

FRANCESCA LEIGHTON

NACD.DC · MBA · BSC (HONS)

EXECUTIVE LEADER | BOARD ADVISOR | STRATEGIC ADVISOR

Strategic leadership and transformation

OVERVIEW

Francesca Leighton is an international commercial executive whose career has been defined by building businesses, transforming organisations and unlocking growth across global brands, founder-led ventures and scaling enterprises.

Over more than three decades she has led businesses through periods of significant transformation, combining strategic vision with operational excellence to deliver sustainable commercial performance. Her experience spans multinational corporations, entrepreneurial businesses and premium consumer brands, providing a breadth of perspective that enables her to move seamlessly between boardrooms, executive teams and founder-led organisations.

She is recognised for bringing commercial clarity to complex situations, balancing long-term strategic thinking with disciplined execution, and helping leadership teams make confident decisions that create lasting value.

EXECUTIVE SNAPSHOT

30+ years international leadership

20 years with Nike

Chief Commercial Officer

US\$3B+ commercial leadership

US\$5.5B+ retail marketplace leadership

Leadership across four continents

Board and strategic advisor

Commercial transformation specialist

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Executive, commercial leader · Nike

During twenty years at Nike, Francesca held senior commercial leadership positions across Europe, North America, Latin America and Asia Pacific, leading some of the company’s most strategically significant businesses, as Vice President and General Manager. Her leadership encompassed commercial strategy, omnichannel marketplace development, merchandising, consumer planning, digital commerce, strategic partnerships, organisational transformation and international growth.

In her final executive role she led one of Nike’s largest wholesale organisations, with responsibility for more than US\$3 billion in annual revenue and US\$5.5 billion in retail sales.

Beyond financial performance, she developed high-performing international leadership teams and helped shape commercial strategies and team dynamics that strengthened Nike’s market position across multiple regions.

Chief Commercial Officer · vetsak

Joining vetsak during a period of transformation, Francesca has led the commercial repositioning of the international premium furniture and lifestyle company.

Her leadership has included redefining commercial strategy, repositioning the brand, strengthening customer experience, accelerating digital commerce, improving organisational effectiveness, expanding international growth opportunities and introducing the foundational processes and systems to enable scale.

The transformation has restored profitable growth while creating stronger commercial foundations for the company's next phase of expansion.

STRATEGIC ADVISORY

Alongside her executive career, Francesca advises founders, CEOs, investors and leadership teams navigating periods of growth, transformation and strategic change.

Her advisory work spans commercial strategy, business model development, pricing architecture, investor readiness, go-to-market strategy, organisational design, leadership effectiveness and international expansion.

Rather than providing theoretical advice, she combines decades of executive experience with practical commercial insight, helping organisations translate ambition into focused execution. She is particularly valued for identifying opportunities that others overlook, simplifying complexity and enabling leadership teams to make confident decisions.

FOUNDER PERSPECTIVE

Working closely with entrepreneurs has given Francesca a unique appreciation for the realities of building businesses from the ground up.

Founders consistently describe her as someone who brings both commercial discipline and genuine belief in their vision, creating clarity without removing creativity and accountability without losing humanity. Her ability to bridge the disciplines of global enterprise with entrepreneurial agility enables founders to build stronger businesses while remaining authentic to the purpose that inspired them.

SELECTED TESTIMONIALS

“Francesca has an incredible ability to see possibility where others see uncertainty. She helped me stay true to my vision while creating clarity, accountability and confidence to turn ideas into reality.”

Vicky Browdy · Founder, Litknit

“She gave my companies commercial discipline, reshaped our strategy and investor story, and saw both the business and the person behind it.”

Jérémie Maret · Founder, The Proposal | HU.Space

“After one conversation the overwhelm became confidence. She cut through the noise and showed me what truly mattered.”

Sam Trickett · Founder, Kinda

“Within days she developed a complete commercial roadmap that gave us the confidence and platform to build our company.”

Co-founders · Walrus Wellness

BOARD VALUE

Francesca combines the perspective of a global executive with the pragmatism of an operator and the curiosity of a strategic advisor. She brings a rare ability to connect commercial performance with organisational capability, recognising that sustainable growth is created not only through strategy, but through people, leadership and culture.

Boards value her balanced judgement, international perspective and capacity to challenge constructively while building alignment. Whether advising global corporations, founder-led businesses or scaling enterprises, she brings the same commitment to creating organisations that are commercially successful, resilient and purpose-led.

IN HER WORDS

“I believe the strongest organisations are built where commercial ambition, exceptional leadership and human potential come together. My role is to help businesses unlock that potential, creating enduring value for all stakeholders and society.”

SECTORS

Consumer goods · Sporting goods & fashion · Retail · Lifestyle · Luxury · Furniture & interiors · Wellness · Technology · Hospitality · Founder-led businesses · Scale-ups · International markets · Investor insights

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