

## Mona Patel

Business Innovation Strategist and Best-Selling Author

Mona Patel is an expert in helping people reframe the way they think by understanding and empathizing with other people's points of view. For over 23 years, Mona's worked with brands like Nike, Facebook, Capital One, First Republic Bank and Pfizer. She teaches organizations how to listen for what people really want. She has started and built a series of 7-figure companies, is a published author, award winning researcher, and keynote speaker. Her latest company, Gray Zones, produces online immersive experiences to inspire leaders to have more empathy, awareness and understanding for different points of view.

Twenty-three years ago, Mona began her career as a researcher, tasked to figure out how to improve in the design of the Hubble Space Telescope control center. She asked the scientists. They said "nothing." Obviously. Needing improvement equals having issues. And they had no intention of revealing any issues to a young, beautiful researcher in a lilac-colored suit who thought that asking questions and observing them for a few days was research. She noticed, however, that they huddled together around small computer screens, and recommended a projector instead. That one simple change had a huge impact on efficiency and productivity. More importantly, her gift of knowing when to listen to people and when to ignore what they say and help them anyway was born.

Next up, she led research to figure out if people would ever give up their printed photos, all filed away in shoeboxes, for digital access to their pictures for Kodak. Then if people would ever go online to look up what their medical condition meant. Lucky for WebMD, she discovered what was needed to have that answer be yes. She lead high-stakes projects for brands breaking old paradigms, and those brands followed her as she started her own research and design agency, Motivate Design, in 2009. Clients like Nike, Facebook, Venmo, First Republic Bank and Chic-Fil-A all used this agency, with Mona at the helm, to figure out what people wanted.

But that helm eventually got unexciting and tiring, so in 2020, she stepped away from being a CEO and started writing again. She had written two books, Reframe and The Thing About Swings, but never written anything close to resembling a play. So, in true Mona fashion, inspired by The Artist's Way, she thought, "why not?" and wrote a play.

Her first play was based on her research about why women didn't report harassment in the workplace. Rather than tell people in a presentation, she wanted to show them what it feels like to be harassed and be unsure if it was happening. She had one scene performed two ways changing nothing but the actors' tone of voice. Over 1000 people joined to watch and vote. And across them. 80% said yes, sexual harassment happened in the first video. Half then changed their minds after the second one. Why that was the case was what we explored in the focus groups. Over 3000 people have joined Gray Zones to participate in more experiences about race, polyamory, forgiveness and compromise in relationships. Mona began creating custom experiences for organizations and coaching teams about what it takes to open up to a new way of thinking and reframe one's perspective and officially launched Gray Zones.

These days Mona's work focuses on studying and understanding the interactions between people, both dynamics at work and in personal relationships, and then creating plays and immersive experiences that bring both points of view to life. She continues to consult with some of the world's top brands on innovation, customer experience and creativity.