

THE IMAN FRAMEWORK



By Hawa M. Sylla



WELCOME

ABOUT MIMPOD

"Muslimahs in Motion" is an interview-style podcast where Hawa, our multi-talented host, converses with successful Muslim women across many different industries. She picks their brains, asking questions about their work, lifestyle, and aspirations, hoping to both gain and share their wisdom with her listeners.

She hopes, with the help of her Muslim sisters, to spread positivity and inspire the next generation of young Muslim women to rise up to their goals, no matter the challenge they present.

Tune in to Muslimahs in Motion wherever you listen to your podcasts.





HAWA M. SYLLA

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Hello! My name is Hawa, and I'm an empathetic software engineer and designer who boosts productivity. With an entrepreneurial spirit, I am passionate about paving pathways into tech and crafting creative solutions.

I recently launched my podcast, **Muslimahs in Motion**, and this guide pairs nicely with the first episode. I highly recommend you listen to it if you haven't already.

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INTRODUCTION

AS-SALAAMU ALAIKUM

Welcome to *The IMAN Framework*.

In this guide, we will break down the principles of the IMAN Framework—something I came up with and often reference when pursuing new opportunities. As a Hijabi Muslimah in the West, we often find ourselves struggling between standing our ground or compromising for the sake of safety.

This framework has helped me objectively evaluate projects, career goals, and opportunities in a way that allows me to weigh out the pros and cons according to my morals and values as both a woman in tech and a Muslimah in the US.

By sharing this with you, I pray it helps guide you through tough career, project, and life decisions. In Shaa Allah this guide will give you a framework that allows you to plan with your religion, health, and happiness in mind.

Without further ado, let's dive into the IMAN Framework!

WHAT IS THE 'IMAN' FRAMEWORK?

In short, it's an abbreviation for **'Intention, Mindfulness, Advocacy, and Nurturing.'** I designed this framework to help Muslim career women protect their boundaries and pursue what is important to them.

It's important to have a metric of how something benefits you, both in this life and the next. Whether it's a job, organization, project, or a trip to the Bahamas—you want to make sure it aligns with your own personal boundaries.

Ultimately, it's important to remember we're doing all of this for the sake of Allah *Subhanhu wa Ta'ala* (The Most Glorified, The Most High).

THE IMAN FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW

STEP

1

INTENTION

Set clear and purposeful intentions based on your spiritual and moral values.

STEP

2

Practice mindfulness and presence through reflection and constant reevaluation.

MINDFULNESS

STEP

3

ADVOCACY

Advocate for yourself and others through boundaries and sharing culture and knowledge.

STEP

4

Nurture your growth and well-being through exercise, socializing, and eating healthy.

NURTURING

THE FRAMEWORK

I - INTENTION

Set Clear and Purposeful Intentions:

- **Define Your Purpose:** Know your faith and values, then create career and life goals that align with them. Set both short-term and long-term intentions that reflect your personal and professional aspirations.
- **Spiritual Intentions:** Begin each day and task with a clear intention (Niyah) to serve Allah through your work. This helps maintain focus and align your actions with your faith.
- **Regular Reassessment:** Frequently reassess and refine your intentions to ensure they remain relevant and aligned with your evolving goals and circumstances.

Before I started working, one of the things I was asked the most by others was about my Hijab.

Was I going to be nervous, being one of the only ones, if not the only one in Hijab?

What if I faced discrimination as a result?

Would a Hijab be a hindrance to my professional career?

Deep down, I knew all would be fine. The du'aas and the Istikhaara I made for this job filled me with confidence.

I had well meaning adults ask me if I would compromise the way I wear my Hijab to fit in, if it came down to it.

The answer? No.

My Creator gave me this job, how could I compromise my religion for something He blessed me with?

A year later, I won a company-wide quarterly award at my job. I accepted that award in my Hijab. My picture with my black face and brown Hijab was displayed on screens all across the company.

I was the only woman, the only black person, and only Muslim Hijabi that won that quarter.

The lesson here? I'm glad I didn't compromise diddly squat. Now, people see with their own two eyes that someone who looks like me can make it. I can perform at a high level and succeed.

Without compromising my faith, my values, and my boundaries as a Muslim woman.

