

# Pass It On®...

## The Power of Youth.

*Sanna Marin, the world's youngest serving Prime Minister at age 34, steered Finland through the COVID-19 pandemic and played a key role in the country's decision to apply for NATO membership. Far from privileged, Marin overcame a difficult childhood to become the leader of Finland.*

Sanna Marin led Finland during one of the most uncertain times in world history. Many doubted her ability to lead at the young age of 34. But her poise and dedication to the working people of her country earned respect.

As a child, Marin remembers waiting at the train station for her estranged father to pick her up for a visit. He never showed. The country was in an economic boom, and social policies like subsidized daycare and free-market protections made opportunities possible, but what Marin didn't have was a stable family life. Marin watched firsthand the struggles it took for her working-class mother to put bread on the table.

She also remembers her first foray into politics. As a schoolgirl, she protested the razing of a forest where she used to pick blueberries. "We had the idea to block off the street – not that there was anyone there to see it," she recalls. Her sensitivities reached out to the underprivileged and the underrepresented. Yet she sees her economic disadvantages as formative to her political commitments.

"I have always considered all work valuable, as long as the conditions are fair," she writes. "We should work toward better salaries instead."

At 20 years old and working various part-time jobs to pay for college, Marin walked into the Workers' Party organization and was immediately underwhelmed. The highbrow and banal conversations got her fired up. She wanted to make a difference, not make small talk. There were real issues in the country that needed to be addressed: expanded paternity leave, workers' rights, environmental concerns. She made her own posters and hit the streets, handing out tens of thousands of flyers. She was appointed leader of the city council at 27, the youngest person to ever hold that position.

She became famous for her support of a tram system that made it possible for citizens to move about cheaply for work. A video of the attractive young councilwoman with the icy blue eyes, staring down venerable members of the council as they tried to stall, went viral. She called them out and called for a vote. And the people loved it.

Marin was elected as Prime Minister based on her ability to get things done. She was immediately thrown into the global pandemic and negotiations with NATO over the Russian invasion of Ukraine. She handled herself with great confidence while insisting that there be a balance to life, including spending time with her own husband and young daughter.

The Finns survived the pandemic, the economy is bouncing back, and that tram she fought for is now the lifeblood of the city. After coping with all the difficulties of governing a small country in a turbulent world, Marin finally had the opportunity relax with her family, but she only took a brief respite. She has continued her commitment to service and now works as an advisor to governments working to improve the lives of their citizens.

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