



Pearls of Leadership Wisdom: Women in Leadership

Welcome to my rather chilly backyard and Pearls of Leadership Wisdom. This last week I was inspired by two different sessions that featured women leaders and wanted to pass on some of their stories and ideas to all of you in the hopes that they inspire you as well.

The first session I attended online was sponsored by the Minnesota chapter of Women Corporate Directors. It was a conversation with Beth Ford, who is CEO of Land O'Lakes. Among other things, she spoke to the world of the CEO vis-à-vis her board and talked about the elusive factor of trust in the boardroom. She said all boards, no matter what they are or where they are, need trust to be able to have the conversations that must happen in the boardroom. She noted that one of the ways we can all engender trust is to prepare, show up prepared, and show curiosity about others' ideas. She made a couple of other really important points, which both involved speaking up. She said as a women you will need to speak up and sometimes more than once, because perhaps the point you made was now made by somebody else and you need to remind people that you did say that idea earlier. And oh by the way, speak up and don't hesitate to participate. She commented that, "Don't worry about whether you are 100% right, simply offer your ideas. Be willing to be vulnerable and be willing to take the chance that maybe something you bring up will sound ridiculous. On the other hand, from my vantage point, if 80% of what you have to say is really on target, people will actually forget the other 20." So as Beth Ford says, "Speak up."

My second session was a great discussion that was sponsored by Twin Cities Business. It was their annual Women in Leadership panel that they do. Two of the guests, Bethany Owen, the CEO of ALLETE, and Corie Barry, the CEO of Best Buy, had some things in common. For example, both of them have been CEO for less than a year. Just imagine getting indoctrinated into the job during the pandemic. Although the silver lining part is that it helps them develop deeper connections with people. The panel also got into a discussion about ambition to become a CEO. Bethany made the comment that when she started her career as an attorney, it was not with the goal of becoming CEO of a company, and I know there are a lot of other stories like that. Leaders can evolve and find their voice over time. Ambition can be a wonderful thing, but is not always what causes someone to want to be a CEO.

That resonated clearly with me because of another story that I heard from a woman leader at Mayo, Dr. Bobbie Gostout. She said that her desire to become a leader was really fueled by her desire to help her OB-GYN profession achieve excellence, and for the organization to better serve patient needs. In all of these cases, it was more about the greater good than it was about personal ambition. Corie also spoke eloquently about Best Buy leadership, and particularly their four values of courage, empathy, vulnerability, and grace. She noted that having those values front-and-center allowed all leaders to do a better job of operating from the same playbook. But then she went on to talk about a concept that absolutely intrigued me, "leadership waterfalls."



Just imagine what happens when a leader demonstrates those values and the energy and momentum of their behavior carries through and influences others. So it got me thinking about this question, “What have I done this week to create leadership waterfalls?” In fact, I would encourage each of you to think about this question for yourself. At the end of the week, ask yourself, “What have I done this week to create a leadership waterfall where I have been visible about what I believe and value, and what might I be able to do next week to create a leadership waterfall?” This is so powerful because it is not about you; it is about how your entire organization behaves according to values.

So I want to leave you with this thought. I hope some of these stories that I have shared with you have inspired you as well and I hope you keep front-and-center what are you doing to keep those leadership waterfalls going. Have a great week.