TIPS FOR MAKING INTENTIONS

- **Mindfulness Journaling:** Even if just a sentence, take a quiet, undisturbed moment to think through your goals and values, then write them down without judgment.
- **Making Du'aa:** Speak to Allah—He's always listening. Ask Him to put barakah in your actions, to make you successful in this life and the next. Take time in the morning to recite the du'aas of protection, and follow-up with the same every evening. Surround yourself with remembrance of Allah and He will certainly bless you with nothing but the best, in this life and the next.
- **Be Honest:** Do these goals align with your beliefs? Do they make you feel good about yourself, your religion, your life? If what you're chasing goes against your core beliefs, religious and personal, what's the point of succeeding? Be honest with yourself, it's only you who has to know.

M - MINDFULNESS

Practice Mindfulness and Presence:

- **Mindful Work Practice:** Incorporate mindfulness into your daily work routine to enhance focus, reduce stress, and improve productivity. Try taking mindful breaks (away from screens), deep breathing, or short meditations.
- **Awareness of Boundaries:** Be mindful of your personal and professional boundaries. Learn to recognize signs of overwork or burnout and take proactive steps to maintain balance.
- **Spiritual Mindfulness:** Stay connected with your faith. Throughout the day, take time to perform acts of worship. Spend some extra time on the prayer mat remembering Allah, making du'aa, reading the Qur'an, and pondering over the wonders of Allah's blessings.

When I think of mindfulness, the first thing that comes to mind is prayer. Keeping up with my Salah. Praying extra where I can. Spending more time on the prayer mat, thanking Allah for his infinite blessings.

In the past few years mindfulness has become a trend. Online self-help gurus preach waking up with the sun, spending time in meditation, journaling, etc.

We Muslims have had the key all along!

Mindfulness is nothing new to us. Allah tells us in the Qur'an to be mindful of Him, His blessings, His creation, His everything.

What better way to be mindful than to be mindful of Allah, the Creator of the heavens, the earth, and everything in between?

Throughout the day, take time to truly ponder. Thank Allah for everything, call Him by His perfect names, and ask Him for everything under the sun and in the heavens above. Center your focus on what truly matters.

TIPS TO STAY MINDFUL ALL-DAY

- **Screen Breaks:** Rest your eyes away from the glaring screens. A lot of us work primarily with computers and phones 8+ hours a day. If you have to, schedule screen-free time to breathe, relax, and ground yourself in reality.
- **Stretch & Move:** Stand up, stretch, and move around every couple of hours. Our bodies weren't meant to stay seated all day. We need movement to help us think, focus, and stay healthy.
- **Stay Hydrated:** In other words, take care of yourself! Our bodies have rights over us. Eat when you're hungry, drink when you're thirsty, use the bathroom when you have to. Don't ignore your body's natural needs for work. Life is too short for that!
- **Stay Prayerful:** Make your Salah a priority. Plan your day around it if you can. If you have a 9-5, or your classes coincide with prayer times, make it a habit to pray as soon as you can. Salah is sacred, it's the ultimate mindfulness practice, and it fills your life with barakah. Protect it.

A - ADVOCACY

Advocate for Yourself and Others:

- **Self-Advocacy:** Confidently advocate for your needs and boundaries in the workplace. This could include negotiating flexible work hours, requesting a prayer space, or seeking opportunities for professional development.
- **Prohibition of Discrimination:** Title VII prohibits employers from discriminating against employees or applicants based on religion in hiring, firing, and other terms and conditions of employment.
- **Reasonable Accommodation:** Employers are required to reasonably accommodate employees' religious practices unless doing so would cause undue hardship on the business. This can include flexible scheduling, voluntary shift swaps, job reassignments, and modifications to workplace policies or practices.

Examples of Accommodation:

1. Allowing flexible hours for prayer.
2. Permitting religious dress and grooming practices, such as wearing a Hijab or growing a beard.
3. Providing space for religious observances, like a prayer room.

Advocacy-It's a skill as minorities we probably had to pick up early.

In the work place, this is invaluable. We have a right to practice our religion freely. We have a right to not be discriminated against due to our religion.

As I mentioned above, ***Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1946*** ensures that.

With that being said, if:

- You need to go to Jummah, your employer is required by law to make reasonable accommodation for you to go every Friday.
- If you need a place to pray, your employer is required by law to make reasonable accommodations and provide a place for you to pray.
- If you need time off for Eid, your employer is required by law to make reasonable accommodations to give you that time.

There are laws that protect us and our religious practices, so we should never feel bad or afraid to stand up for ourselves.

This is in every job. Not just corporate.

Another important part of advocacy is: Cultural Competence and Educating Others.

