

Kris Plachy: Is CEO a noun or is it a verb? Let's talk about it. Here we go! Hey, hey, welcome to Leadership is Feminine. I'm Kris Plachy, thank you so much for tuning in. And today I want to, sort of building on our theme for this season about change, I want to kind of wrangle your brain a little bit about even what we think of when we think of the word "CEO".

So, the first thing I want you to do is just sort of be honest with yourself, like, just take a minute when you conjure that, when that word comes into your brain, or that acronym, CEO, what do you think of? Or maybe I should say, who? I really curious, like, this is a great exercise for you to just kind of sit with like, what happens in your brain when you hear CEO?

Do you think of someone you know? Do you think of someone you admire? Do you think of a color? Do you think of the initials themselves? Like, in my mind, sometimes things are heavy, sometimes things are white. Do you think of a man? Do you think of a woman? Do you think of yourself? Do you think about your business? Do you think about other people's business? Do you think about the size of the business? Like, really, what happens?

We know that the history of the word, or the title, Chief Executive Officer, that that comes from in the early 1970s. It was when it was originally coined. And it was originally created by men for men. So, it's very natural that it's not associated with women. And even when it is, I think we all still kind of like oh, like it catches our eye, like, "Oh, she's a CEO?" So, for the most part, the world assigns that word or acronym as a noun. It's an association. It's a title of a person, so it's a proper noun. Is that what we call that? I'm so bad with my grammar anymore, you guys. You know what I'm talking about, right?

It was about a year ago now, I was working with a client, who really did not want to call herself a CEO. And she was very, very honest with me about that, she was kind of insistent, she's like, "I do not believe I'm a CEO, I do not want to be a CEO. I don't like calling myself a CEO." She just was really, really, really resistant. She's like, "I want to work with you. But I don't want to play in this whole CEO thing." And I'm like, "Listen to me, you do not have to call yourself a CEO. Let's just table that." Because it was a real roadblock. She was very resistant. And that, to me, was a dumb reason not to go forward, right?

And so, I said, "How about instead of calling yourself as CEO, we'll just decide that there are things that you do, there are going to be actions that you take, and we're just going to call that CEOing. So today, I had to CEO in my business. Today, I was CEOing in my conversation with my team member. Today, I was CEOing in my decision making. Oh, today I was so CEO in the way that I was doing my work, whatever, right? So, I just sort of gave her this alternative perspective. What she say is that she is not a CEO, but that she does do CEOy things. And lo and behold, we get on a call the next week and she's like, "Okay, this whole like making CEO, a verb is like a game changer."

She's like, "I totally change the way I think about it. I totally CEO my business, I was totally CEOing yesterday, I was CEOing my hiring, I was CEOing my process creation, I was CEOing. And it's so funny because it totally changed her mindset. That shift changed everything for her and how she assumed her presence in her company. And that's the goal, you guys. Well, you could call yourself whatever you want. But what we know is, I know, is that word, that acronym, CEO, is so possessed by men. \

And the only reason that's true is because they dominated leadership in business for centuries. And that's changed and continuing to change. And I want us as a collective, as women to say, "No, no, listen, yeah, you probably created it. And you might think you own it, but I'm actually going to sit over here and I'm either going to take that noun and own it, or on doing the work of it, I am CEOing, which means I'm in charge, I am leading this, I'm taking responsibility and accountability for this, this is my business."

It changes the voice and the presence you carry in your company, and that's what I want for you. Whether you started your business and you print t-shirts in your garage, or you have a \$35 million shipping and receiving company, you really do get to call yourself whatever you want. And what my goal is for the women that I work with, is what you call yourself, pulls you up. It encourages your growth, and it acknowledges your role in your organization.

And one of the reasons that I prefer CEO to owner or founder is because I believe those words indicate relationships with a business that don't support the expansiveness of both your and the business's potential. Because when I, when I say I'm the owner, it belongs to me, it is mine. And that means that no matter how hard you all work in this business, it's mine, I own it. Whereas, when I'm the CEO, when I learned how to CEO, I am building a collective environment where a lot of people are invested in the success of the business. But owner mentality means it's mine and I hire people to help me.

Founder, again, I founded an idea, I am the founder, I started it, I found it, I figured it out. But there's a lot of founders who, I will be honest with you, are terrible at leading the very business, they create it. And it doesn't, again, indicate the expansiveness and the potential of the growth that you have in your role and for the business, because the Chief Executive Officer runs the company. In most cases, the founder does not. The founder is a visionary, has really good idea, gets that idea going. Now, am I playing semantics properly, but I think they matter.

