



Sandrine Kubinski American Eagle

Here's the **numbered, detailed summary** of the document “*Sandrine Kubinski – AE Change Makers*”, with icons removed and clear numbered sections for structure and readability:

1. Overview

The document is a transcript of a **speech by Sandrine**, a senior executive at **American Eagle Outfitters (AEO)**, presented at a *Change Makers* event. The talk focuses on **embracing change, adaptability, and leadership through transformation**, told through Sandrine's personal life and professional journey.

2. Early Life and Foundations of Adaptability

1. Family Background:

- Mother: French, moved to the U.S. to work for Pan Am as a flight attendant.
- Father: American, Marine Corps pilot, engineer, and entrepreneur.
- They met in Puerto Rico and married quickly, symbolizing boldness and spontaneity.

2. Childhood Environment:

- Frequent travel between Paris, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. made adaptability a way of life.
- Father built electronics, household systems, and even flight simulators—teaching creativity and resilience.
- Sandrine learned that when things change, you simply “figure it out.”

3. Core Lesson:

- Change is constant; adaptability and curiosity are key to success.

3. Education and Early Career

1. **University of Florida:**
 - Studied marketing to keep career options open.
2. **Early Jobs:**
 - Began with Hyatt Regency in Princeton, NJ.
 - Moved to Washington, D.C., to work for Gap—viewed retail management as running her own small business.
3. **Career Breakthrough at Abercrombie & Fitch:**
 - Recruited to help transform Abercrombie from a traditional men's store into a youthful, modern lifestyle brand.
 - Moved to Columbus, Ohio, with no prior experience in “visual merchandising,” but successfully helped redefine the company's image.
 - Showed willingness to take risks and thrive in ambiguity.

4. Discovering the “Mary Poppins Philosophy”

1. **Self-Reflection:**
 - Realized that throughout her career, she was repeatedly “tapped” to fix or build something new—then moved on after success.
2. **Shift in Perspective:**
 - Initially resisted change but came to see it as a sign of growth and leadership.
 - Learned that stepping away allows her team to rise and evolve.
3. **Philosophy Defined:**
 - Like Mary Poppins, she arrives to help teams develop, then “flies away when the wind changes.”
 - She never knows when the next change will come but embraces it as natural and necessary.

5. Career and Leadership at American Eagle

1. **Tenure and Roles:**

- Over 20 years at AEO, moving through leadership positions in **visual merchandising, store operations, technology, store design, and maintenance.**
- Worked on multiple AE brands and third-party concepts.

2. **Brand Innovation and Projects:**

- Helped launch and lead experimental concepts such as:
 - “Don’t Ask Why” clothing line.
 - “Drinkwear” mocktail store in Times Square (collaboration with Coca-Cola).
 - NAMU Music Festival (“New American Music Union”) featuring the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

3. **Pattern of Change:**

- Each role was a “new wind,” demonstrating trust in her ability to build and transform.
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6. The Workplace Innovation Journey

1. **Unexpected Opportunity (2019):**

- Asked to become **Vice President of Workplace Innovation**—a newly defined role.
- Tasked with ensuring AEO’s new office design in New York met modern associate needs.

2. **COVID-19 Disruption:**

- Three months later, the pandemic hit.
- Guided construction and operational teams through shutdowns while maintaining safety and productivity.
- The AEO mailroom became a central hub for global product shipments.
- Viewed the pandemic not as an ending but as the *beginning* of a new way of working.

3. **Post-Pandemic Reinvention:**

- Led the consolidation of **three Manhattan offices into one building.**
- Collected associate feedback (over 170 pages from one department).
- Key changes included:
 - More collaboration areas and flexible layouts.
 - Standing desks, phone rooms, and extensive video conferencing.
 - Downsizing executive offices to give more space to teams.
 - Improved lighting, air quality, and coffee.

4. **Todd Snyder Integration:**

- Brought designer **Todd Snyder's** team into the new AEO building, unifying creative, design, photo, and retail operations.
 - Enabled same-building fashion shows, fittings, and production for the first time.
 - Created a model of efficiency and collaboration.
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7. Building Culture and Motivation

1. **Associate Engagement:**
 - Used short video “snacks” to share progress and generate excitement for upcoming moves.
 - Advocated for **phased implementation**, allowing early teams to act as testers and internal ambassadors.
 2. **Focus on People:**
 - Stressed that workplace innovation is not only about design and construction, but about creating **energy, motivation, and pride**.
 - Highlighted how keeping associates informed and inspired sustains project momentum.
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8. Leadership Principles and Lessons

Sandrine shared key takeaways based on her experiences leading through change:

1. **Be Curious and Open-Minded:**
 - View unexpected changes as opportunities to discover something great.
2. **Bring People Along:**
 - Involve both supporters and skeptics to get a balanced perspective.
3. **Embrace Feedback:**
 - Accept criticism as a way to improve and prepare for broader acceptance.
4. **Be Selfless with Ideas:**
 - Celebrate when others adopt your ideas—it reflects trust and influence.
5. **Celebrate Progress:**
 - Recognize small and large achievements to maintain enthusiasm and morale.

9. Closing Reflections

1. **Gratitude and Perspective:**

- Sandrine reflected that had she said “no” to workplace innovation, she would have missed her most meaningful project.
- The journey from 2019 to 2025 showed her that change always brings new beginnings.

2. **Video Presentation:**

- Concluded with a celebratory video highlighting AEO’s new **New York Design Center**—a culmination of years of transformation.

3. **Final Message:**

- The “Mary Poppins wind” has not yet changed; the journey continues.
 - Encouraged others to embrace change, support their teams, and find pride in transformation.
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10. Core Themes

1. Adaptability is a lifelong skill cultivated through openness and curiosity.
 2. Leadership means empowering others and gracefully moving on when the mission is complete.
 3. Innovation begins with people and culture, not just design.
 4. Change is not an ending—it’s the start of something new.
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