

# Cover Story

## The 10 Most Inspiring Women Leaders to Follow in 2022

**F**ear is the final nail in the coffin of most dreamers. Many aspirants dream of a better life, a vision, and a path of integrity. The ability to break through clouds of fear and conquer uncertainty in life is – what separates inspiration from the rest. **Ethel J. Davis, CEO of VZD Capital Management, LLC**, learned how to break invisible handcuffs during college. As an African-American and a great woman of faith, she was always sure of her identity. Ethel was proud of her heritage, for her parents and extended family fueled her acceptance of her ethnicity. However, she struggled to find her confidence throughout college, for the peer pressure and parental guidance weighed heavily on her shoulders. Her initial aspirations of becoming a journalist remained safe, cozy and narrowed her vision to remain loyal to the field of choice. She aspired to be a protégé between Barbara Walters and Oprah Winfrey. After becoming friends with many wealthy, trust fund babies, she realized she knew nothing about money. She familiarized herself by reading "Money" and "Kiplinger's" magazine, to fuel her interest and thirst for the capital markets and the financial industry.

When Ethel started learning about various financial investments, including the stock market, she broke through the shackles of her past to become a leader within the finance community. In her passionate awakening, she left her education in journalism to transition into a stockbroker. Her faith always helps Ethel find the proper steps to follow on her career path. When she sought to investigate truth as a journalist, she found inspiration in James Stowers, Jr. from Kansas City, Missouri, a pioneer in mutual funds, who went door-to-door to sell financial products. Today, he is best known as the founder of the Twentieth Century, aka the American Century.

### A Rich Lessons of Struggles

During her struggling years, Ethel learned several harsh truths about life. Despite being ambitious, hardworking, and encompassing great values – she did not receive an open invitation to become a respected expert by Corporate America. As her women colleagues told her, "women should be seen and not heard" similarly, her African-American status always kept her at bay, far from the head tables. She applied for many promotions and different roles only to be overlooked by a white male cohort. However, she never understood why Corporate America would not support her human rights. Ethel relied on her faith to carry her through the most challenging times she faced. She took her struggles in strides and climbed higher and higher despite relentless obstacles waiting in her path. Her efforts led her to a series of life lessons she never

forgets, "*Leadership is a journey. Not a destination.*" Before opening her firm, the VZD Capital Management, LLC, Ethel worked at American Century, Fidelity Investments, Charles Schwab & Co., Inc., and Paragon Capital Management, LLC. She had tested her lucks in unfair waters regularly, which finally led to her termination. Despite her tremendous sacrifice, and inequitable treatment resulting in her termination, she takes the positives in her stride. She notes, "*Every step of my career ladder enhanced my leadership skills and team building to become a business owner building a successful investment firm.*" She continues to walk a path led out by her parents to get the best out of education and experience.

She believes leaders must adapt to an ever-changing world and can build teams despite differences and obstacles. Ethel is a Kansas City Influential Women member, the Kansas City Business Journal's Women Who Mean Business Class of 2011, Five Star Wealth Manager for seven years, and appearing in many respected magazines. She admires trailblazing women who did not have a path to follow but cut one from their fabric of life.

These individuals, mainly from humble beginnings and backgrounds, deserve to enjoy a customized investment approach and close attention to the investment cycles.

### An Inspiring Journey of Real Values

Her experience led Ethel to take a significant leap in the world of investments. Today, Ethel caters to wealthy individuals and multigenerational families around the world. These individuals, mainly from multigenerational backgrounds, enjoy the customization approach and close attention to the

“  
We are invested in you  
and helping you build  
the legacy you've  
worked to create.  
”

investment cycles. Ethel notes that VZD does not believe in conforming to the cookie-cutter approach or predetermined models. Her goals concerning her clients are always transparent. She aims to understand the financial goals, wealth objectives, standard of living, and tax planning, to offer them the best solution. VZD also does not sell any commissioned-based products, contrary to the trend in the financial field. Her goal for her firm remains very clear. Ethel says, "*I do not wish to build the prominent firm, but a*

*firm that my clients trust and respect.*" VZD's name received its inspiration from Ethel's parents, Vergie and Zether Davis. She asserts, "*Every client of the firm is a member of my extended family, and I wish to develop my legacy among them accordingly.*"

Ethel came across many shocks and surprises during her challenging journey. However, nothing could have prepared for the unraveling secret that arose in her own home. At eighteen, Ethel discovered that her parents adopted her. Despite the tremendous angst and stress that usually follows such revelation, Ethel, like her resilient nature, took the experience positively, and she realized what it truly meant. After digesting that her parents made great sacrifices for her to have a bright future – what an honor to have two people (my mother and father) love her without knowing anything about her DNA. In essence, her primary consideration was to make her parents proud – which is a lifelong debt that she strives to repay. She expresses, "*The only way for me to keep their legacy alive is by sticking to principles and values they cherished.*"

Today, her firm VZD continues to lay the groundwork to offer the same safety, confidence, and peace of mind that an orphan values above all material treasures.

### An Independent Expert Financial Advisory

VZD has put in several excellent financial practices to achieve this goal. The company does not sell mutual funds, commission-based investment vehicles, or annuities, and these plans, as a rule of thumb, often embed conflict of interest. Hence, Ethel handpicks every vendor and independent contractor to ensure the most trustworthy experience for the clients. She is proud to have Ms. Nikisha L. Johnson as the first candidate in the Executive Mentoring Program. She also oversees the development of the company's strategic interests. This includes expanding VZD's vision to reach new parts of the country and increase clientele through personal referrals. Ethel shares her notable achievement as a financial advisory. She says, "*We are honored to serve second and third-generation families due to becoming a partner with their families.*"

### A Knowledge Approach to Conquer Fear

The company has grown and has climbed to new heights of success. Mr. Chuck Schwab, the founder of Charles Schwab Corporation, is the primary custodian for VZD Capital Management, LLC. Ethel says she would like to begin an institutional relationship with Fidelity Investments in the foreseeable future, too.

