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Leading with Heart: Aziza Alexander Of Lite Tuition On The Power of Authentic Women’s Leadership

An Interview With Pirie Jones Grossman



Pirie Jones Grossman

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In *today's dynamic world, the concept of leadership is continuously evolving. While traditional leadership models have often been male-dominated, there is a growing recognition of the unique strengths and perspectives that women bring to these roles. This series aims to explore how women can become more effective leaders by authentically embracing their femininity and innate strengths, rather than conforming to traditional male leadership styles. In this series, we are talking to successful women leaders, coaches, authors, and experts who can provide insights and personal stories on how embracing their inherent feminine qualities has enhanced their leadership abilities. As part of this series, we had the pleasure of interviewing Aziza Alexander.*

Aziza Alexander, CEO and co-founder of Lite Tuition, is a passionate leader with a strong background in Legal Administration, Management, Human Resources and Labor Relations — Position Control. Driven by her guiding principle, “Faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains,” Aziza empowers students and families worldwide by providing innovative financial solutions that make education more accessible and successful.

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Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series. Before we dive into our discussion about authentic, feminine leadership, our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you share with us the backstory about what brought you to your specific career path?

Thank you for having me! My journey to entrepreneurship has been anything but traditional and is rooted in a deep passion for helping others succeed. I began my career in retail management, where I quickly discovered my love for supporting people in their growth and development. This passion led me to roles in Human Resources and Labor Relations within local government, where my focus was always on empowering individuals to reach their fullest potential. Along the way, I gained unique insights into the challenges people face and the importance of fostering environments that truly support growth and resilience.

This shared purpose eventually inspired my husband, Marc, and I to start Lite Tuition. The idea stemmed from a meaningful experience Marc had in college, when he received an anonymous donation with the simple request to “pay it forward.” This act of generosity left a lasting impression on us both, and Lite Tuition became our way to continue that legacy — by providing meaningful educational support to students and creating a platform where communities can uplift one another.

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One of the most interesting and pivotal moments in my career happened during the early days of Lite Tuition when COVID-19 completely shifted our focus and approach. Initially, Lite Tuition was designed to help college students manage the financial burden of tuition. But as the pandemic unfolded, I began hearing from families struggling to keep their children in school across all age groups — not just college. Parents faced impossible choices between household essentials and educational expenses and high

school seniors — like our first high school senior Ashley Dobson — were missing out on the graduation celebrations they had worked so hard to reach.

As I was able to speak with parents, I realized that the need was far broader than we had anticipated. Families wanted a way to support their children's education at every level, from pre-K through grad school, trade school programs and even just to celebrate their accomplishments. This feedback led to a complete pivot for Lite Tuition. We expanded the platform to serve students of all ages, making it possible for parents, friends and even anonymous donors to provide financial and emotional support to students wherever they were on their educational journey.

This change was transformative — not only for Lite Tuition, but for me personally as a leader. It reinforced the importance of listening to our community, and it solidified our mission of helping students and families overcome educational barriers, no matter what they might be facing. This pivot has allowed us to serve students across all stages of life, and to date, Lite Tuition has provided over \$1.3 million in support to students worldwide. It was a powerful lesson in adaptability and staying true to the core purpose of helping others, even if it means taking an entirely new direction.

What do you think makes your company stand out? Can you share a story?

Lite Tuition stands out because of our commitment to making education accessible for students from all walks of life. We support learners from pre-K to trade school, graduate school and beyond — making our platform useful for anyone planning for tuition-based education. Students can rely on Lite Tuition to offset expenses, regardless of income, because we believe everyone deserves the opportunity to succeed. Our platform is free for students to use, allowing them to focus on their education.

What makes Lite Tuition truly unique is our dedication to fostering a supportive community around every student's journey, no matter their financial need. Ashley Dobson's story illustrates this perfectly. Though her parents had saved for her college tuition, COVID-19 disrupted her high school graduation in a way no one could have predicted. Her celebration venue was canceled, and her extended family couldn't travel due to health concerns and restrictions.

Through Lite Tuition, Ashley's loved ones were able to honor her achievements by visiting her campaign page, reading about her journey, sharing heartfelt messages and contributing directly to her Lite Tuition campaign. And as Lite Tuition does for all students, we ensured those contributions went straight to her school. But perhaps the most touching part of Ashley's experience was her response — she and her mother were so moved by the kindness of anonymous donors who supported her that they decided to “pay it forward” by contributing to other students' campaigns.

