

Women managing the pandemic is a source of inspiration and legitimacy on a giant screen for all leaders worldwide!

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The feeling of imposture, the unattainable need for perfection, the fear of showing one's emotions and appearing vulnerable, the fear of judgment, and the feeling of guilt that accompany making difficult decisions, are all obstacles to women leaders. These fears and sentiments subvert the influence of their talents and hinder their deep and unique power.

Almost a year ago, a microscopic virus skewed our reference points and put us all on an equal footing in the face of the risk of death. How do we manage this unprecedented crisis?

In Chinese, the word “crisis” is made up of two characters: one represents danger, and the other represents opportunity. Faced with a crisis involving experts, politicians, citizens, and front-line workers, women leaders acted on their own without trying to fit into the model of the dominant ruling culture. They succeeded.

In the context of a company, what are the appropriate attitudes and skills that female and male leaders can appropriate, or even claim, in the practice of effective leadership?

A flashback to my own experience as a leader: In 1995, I was the youngest and only female CEO of a major advertising agency. I found myself facing these previously described obstacles alone without a model of female leadership or support system around me. Without leadership guidance, I hid my vulnerabilities and ignored my needs. My personal equilibrium became precarious. This changed when I discovered a mentor in pioneering choreographer and dancer Martha Graham (1894-1991). Over the years, I have made one of her principles my own: to become aware of our uniqueness and to remain open and in touch with our deep impulses. Dare to be oneself and act based on one's values and convictions outside of the pressure of the social environment's established models and standards—a vast project to give birth to oneself and ultimately find lasting serenity.

In business, most of the women I meet today wish to bring women together. The leader within them for this leadership is “powered by the sap of oneself” planted in a breeding ground rich in experiences, shared expertise, and encounters.

How do we get there? First, take the time to look inward and avoid the deadly comparison while welcoming and assuming all its nuggets with their singular irregularities. Secondly, act aligned with what, in our own eyes, finds us deeply in value. And it is there in the transition to that the shoe pinches a second time. This exercise awakens fears and requires courage to overcome them. In my practice, exemplarity turns out to be a powerful lever for daring to project oneself and courage a necessary quality to expose oneself and act from one's inner springs. Walking at your own pace in the footsteps of a legitimate source of inspiration in your own eyes is the best way to resonate with what is already there inside each of us and which only asks to be activated.

Faced with this triple crisis (health, economic and social), public women have successfully carried the highest responsibility of preserving life and this by going partly blind. Let's take a look at four dimensions of leadership that have become exemplary:

Solicit collaboration, participation, and solidarity: Chancellor Angela Merkel already poses on March 18: "... 70% of the population will contract the virus. We will work together to protect each other."

Act with empathy, love, and compassion: Erna Solberg, the Norwegian Prime Minister, held a press conference dedicated only to the children of her country: "It is normal to be afraid, and I too miss hugging my friends."

Decide firmly and stay the course: In January 2020, Tsai Ing-wen in Taiwan put in place 124 measures to block the spread, including testing and tracing, without having to resort to containment. There are nine reported deaths as of February 10, 2021.

Inform with clarity, transparency, and proximity: As the head of Finland, Sanna Marin succeeds in mobilizing social media influencers to disseminate concrete facts on the pandemic's management. Connecting substance and form, Jacinthe Arden of the New Zealand Premiere held daily Facebook Live video sessions on her sofa and sweatshirt with the theme of "stay home, save lives".

In a "survival" mode of anxiety, family exhaustion and professional stress, these are the skills of emotional intelligence (authenticity, transparency, 'long' times of listening and verbalizing doubts and difficulties experienced) and relational intelligence (reinvented social bond, mutual aid and solidarity) which have proven to be the most effective.

Suddenly, in "post-crisis" mode, should we fear a return to the behaviors associated with the competition paradigm? Let us sincerely hope that women - who carry life - assume their role in contributing to inventing a managerial ethic focused on preservation and, therefore, collaboration with all the stakeholders of the Living.

Following my early life in advertising and at university, I founded Wingsfromwithin, a consulting & coaching firm. In 2002 I co-founded the Belgian chapter of ICF (International Coaching Federation). My professional identity: midwife. My contribution to creating value: supporting the birth of the unique being that we each are. This being who sometimes has so much difficulty taking his rightful place, feels oppressed and is rejected by the interior authority that inhabits, criticizes, and judges us. Daring to exist oneself fully is also to mirror permission to others. It is the necessary condition for leadership that needs to be sincere, shared, and operated in confidence more than ever.