more brave and give you courage and get out there and learn how to do public speaking and, you know, deal with roommates. Don't be comfortable with conflict management. So, I think it tends to take a little bit longer to develop some of those leadership skills because anything, but they're still there, you know, and as mothers, you know, anything that you're totally a hundred percent in is going to push you in whatever area, you know, if you're thrown out in a country and having to learn the language in a different kind of situation, it'll still develop you really well like missions. So that's a good question though.

Kurt Francom:

And then what would you say, because in our culture, we feel like, well, you just need to get out on the mission and this will be a great experience for you. But what would you say to stake presidents, bishops, or even some of their women leaders to better help them prepare for a mission and prepare to be a leader on the mission before they actually go?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Actually, the church has already made some changes. The differences in young women and young men through the years have been striking in terms of preparing young men for missions and women for domestic work at home. Let's teach you how to iron or whatever. It's like, when you need to iron, you can learn how to iron. Just my opinion about food storage. When you need to use food storage, you can learn how to get the book out. But actually, there were many comments in this question that talked about really wanting more very specific training before they go on missions for looking at leadership, how to develop leadership, all of the roles, not just the text of what they're going to be teaching, but those would be better. And encourage, I just did a TEDx actually called Raising Girls to Become Leaders. And any of those things are really, and one of them, but the one I gave four main strategies and the last one I would really encourage in this situation, and that was teach girls how to effectively reflect. The research on leadership development and on learning is that you get so much more if you reflect. So most people think it's experiences that teach you life lessons, but it's actually not the experiences that teach you. It's the reflection on the experiences that teach you. So learning, teaching our kids and teaching our missionaries to reflect. So maybe you had door slams and all of these things happened, you know, but let's reflect. What did you learn from that? How, because two people can have a really tough thing happen. And one can move forward and learn and one can block it out and they just don't get the learning. So that reflection on the experience, and we do that not by preaching to them, not necessarily by giving them advice, but learning to ask them questions

like, So what did you learn from that experience? Or if you had to do that all over again, what would you do and say differently? Those are my two favorite. And you get them to learn and you just prod those questions around until they have the aha. Oh, cool. I think I learned this from that hard experience. And then they run off and they processed it. Right?

Kurt Francom:

Right. Yeah. And that's profound because I'm the pre-score advisor right now. And I just think of, you know, in the youth experience, you do all sorts of activities every week, right? And I think just last Wednesday, we did an egg drop activity, right? They had to put together some type of protection as they dropped this egg and whoever, you know, broke, they lost a point. But we rarely take the time to say, okay, let's take 10 minutes, 15 minutes and say, where can we reflect?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

What did you learn, right? It's the debrief that makes all the difference. Just doing the activities or having the experience without the reflection doesn't mean a lot. It really doesn't. It's just another activity. It's just another fun thing. And it might have a purpose to just get people to know each other or whatever, but why not include a reflection element and actually have it stick in their minds in different ways? And there's ways to do that with the scriptures and stuff.

Kurt Francom:

Wow. That's awesome. Well, did we cover it all? Anything we missed? We dove deep here.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

This is good. Yeah, I think there's just, like I said, I would encourage people to, it's under our research page on utwomen.org. And again, it's not, this study was done in Utah, but we're going to also publish it in a scholarly journal as well. But it's good for any member of the church to look and think about the missions. And I would hope that the church would look at these recommendations as well, because they're not overwhelming in terms of big changes, but they're, you know, working in some more content of training for leaders, mission presidents, area 70s, and so forth. But also some of these, the trainings for the sisters and elders that are out there, you know, just adding 15 minutes here and there about training on some topics would really help change things. And then that conversation, like we talked about at the middle with saying, you are leaders, you are each one of you. And this is how, and this is what you're learning. And this is how it's going to relate that reflection piece of here's what you're going through. Here's what you're learning. Here's what you're doing and how it relates to you being a leader and future life. You're going to use this as parents. You're going to use this when you're the bishop or the young women president or the Relief Society president or just a mom and dad. That connection of those skills to applicability in life, application I guess, is really powerful. So I'm just happy that I've wanted to do this study for so many years and just, it's powerful. And we just scratched the surface on these results because we have so much other stuff.

Kurt Francom:

So is that, you mentioned that website, is that where you'd send people they want to learn more about you and your research? Absolutely.

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Yeah. If you search online, it's Susan R. You need to put the R in the middle. R. Madsen. There's a few other Susan Madsens that do writing. You can get to the website, but utwomen.org gets you to that and my bio. And like I said, I do work in other countries as well.

Kurt Francom:

I love it. Cool. And the last question I have for you is you consider this research you've done and really been a leader in your own right, in your own life and experiences you've had, but how has you being a leader and researching leadership made you a better follower of Jesus Christ?

Dr. Susan R. Madsen:

Oh, that is wonderful. I think it goes back to that calling piece that I talked about, and I've studied that and learned so much, but I feel called absolutely to do the work I do. And all of that is in light, I don't know, by the way I was raised with my father being in seminary as an institute. I believe, and he worked until his last days to serve Heavenly Father. And so I approach that no matter what I do for pay or in the community. My biggest motivator of anything in my life is that I do what Heavenly Father wants me to do with my limited time on earth. And I'm getting older, so it's more limited. But I need to, I don't care what anybody else says at this point in my life, I need to know that I am serving Him and do what I need to on earth to when I see Him again in the next life. that He will say to me, you've worked hard and you've done what I needed you to do. So that personal revelation, I think, that comes along with finding that life calling, and I've found mine, and this is the work I need to do and will continue to do inside the church and beyond, is to help girls and women really strengthen their impact in whatever they choose, but definitely in their homes and their schools and their communities and neighborhoods and nonprofits. politics or whatever, because I believe without a doubt that God needs more women to feel empowered to use their voices for good in this world.

Kurt Francom:

That concludes my interview with Dr. Susan R. Madsen. I so much enjoyed that conversation and all that I learned from it and it inspired me, especially being a father of two daughters. And I'm excited for the leadership opportunities they have and encouraging them in that leadership. Would you do me a favor and maybe drop the link of this episode in an email to your Relief Society president or Young Women's president? I think this would be really powerful and inspiring for them to just hear and realize the difference that we can have by extending additional leadership opportunities to women in our church. And it's awesome. And then to consider how that might overflow into the community, right, and having more women serve in the community. So, awesome discussion, and I hope that you'll share it. And that concludes this

throwback episode of the Leading Saints podcast. Remember, the Jody Moore presentation about youth and mental health is waiting for you at leadingsaints.org slash 14.

SPEAKER_00:

It came as a result of the position of leadership which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when the declaration was made concerning the only true and living church upon the face of the earth, we were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor run away, and to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.