This experience highlighted Lite Tuition's mission in a new way: it's not only about covering education costs but about creating a network of encouragement and generosity for every student. With Lite Tuition, students and families are uplifted by their communities, building a culture where education is celebrated and supported. This is the heart of our mission, and it's what sets Lite Tuition apart.

You are a successful business leader. Which three character traits do you think were most instrumental to your success? Can you please share a story or example for each?

Compassionate Insight: My leadership is driven by a deep understanding of the challenges families face. When the pandemic hit, we expanded Lite Tuition to support students from pre-K to trade school, knowing that

education should be accessible to all, especially in difficult times. This decision was rooted in genuine concern for the well-being of families.

Enduring Fortitude: Resilience has been essential to our journey. Even through financial challenges and unforeseen setbacks, we've stayed focused on our mission. Our unwavering commitment has allowed us to create lasting value for students at every stage of education, even when it would have been easier to step back.

Genuine Integrity: At the core of Lite Tuition is authenticity. By staying true to our mission and building real connections, we've earned the trust of families who know we genuinely care about their success. This integrity has made a lasting impact on the lives we touch.

These values — compassionate insight, enduring fortitude and genuine integrity — are the foundation of Lite Tuition and the driving force behind our commitment to creating positive change.

Leadership often entails making difficult decisions or hard choices between two apparently good paths. Can you share a story with us about a hard decision or choice you had to make as a leader? I'm curious to understand how these challenges have shaped your leadership.

One of the hardest decisions I ever had was contemplating leaving a stable career in corporate America to become an entrepreneur. While I had security and a clear path, I felt called to serve others in a deeper way. I trusted that God was guiding me, even though it meant stepping into the unknown. This decision required faith, prayer and reliance on Proverbs 3:5–6, which reminds me to trust in the Lord and acknowledge Him in all my ways.

Starting Lite Tuition came with challenges — funding struggles, learning new industries — but in those moments of doubt, I leaned on my faith, knowing God would provide. This journey taught me that leadership isn't about having all the answers, but about trusting in God's guidance, even when the path isn't clear. Thanks to that faith, we've been able to disperse over a million dollars to schools in care of our Lite Tuition students, providing them with the support they need to succeed. This experience has shaped my leadership, helping me lead with courage, humility and faith, knowing that God's plan is greater than anything I could envision.

Ok, thank you for that. Let's now jump to the primary focus of our interview. Can you share a personal experience where embracing your unique leadership style, which might not align with traditional expectations, led to a significant positive impact in your organization or team?

Certainly. Embracing a heart-centered leadership style, which focuses on empathy and connection, allowed me to see the deeper challenges families were facing. For instance, during COVID-19, many families struggled to choose between basic needs and education. By listening to their concerns, I was inspired to expand Lite Tuition's platform beyond traditional college students to include students from pre-K through trade schools. This shift wasn't the typical business move, but it significantly increased our impact, providing educational support to a much wider range of students and creating lasting, meaningful change in our community.

In your journey as a leader, how have you balanced demonstrating resilience, often seen as a masculine trait, with showing vulnerability, which is equally powerful, but typically feminine? Can you give an example where this balance created a meaningful difference?

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In my journey as a leader, balancing resilience with vulnerability has been crucial, especially in an industry where my access to investment capital and support doesn't look like that of my peers. Resilience in this context means standing strong in my mission despite systemic obstacles; vulnerability, on the other hand, is openly acknowledging the need for support and empathy. Together, these qualities allow me to lead Lite Tuition in a way that resonates deeply with the communities we serve.

For example, when we made the decision to expand Lite Tuition's support to all levels of education — from pre-K to trade schools — it was a choice grounded in vulnerability. I understood how the rising costs of both education and everyday living expenses were impacting families, particularly those already stretched thin. By openly addressing these needs and creating a platform where families could seek and give support without stigma, we were telling them, "It's okay to ask for help; needing assistance doesn't define your capability or worth."

This balance of strength and openness has allowed Lite Tuition to become more than just a financial tool; it's become a source of community and reassurance for families who might otherwise feel alone in their struggles. By leading with both resilience and vulnerability, I believe we've created a space where families feel seen, valued and supported — regardless of the financial challenges they face.