Promote understanding and respect for cultural and religious diversity in your workplace. Educate colleagues about Islamic practices and advocate for policies that support diversity and inclusion.

Never be afraid to educate people.

Islam is a religion that is the victim of misinformation. There's so much people either don't know about, or have the wrong idea about.

When someone asks you a question, treat it as a teaching moment. A moment for calm, collected, friendly Dawah. After all, it's what the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) would have done.

I know, you're tired. I am too. We all are.

The lies, hatred, and misrepresentation is enough to fuel an endless fire. But we must rise above it and show our peers, colleagues, and even strangers the true essence of Islam.

Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of people out there who ask questions out of malice or make sly comments out of hatred. I've developed a knack for detecting those kinds of people vs. the ones who truly want to learn.

The people who trust you enough to ask genuine questions shouldn't be punished due to others' ignorance.

Look at it as spreading Dawah. You're doing the Ummah a service by properly informing people about our beautiful religion.

If we write off everyone who wants to learn about our faith, are we no better than the ones who write us all off, who call us backwards and barbaric?

WAYS TO ADVOCATE

- **Mentorship and Support:** Seek and provide mentorship within your community. Join like-minded Muslimahs who are pursuing similar goals or who are further along than you. It's crucial, especially nowadays, to have that support all around us.
- **Educate Others:** As I mentioned above, not everyone is a hater. Take the time to educate those who'll listen about our beautiful religion. Help them understand why you wear Hijab, why you need a quiet place to pray, and how they can help you thrive within the boundaries of Islam.
- **Cultural Competence:** Advocate for other cultures as well. Promote understanding and respect for cultural and religious diversity in your workplace. Just as we deserve respect and understanding, so does everyone else.

N - NURTURING

Nurture Your Growth and Well-being:

- **Personal Development:** Invest in continuous learning and self-improvement. Attend workshops, pursue further education, and develop skills that enhance your professional and personal life.
- **Well-being and Self-Care:** Prioritize your mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. Take time to exercise, eat healthy, and pursue hobbies that bring you joy and relaxation.
- **Community Engagement:** Stay connected with your community. Participate in community activities, volunteer, and build strong, supportive relationships with family and friends.

Whatever your goals are in life, you'll reach them faster when you make yourself top priority. You cannot operate from an empty well. When you nurture yourself-creatively, professionally, and in your relationships-you'll find that joy, peace, and happiness trickle into other areas of your life.

Don't be afraid to keep learning! Just because you graduated doesn't mean you're done studying. Nurture your mind by learning new skills, be it for work or play, it's worth it.

Take advantage of your job or school's resources. My job offers online courses through Udemy and Coursera, and has a free fitness center. I use them all!

What opportunities does your employer offer you? Take advantage of it, because it's not only helping you, but them too.

Ultimately, the more we nurture ourselves, the better our life gets.

The better we feel about ourselves, the more productive and social we can be. And speaking of social, spend time with people you love! Go out on picnics with the girls, cozy up for a movie night with the family, join community events—and volunteer!

Us humans are social creatures, no matter how introverted some of us can be. We crave that connection, closeness, love, and support we can only get from others. Find the people that charge your battery and keep them close.

Nurture your most important relationships, and they will nurture you back.

There is so much emphasis I could give to this last part of the framework, but we would be here forever. The main idea I want you to take from this is:

Take care of, and improve, yourself first.

Be active, go on trips, take mental health days, opt for homemade instead of takeout, spend time with the people who make your chest feel lighter, drink plenty of water, and do things simply because you want to.

You decide how to spend your life.

Decide to put yourself first. Everything else is secondary.

WAYS TO FILL UP YOUR WELL:

- **Take Online Courses:** You can do this on your own by signing up to course sites like Udemy, Coursera, or Skillshare. Another option is to see if your company offers discounts or memberships to these services.
- **Prioritize Your Diet:** Make healthy food choices! That doesn't mean cooking a 3-course meal every day. It may look like opting for fresh juice over soda, a rice dish over a burger, or a light salad instead of a bag of chips. Eating healthy shouldn't be another draining activity, it should be accessible and catered to your circumstances.
- **Network, Network, Network:** Always be ready to make friends! Especially work ones. You never know how a conversation at a simple gathering will benefit you just months later. Be open, talk to people about your projects, learn about their work and hobbies, and be willing to offer advice where possible.

