

KHALIDA BROHI

Speech Topics

- 1. I Should Have Honor:** Khalida Brohi is on a mission to redefine honor. From a young age, growing up in travel life in Pakistan, Khalida was raised to believe in the sanctity of arranged marriage. She was engaged before she was born, set to be married off at the first sign of her menses. But against the odds, her father believed in education for his daughters, and Khalida grew up thinking she would become the first female doctor in her small village. He taught her that honor comes from working hard, being a good person, preserving your heritage, and achieving great goals. Khalida knew her life was proceeding on an unusual track for a woman of her circumstances, but everything shifted when her beloved cousin was murdered by her own uncle for the crime of falling in love with a man who was not her betrothed—in a tradition known as an honor killing. She began to realize how blindly in the name of honor hundreds of women are abused and murdered around Pakistan. Because of her father's early lessons, Khalida began to believe that a better definition of honor is the best weapon to fight honor killings. Since then, she has made it her goal to change the common notion of honor, to make it about achievement and celebrating culture with dignity—because it is the fundamental right of everyone to have dignity, and we do that by redefining honor, by educating our daughters and all our children about how to strive for success and do things that dignify us as humans and nations. Khalida started a viral Facebook campaign that led to the creation of a foundation focused on empowering the lives of women in rural communities through education and employment opportunities, and changing the minds of men who are their partners, fathers, and brothers. From growing up in poverty to becoming a global activist and social entrepreneur, Khalida's long journey tells the story of the brave decisions of her parents, empowering those around her, and redefining honor to create change.
- 2. Don't Cry, Strategize:** Despite growing up in slums, mountain villages, and poverty, with the threat of honor killings ever-present, Khalida Brohi loved her childhood. Her parents made sure that she always had a pencil, a book, and a good education, which was not normal in their communities. This unique perspective made her sensitive to the unjust behavior that she witness regularly. Each time she saw injustice, she cried. Each time, her father would hold her and say, "Don't cry, dear one. *Strategize.*" Today, she uses this teaching in everything she does, especially in her fight against honor killings. It has required a lot of creative thinking and action to be able to work in communities that commit these atrocities but do not believe there is a problem to be solved. Khalida has seen that when we bring solutions to the table, we don't waste time by complaining, but instead choose to discover new strategies to fight our problems and then make change happen.
- 3. Building Bridges and Interfaith Love:** When Khalida Brohi and her husband David fell in love, they shocked both of their families. Khalida's tribal family back home in Pakistan was in disbelief because David, who grew up in Los Angeles, was from such a different world. Similarly, David's family struggled because not only did Khalida come from Pakistan, she also fought honor killings of women. Khalida shares the journey of bringing these families together, across continents, cultures, and faiths, and in the process, discovering ways to build bridges across nations. Today, Khalida and her husband run two companies that touch the hearts of people every single day. Khalida shares about building bridges and the power of diversity and unity coming together.
- 4. Grassroots Change:** The biggest reason honor killings still exist is because the definition of honor in tribal areas focuses on where women go, who they see, who they talk to, etc. In short, honor is most concerned with the sequestering of one's women--daughters, sisters, wives. The reason Khalida Brohi's projects have

KHALIDA BROHI

been so successful in fighting honor killings is because they have been able to shift the focus of honor from disempowering women to preserving tribal identities. Khalida's work aims to remind tribal leaders and communities that their honor lies in their cultural heritage. The moment they lose their cultural identity is the moment they lose their honor. As a way of bringing back the focus to traditions and culture, Khalida engages women in using their indigenous skills of embroidery to create beautiful products which they then sell in markets all around the world. This, in turn, empowers these women as breadwinners in their own homes and communities, which fundamentally changes the way they are perceived by their husbands, brothers, fathers, and tribal leaders. Earning income gives these women a voice in their homes and their communities, and doing it through traditional crafts brings honor to the men.

5. **The Sughar Model:** Khalida Brohi is the Founder and Executive Director of Sughar, a nonprofit established in 2009 to empower and educate the women and youth of Pakistan. Khalida explains the many reasons why Sughar has been so successful, and how these lessons can be applied to other companies, organizations, and even personal strategy. For example, the Sughar Hub model includes establishing a building in the center of a tribal village with a bathroom, plenty of natural light, solar panels for electricity, a water tank for drinking water, and enough room to seat about a hundred people. At these Sughar Hubs, several organizations are invited to engage the community on a broad range of useful events and trainings so that everyone can work together as one community. So if one organization is providing training to women, another organization helps in providing a market to use that skill. If one organization is providing young people of that village with an exposure visit to business in a second province, the other organization can then provide them grants to launch their own businesses. In effect, these Hubs have a ripple effect, creating a hub of solutions to many more local and micro problems.
6. **The Importance of Hope, Balance, and Self-Care:** In 2011, after working tirelessly for women and later serving families displaced by massive flooding in Pakistan's Sindh province, Khalida Brohi collapsed in a puddle of convulsions. The doctors would later tell her that she had had a stroke and warned that if she did not stop, she would continue to suffer from dangerous seizures. She was only 21 years old. But stopping her work wasn't an option for her—instead, she knew she had to continue to try to stop the abuse she saw all around her. So, believing that she would die, she decided that she had to find a way to bring more impact more quickly. That is when she decided to start telling her story to the world. Along the way, she realized that it was foolish to think that she could change so much without being alive to see it through. In order to be effective in reaching her goals, she realized, she had to take care of herself. Ultimately, it was her stroke that taught her about balance; how it is just as important to rest as it is to work. Khalida shares how she fought hard to go back to her work and how her physical body forced her to change the way she approaches challenges.
7. **The Power of Storytelling:** At the age of 16, Khalida Brohi started her journey with no experience, no wealth, poor health and no power. She only knew how to tell her story. That led to the change in lives of hundreds of women in Pakistan and inspiration to thousands around the world. Khalida talks about how to tell your story and how to use social media, writing, speaking, and other platforms to touch human hearts wherever you go.
8. **The Courage to Forgive:** Khalida Brohi's uncle killed her cousin at the age of 14 because she fell in love with someone—known as an honor killing in Pakistan. At the time, Khalida hated him for this act. She hated her father and brother, and every man in the world. She lived in rage, trauma, hatred and sadness for many years—until one day she learned to forgive. It didn't come easy and it nearly broke her, but what came after was incredible freedom, and tremendous success in her work. She took a huge barrier

KHALIDA BROHI

that was holding her back and threw it away. As a result, she was able to walk further and do her work more effectively. Khalida explains how first you must forgive yourself, and then every person who is holding you back. Forgiveness is the real courage. It's the first step towards real change.

- 9. The Role of Faith Islam in Women's Leadership:** In her fight for women's rights, Khalida has used her curiosity and love for Islam to understand how customs that the Prophet Muhammad PBUH abhorred became normalized and re-justified by using improper interpretations of Islam. In fact, women's equality was very important in Islam from the very beginning. The Prophet's first wife was a very successful and powerful businesswoman, much older than he, who believed in him before anyone else did. The Prophet valued intellectual relationships with the women around him. And God taught in the Holy Quran that women are to walk shoulder to shoulder with men. There are many stories in Islam dedicated to important women throughout the ages—so now, Khalida uses these lessons and stories, which are mostly unknown in communities where understanding of the Holy Quran is limited to the recitation of the book in Arabic, a language unknown to them, to share about how it's possible to use Islamic teachings to fight honor killings and the overall role of Islam in women's leadership and empowerment. Khalida's journey has been shaped by her belief in one God and the security and comfort of faith.