As a woman in leadership, how have you navigated and challenged gender stereotypes, especially in situations where traditional male-dominated approaches are the norm? What strategies have you employed to remain authentic to your style?

I've found that listening closely to others is one of the most powerful tools in leadership, even when traditional approaches favor assertiveness. By being authentically attentive, I've been able to understand and address the true needs of families and students. In a field where male-dominated strategies are often transactional, I'm proud that Lite Tuition has created a more relational and empathetic approach.

How do you utilize emotional intelligence and active listening to create an inclusive environment in your team or organization? Could you share a specific instance where these qualities particularly enhanced team dynamics or performance?"

In our team meetings, I ensure everyone has the chance to share their perspectives and ideas. I've learned to listen actively and with intent, which has led to innovative solutions we might not have discovered otherwise. For instance, a team member's suggestion led to a payment gateway feature being developed that will reduce our bottom line and help us get funds to where they are needed most — the students at Lite Tuition — while expanding our community support impact.

What role has mentorship played in developing your authentic leadership style, and how do you communicate authentically to inspire and empower both your mentors and mentees?

Mentorship has been instrumental in shaping my leadership style, helping me cultivate authenticity and continuous learning. My husband often reminds me, *“You don’t know what you don’t know,”* a phrase that underscores the importance of curiosity and humility. Embracing this mindset, I’ve learned that asking questions and staying open to new perspectives are critical to growth — and I encourage my team to do the same.

My mentors taught me that leadership doesn’t require having all the answers but rather having the willingness to seek them. I carry this lesson into my own mentoring, sharing openly about my own journey and challenges, and creating a space where my mentees feel comfortable exploring ideas and asking questions. By modeling a commitment to learning, I empower them to lead authentically, confident in their ability to learn, adapt and overcome

Ok super. Here is the main question of our interview. Based on your experience and research, can you please share “5 Ways Leading Authentically As A Woman Will Affect Your Leadership”? If you can, please share a story or an example for each.

1. Greater Connection: Authentic leadership fosters deeper connections with those you lead.

When building Lite Tuition, I prioritized open communication with everyone involved, from students, families and our team. Sharing the “why” behind our mission — how the anonymous gift inspired Lite Tuition — helped us connect deeply with people. But it wasn’t just the story that created these bonds; it was actively listening to others’ stories and challenges. By showing genuine care and aligning our vision with their needs, we created relationships rooted in trust and shared purpose. This connection goes beyond the business — it’s about being part of a larger community where we support and uplift one another.

2. Increased Trust: Being open and genuine builds trust within teams and communities.

When Lite Tuition was just starting, we didn't have the financial resources to pay our team. I was upfront with them about our situation, sharing the challenges we faced and the vision we were building toward. Despite this, they believed in our mission so strongly that they chose to join us anyway, contributing their skills and energy to help us grow. Over time, as the company evolved, many of them returned multiple times to support us, and we've since transitioned to offering paid opportunities. This experience showed me that transparency and authenticity create trust and inspire dedication, even in difficult circumstances. It reinforced the importance of leading with honesty and purpose, which continues to strengthen our team and mission today.

3. Enhanced Empathy: Women naturally lead with empathy, which is essential for understanding and addressing needs.

Empathy is at the core of everything I do, and it drives the work we do at Lite Tuition. I listen to the families and students who use our platform and make sure their voices are heard. One single mother shared how Lite Tuition helped her secure funding for her child's private school tuition after experiencing a financial setback. Hearing stories like hers reminds me why empathy is crucial — it helps us understand the real needs of the people we serve and make their lives better.

4. Innovative Solutions: Listening to others' perspectives creates opportunities for innovative, inclusive solutions.

One of Lite Tuition's key features — supporting students across all levels of education, from pre-K to trade school — was developed because I listened to

the concerns of our users. They needed a platform that went beyond traditional college funding. By considering these diverse perspectives, we've been able to create solutions that address a broader range of needs, making Lite Tuition more inclusive and impactful.

5. Stronger Resilience: Leading with authenticity allows you to be resilient, as you're rooted in a mission larger than yourself.