BONUS TIPS TO THRIVE

Now that we've gone over the entire IMAN framework step by step, here are a few extra tips to help you thrive.

- **Set 'SMART' Goals:** Develop specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals for each component of the I.M.A.N. Framework.
- **Daily Reflection:** Incorporate a daily reflection practice to review your intentions, mindfulness, advocacy efforts, and nurturing activities.
- **Accountability Partner:** Find an accountability partner who can help you stay on track and provide support as you work towards your goals.
- **Resource Utilization:** Utilize available resources, such as professional development courses, mental health services, and community organizations to support your journey.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

That's a wrap!

I hope you find The IMAN Framework insightful and inspiring. Remember, setting clear intentions, practicing mindfulness, advocating for yourself and others, and nurturing your growth are key steps to achieving balance and success in your professional and personal life.

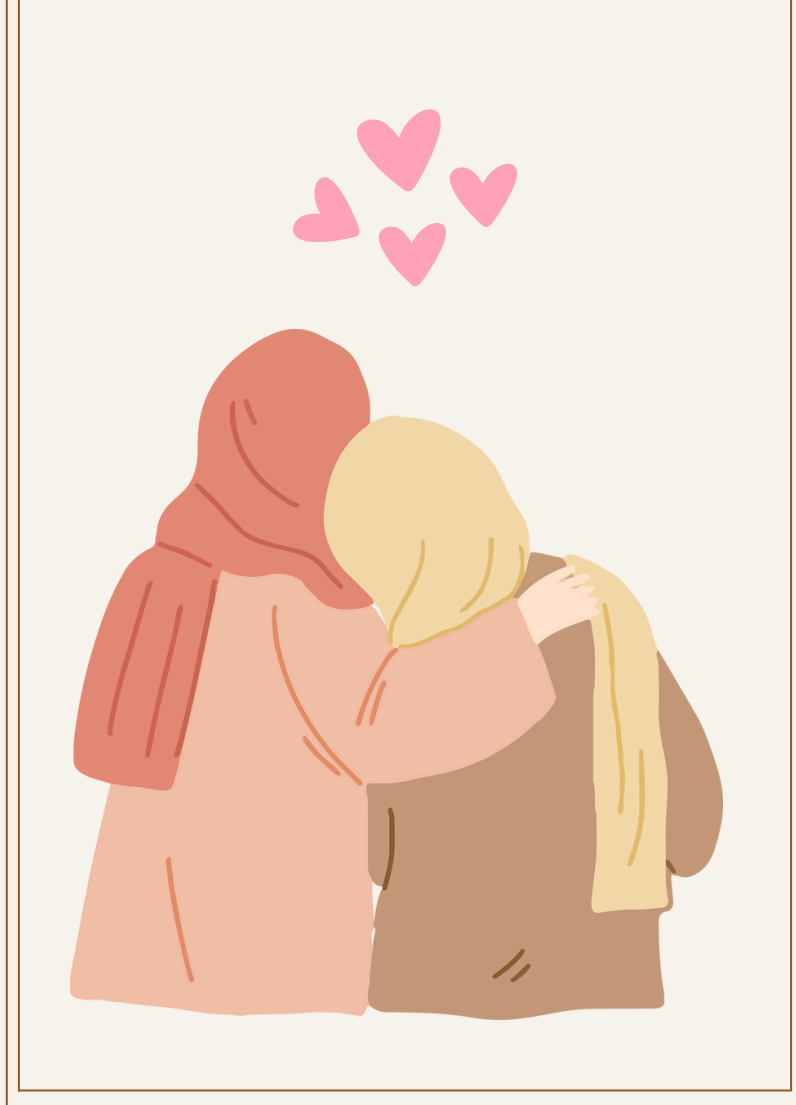
However, without action, the framework is useless.

I encourage you to start implementing these strategies immediately. Take the first step, make the decision to live mindfully and purposefully from today onwards. Don't just read this guide and move on to the next—implement it!

Evaluate your goals, aspirations, and even your current occupation through the framework, and see how it can help you create a plan to succeed in this life and the next.

Through this framework, I pray you find peace, balance, and fulfillment in all your future endeavors—both professional, personal, and spiritual.

Ameen.



THANK YOU

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this guide. I pray it brings you a sense of ease and helps you feel more confident about your goals, aspirations, and future endeavors--both professionally and personally.

If you haven't already, [go listen to the first episode of *Muslimahs in Motion*](#), where I dive deep into the IMAN Framework.

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