

## On Leadership

By Tsitaliya Mircheva

Since we've chosen to talk about success in this month's newsletter there is no way to miss the subject of leadership, which is essential for successful management and also beneficial for a person's career in any field of their choice. It is important to mention, though, that leadership has nothing to do with seniority or one's position in the hierarchy of a company. Leadership doesn't automatically happen when you reach a certain pay grade. Leadership is also not about titles or personal attributes.

Dr. Anja Förster is a trainer and a coach on leadership and negotiation. In fact she studied and worked in the chemistry industry and only later she founded her own consultancy agency for leadership training and coaching. Since 2000 she works with individuals and teams, organizing workshops and team building programs, as well as speaking publicly on the topic.

Tsitaliya: What made you change your career path from a chemist to a leadership coach?

Dr. Förster: Passion. I felt passionate about people and communication and I didn't have a lot of either of them being a chemist. I needed to find another career. Because I had lived in the UK for seven years, my language skills allowed me to teach English in Germany. I was giving lessons to long-term unemployed people, who had no or very little interest in learning English. So the first thing I had to do in those classes was to form a relationship with the participants. I learnt to listen to their stories. I found out how to motivate them. Our lessons were leadership trainings for me from the very first moment. Only that back then I didn't give it that name. I just called it good English lessons. To become better at my job I had some professional training myself and slowly I realised that what I was doing was actually leading a team. We had a goal, we had resources and we had an infrastructure. So it was a natural step to say yes when I was asked if I would give leadership training.

Tsitaliya: Can you describe the process of your work?

Dr. Förster: It very much depends on the type of work I am asked to do. If I give some training for example, the first thing I do is to talk to the client to really understand: what is the current situation, who will be at the training, what knowledge do they already have, what are the problems and most importantly what are the goals. Just to give you an example. I am currently preparing for a two-day inhouse training. The initial brief was to do just negotiating training. Then after speaking with the client personally it turned out that we will need to work not only on the skills but also on the values, beliefs and the identity of the team. If however I do coaching the process is very simple. I ask the client what his or her goal is and then we go for it.

Tsitaliya: In your opinion what are the key skills for a person to become a leader?

Dr. Förster: Indra K Nooyi (Chairman & CEO, Pepsico) once said in an interview: "If you can get people to follow you to the ends of the earth, then you are a great leader....The distance between the number one and the number two is a constant. As a leader, I am tough on myself and I raise the standard for everybody; and then I am very caring about other people because I help them to excel at what they are doing so that they can aspire to be me in the future."

There are two answers to this question. If we think of skills as something we can learn, then being able to listen, to communicate effectively, plan and organize effectively, take decisions and delegate rank high in what is important to be a good leader. Perhaps even more important than the skills are having passion and vision, being honest, authentic and committed and having a good sense of humor.

Tsitaliya: EPWN is about women and teaching them how to become better leaders. What would you suggest particularly to women – how can they learn to become better leaders?

Dr. Förster: Sheryl Sandberg started a whole new discussion about why there are so few women in top management positions. She, for example, names three things women can improve:

1. Sit at the table – Women should make themselves seen and heard. State your opinion in a meeting, ask questions. Don't just be operating in the background, come to the front and stand up.
2. Make your partner a real partner – Women are facing difficult situations: career, home, partner, kids, household – everything is running in parallel. So our partners have to be real partners also in terms of sharing the responsibilities and the workload at home.
3. Don't leave before leaving – Give 100% at work until the day you want to leave: for example, because you are having a kid. But until that day, go for the new project, ask for a promotion, gain experiences abroad, work on your career.

A passion of mine is success factor modeling. It means I look at what people can do very well and I try to model them. What I have learnt is that successful people have a fantastic network. They know and are known by a lot of people. And they talk about their projects, their ideas, their plans. EPWN is a very good opportunity for this. Being a good leader means also being alone on the top. Also a support group that listens, gives advice, encourages and helps to stay focused is an invaluable asset.

Tsitaliya: Communication is obviously a significant factor for leadership and success. What is the most common problem you've encountered with your clients when it comes to communication?

Dr. Förster: People don't listen! One of the most difficult skills in communication – if not the most difficult one - is to listen. By that I mean really listen; curiously, non-judgmentally, openly, non-advising, no problem solving, no "I know exactly how you feel.." – none of that. People want to be seen and heard. If I actually listen to somebody, I hear his/her expectations, values, wishes, hopes, goals, motivations. I get a sense of a possible misunderstandings or conflicts. This work is priceless. But how can I teach how to listen to somebody? One way is to have them experience what it feels like to be listened to. This alone can motivate them in the future to work on it.

Tsitaliya: Dr. Förster, you have been a guest speaker at our Working Across Generations event. You spoke about behavioural patterns of the different generations at work. You showed an impressive understanding of all generations plus you explained how the brain functions in different situations. Can you tell us where your understanding comes from?

Dr. Förster: Even though I don't work as a chemist anymore, I have the brain of a scientist. So I read a lot of research. I ask a lot of questions. I doubt a lot and I form my own opinion. For me information has to be logical so, for example, it makes

perfect sense that due to the financial global situation, Gen Z is much more performance driven than brand loyal and since they grow up with social media, they feel much more connected than previous generations.

Tsitaliya: In one of your latest projects you are working with a dance artist from Glasgow. How do you choose your partners for your work? How is dancing able to help communication?

Dr. Förster: Satya Dunning and I have known each other for 20 years. We have been aware of each other's career paths, we've shared and discussed problems and we both realised last December that we have the same values and passion when it comes to leadership. Mutually we felt that we inspired each other and that the fusion of her and my skills would result in a very unusual but fantastic training program.

"For me increased awareness in communication is certainly connected to my relationship to my body: the more connected in my body I can be, the more intentional and original my communication can be. "Original" meaning that my communication has an origin, an integrity rooted in my body. Our body is a kind of repository for our emotions, thoughts, experiences and resources. Reconnection, for example, can take place through breath, awareness of feelings (anxiety in the belly), physical sensations of stress or wellness (tightness in shoulders or sensation of openness in the chest area). Through breath exercises for example, I can learn to be with difficult emotions like anxiety and stress and create the inner conditions I need to be present with myself. I can then ground this experience into a series of movements as a way to rewire my nervous system. Once this reconnection is in place, I am ready to articulate the strategies I need to put in place to yield self efficacy, participate more fully in the world and communicate with clarity and effectiveness. This is embodied communication."

Tsitaliya: You have years of experience in the training and coaching field. What is the most important lesson you've learned?

To be authentic. I never play roles. What people see is who I am. That makes me believable. I show my strengths but I don't hide my weaknesses. And I know that I don't know it all.

At the moment Dr. Anja Förster is preparing a negotiations workshop. More information about the workshops you can find here: : [www.anja-foerster.com](http://www.anja-foerster.com) or on facebook.