So, whatever it is that you choose, I want that choice of yours, whatever you choose to call yourself, my goal is always that it instils a little discomfort. And it invites you to a new level of gravitas, a new level of presence, and a bigger, bolder, but also authentic voice in leadership. As you grow in your company, you have to be willing to grow out of the weeds and into and farther up the tree.

One of my very first executive coaches, Vicki Merrill, amazing woman, she used to talk about the analogy of being in the jungle. And I've probably mentioned this on a podcast in the past, I don't know. But it's always stuck with me. And she always used to talk about that, imagine that we're all in the jungle. And we're trying to find not only our way out, but the most efficient and effective way out of the jungle. So, we're all standing on the jungle floor with our machetes and our axes, and there's thick underbrush and thick trees and bushes everywhere, we're trying to figure out how to get out of the jungle.

Well, if we're all standing on the floor together, all carrying our machetes, and our axes, etc. We're all just going to be chopping, trying to find our way out. But what a leader does is a leader gets up to the highest tree, and you get out from underneath the floor of the jungle, out of the weeds out of the thick underbrush and you go up to the top of that tree. And then from that vantage point, you actually can see the fastest, most surest way out of the jungle. But that means you have to drop that machete, you are better for the business, the sooner you can

learn to delegate weed chopping to people who are good at we chopping, and allow you to get up in the tree to see where you need to go.

And that, to me, is the role of and the verb of CEOing. This is the direction we want to go. These are the decisions I need to make to get us there. These are the actions I take when I'm CEOing, to assemble the team, to connect the relationships, to bring in the resources that support that growth. But if I'm the owner, I am not thinking as an executive, I am not thinking in that leadership role. I'm thinking it's mine, don't break it. If I'm the founder, I'm thinking, I invented that. Don't ruin it. But if I'm the CEO and I'm CEOing it, I recognize, this idea, this business was sure of me, it started with me, but it doesn't belong to me, I am the leadership curator of this. I am the custodian of the success of this business.

And in order for this business to breathe, and expand and grow, I have to grow who I am, I have to be willing to invest in myself, in my brain, in my beliefs, in my skills, so that I can be the best version of myself for this business. In the absence of doing that, I actually impair my business's ability to grow, even though in the moment chopping those weeds feel so vital. Listen to me, I get it, I am with you. In the moment, you've been gifted, it's the only thing, if you just stayed up till two in the morning, you are the only one who can make it happen. And for as long as you keep believing that, that will be true.

But just like I've said to my clients, and one of my girlfriends said to me this weekend, "Listen, you've got to remember you are only ever just one person away from being able to truly CEO your business." And it's scary. I think if it scares you to call yourself a CEO, then that's more reason why would want you to do it. Just start practicing, right? Like, write your first name, comma, CEO. Next time you meet someone, "What do you do?" "Oh, I'm the CEO." "Of what?" "This business." You don't have to say my business, this business, say the name your CEO. "I mean, don't you only have like four people?" Who says there's a number of people you need to have to call yourself a CEO?

Well, we know who says that. Actually, it's the people who want to keep the title to themselves. You really can call yourself whatever you want. So, CEO can be a noun. If it's a struggle for you right now, let's call it a verb, and let's practice CEOing. Do you know how to CEO? That's why that's the name of our program, How to CEO. Do you know How to CEO? That's the name of the program, because it is a verb. And it's essential that you learn How to CEO, if you want to grow that beautiful business. And whether it's now or later, it will hit you that there are pieces and parts you've got to learn that stretch you out of your comfort zone and get you out of the weeds, where I know you're so good, you're so good at those weeds. But the business needs you to be better at other things, so that you can hire people to be really good at the weeds. That's how we're going to make this business grow.

So, I want you to just practice that mindset shift. Let's go away from it being a noun and focus on it being a verb, just for this week. Try it. I was CEOing, oh, I CEOed today, just try. See what happens. Let me know how it goes. Talk to you again soon.

Hey, entrepreneur, you started that gorgeous business of yours to do some real good in the world. You probably didn't start your business to manage people, but here you are, having to figure out how to manage people to get work done, and maybe it's not going so well. So, head on over to www.krisplachy.com/howtoceo and let's talk about how we can help you

learn how to lead, manage, hire, fire, and all the things so that you can build a team that expands on your amazing dream.