When seeking capital to grow Lite Tuition, we faced numerous rejections. Investors often questioned the viability of our platform and services. However, I remained steadfast, knowing the mission to provide equitable access to education was worth every challenge. Each setback became an opportunity to refine our pitch and double down on our impact metrics. By staying authentic to the mission and transparent about our goals, I found a way to help students without the backing of investment capital. Resilience in those moments wasn't just about perseverance; it was about keeping the mission at the heart of every decision.

Are there potential pitfalls or challenges associated with being an empathetic leader? How can these be addressed?

Empathy can sometimes lead to emotional exhaustion. I've learned the importance of setting boundaries and taking time to recharge, which helps me stay grounded and balanced.

You are a person of great influence. If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

We have already started a movement with the **Lite Tuition Foundation** called the "Pay It Forward Education Fund." This initiative was inspired by Lite

Tuition's mission to make education accessible to all. Through this fund, individuals, companies, and organizations can create scholarships for students, not just locally but globally. The idea is simple: when you give, you help ensure that education is no longer seen as a privilege for the few, but as a right for everyone.

With the "Pay It Forward Education Fund," we're creating a world where generosity fuels the future of education. People can start their own scholarships, whether for K-12 students, trade school learners, or those pursuing higher education, and the fund allows those scholarships to reach students who need them most.

By coming together to support this fund, we're building a movement that empowers the next generation of leaders. Every contribution, whether large or small, makes a profound impact. Together, we can shift the mindset around education, create lasting opportunities for students worldwide, and pave the way for a brighter, more equitable future.

How can our readers further follow you online?

Readers can follow Lite Tuition's journey and my own on our website, where we share our stories, student successes and ways to get involved. Please visit us at www.LiteTuition.com.

Thank you for the time you spent sharing these fantastic insights. We wish you only continued success in your great work!

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A bout The Interviewer: Pirie is a TedX speaker, author and a Life Empowerment Coach. She is a co-host of Own your Throne podcast, inspiring women in the 2nd chapter of their lives. With over 20 years in front of the camera, Pirie Grossman understands the power of storytelling. After success in commercials and acting. She spent 10 years reporting for E! Entertainment Television, Entertainment Tonight, also hosted ABC's "Every Woman". Her work off-camera capitalizes on her strength, producing, bringing people together for unique experiences. She produced a Children's Day of Compassion during the Dalai Lama's visit here in 2005. 10,000 children attended, sharing ideas about compassion with His Holiness. From 2006–2009, Pirie Co-chaired the Special Olympics World Winter Games, in Idaho, welcoming 3,000 athletes from over 150 countries. She founded Destiny Productions to create Wellness Festivals and is an Advisory Board member of the Sun Valley Wellness Board. In February 2017, Pirie produced, "Love is Louder", a Brain Health Summit, bringing in Kevin Hines, noted suicide survivor to Sun Valley who spoke to school kids about suicide. Sun Valley is in the top 5% highest suicide rate per capita in the Northwest, prompting a community initiative with St. Luke's and other stake holders, to begin healing. She lives in Sun Valley with her two children, serves on the Board of Community School. She has her Master's degree in Spiritual Psychology from the University of Santa Monica and is an Executive Life Empowerment Coach, where she helps people meet their dreams and goals! The difference between a dream and a goal is that a goal is a dream with a date on it!

Business



Social Impact



Written by Pirie Jones Grossman

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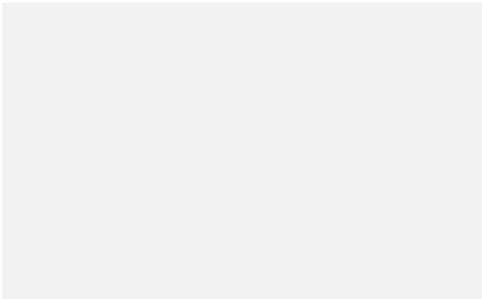
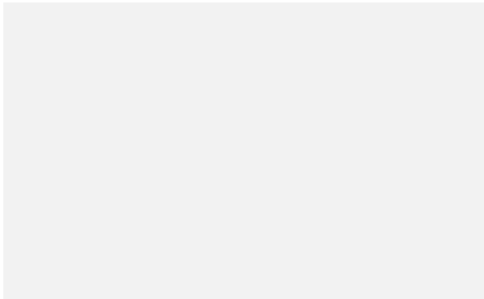


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