



Heather Nesle

President, New York Life Foundation;
Vice President, Corporate Responsibility,
New York Life



Education: BA & MA, George Washington University

Company Name: New York Life

Industry: Insurance

Company CEO: Ted Mathas

Company Headquarters Location: New York, New York

Number of Employees: More than 8,000

Words you live by: Don't let perfect be the enemy of the good.

Personal Philosophy: Act like your parents are watching.

What book are you reading: *On the Other Side of Freedom* by DeRay McKesson & *Midnight at the Bright Ideas Bookstore* by Matthew Sullivan

What was your first job: Hair washer in a salon

Favorite charity: My job prevents me from saying!

Interests: My family, reading, volunteering, dogs, meeting new people, and good conversation

Family: Husband, Steve, son, Ben (8), and daughter, Paige (4)



COVID-19 Is Making Me a Better Leader

I used to think in terms of “before 9/11” and “after 9/11.” But that has evolved. I can now add “pre-COVID” and “post-COVID” to the timeline of my life. While this time has been challenging for me, it has been earth-shattering for so many others. There may be reason to despair, but I prefer to look at the positive changes I see arising from the crises we are confronting.

While I can only speak from my vantage point as it relates to COVID, and the social justice issues that have taken their rightful place in our public discourse, I do recognize that not everyone has the privilege that I possess as a white woman in a position of power. Truly acknowledging my privilege will be the most important thing influencing my leadership style going forward. This means that I need to reevaluate the processes and methods I and my team use to do our

work, and how I speak with and listen to my colleagues. It means taking on the responsibility of hearing from the people who don't feel as if they have a voice and, in some cases, being their voice. It means working with others at my company to continue to move us forward to a place of greater equity and understanding.

Working from home these last few months, we have lost the opportunity to celebrate together in person, to casually stop by someone's desk to chat, and to work face to face. But in many ways, I've found this time to be more intimate—offering glimpses into the lives of my coworkers that I would not normally see. The ability to see a family member, a pet, where someone spends the “life” part of their “work/life balance” has been illuminating and humanizing. I feel more empathy than I have ever felt

before, and I believe this will lead to closer bonds that will follow us back into the office when the time comes.

The current situation reminds me that my team has a myriad of responsibilities and priorities outside of work, and that constantly needs to be in my mind. I've always tried to see the larger picture, but this time has made it more vivid and proven that work gets done well when we treat people as people, not as roles on an organizational chart.

I will be forever grateful to have worked at New York Life, a company that puts its people first and took quick and decisive action to protect and care for us during this uncertain time. And, I will move into our post-COVID world (that sounds nice!) committed to becoming a more open-minded, supportive, and bold leader for everyone.