

WISE²⁰²⁶ WOMEN

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THE LEGACY EDITION



Celebrating the **courage, strength and wisdom** of women over 40.



Suzie Thoraval

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Age 51

If you would like to connect with Suzie, you can find her at:

 suziethoraval.com

 Suzie Thoraval

 [suziethoraval](https://www.instagram.com/suziethoraval)

***“You can lead in your way.
There is no archetype of a
leader you need to follow.
And you can lead from
wherever you are...”***

Strength Was Always There

At eleven, Suzie wanted to be a magician, not the assistant. The one who performed the tricks. It was, looking back, an early signal of everything that followed.

By Year 9 she had a clearer plan. She wanted to be a lawyer, to speak for people who could not speak for themselves. She pursued that goal with everything she had, from an under-resourced government school while caring for a single mother with significant mental health challenges. She had no one to lean on. But she knew she would be okay, because she had to be.

The morning her university results came out, she rode her bike to the newsagent at opening time and bought a newspaper. She laid it flat on the footpath, knelt down, and scanned the tiny columns of Victorian student results. When she found her name and moved her finger across the row, her heart leapt. Law and Arts at the University of Melbourne. Her first preference. She rode home elated, cheering into the open air.

You realised that if you had the ability and you worked hard, you could achieve anything you set your mind to.

Not everything in those years was about career. Travelling in Montreal at 22, Suzie met a man named Yannick. They spent a week together and never stopped talking, the kind of conversation that makes a week feel like a lifetime. When it ended, she wanted to keep travelling and he wanted to stay. So they parted. About two weeks later she found herself missing him in a way she had not expected and wrote him a letter inviting him to join her. He never replied.

She kept travelling, then returned home. About six months later he was simply there in her thoughts one morning. That same day, Yannick called. A few months later the letter came back. Return to Sender. He had never received it.

Yannick visited her in Australia and it was during those months that she made her decision. She would move to Canada, pursue the relationship, and enroll in a Masters in Law so her career stayed on track while she followed her heart. She got her own place when she first arrived, keeping her independence while they worked out what their future might be. They married, had two children, Charlotte and Alex, who grew up speaking French and English, and a year later the family returned to Australia, where they have been ever since.

She built the career she had planned, working in a prestigious law firm, gaining international experience, status and financial security. Everything that growing up without money had made her reach for. From the outside it looked exactly like success but something did not sit right with her.

The work did not feel meaningful. The cost of maintaining that life was high. Long hours, pressure, and a steady sense of disconnection from what actually mattered. She had achieved what she thought she wanted, only to find it did not feel like freedom at all. Status alone was not enough. A life built around work, without space for

relationships, kindness, or lived experience, was not the life she wanted. That realisation marked a shift. From chasing external success to defining it on her own terms. At that point, she decided to move from law into government, executive leadership, Chief Risk Officer and governance roles. She sat on boards and worked across large regulatory reform projects.

Then on her 50th birthday, she looked at the life she had built. The work was meaningful and she loved supporting her team, but there was a longing she could not ignore. Starting her own business was something she had wanted to do for a long time. What had held her back was courage, and she knew it. Turning 50 made the question impossible to avoid. If not now, when? She had never been able to live with what if. It was the same instinct that had once made her sell everything and move to Canada for a relationship with no guarantees. Fear had never been enough to stop her. So she made the call, resigned the next day, and stepped off the career cliff. Not on a whim. On a conviction that growth only ever lives on the other side of comfort.

Today Suzie has a portfolio career. She is a leadership strategist and coach, working with leaders in high stakes, high pressure environments, helping them build what she calls Adaptive Stability. Two words that do not often go together, but describe exactly what is needed to lead well under pressure. The mindset, the flexibility, the resilience to keep going when everything around you is shifting. She is, she says, the coach she needed when she was in those rooms herself. She also sits on a range of boards and



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committees and is a fractional Company Secretary for clients who do not employ one in-house but still need that important senior strategic role to ensure their board stays on track.

Success looks different now. It is relationships, kindness, presence and beauty in all its forms. No one, she reflects, ever wished at the end of their life that they had spent more time at work.

There is one more thing she has had to learn, and it has taken longer than the rest. How to care for herself. Having been a carer since childhood, putting others first was simply what she did. She now knows rest is not a reward, it is a requirement. She speaks of seven kinds of rest, from physical and emotional to creative and spiritual, and the importance of honouring all of them. A balanced life, she says, is what wisdom eventually looks like.

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To her younger self she would say simply: you are enough. You are exactly where you need to be. Trust the process. And to the women reading this, her message is: Find your unique strengths and use them. You can do anything you set out to do. The world needs you ■





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WOMEN SEEN

WOMEN HEARD

WOMEN HONOURED

