



What **everyone** can learn from women leaders

A whitepaper about leadership, role models, authenticity and trust



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Role models inspire other people to take action

“I believe in you”, “You can do more than you think” and “Yes, your story is a story to share” – Someone else’s opinion can make a big impact. The female leaders in this whitepaper have used these statements in their careers or have wished someone would have said these things to them.

Role models are people that inspire others to take action. If you see that someone, especially someone who looks like you or with a similar background as yourself, who has already done it once before than that also because a possibility for you to do the same. The female football players, the NASA women and Michelle Obama’s of this world have this effect on women. But how does this compare in the workplace? You don’t have to be Michelle Obama to be a role model. You’re already a role model when you can inspire your niece to become a businesswoman, when you help a female colleague to get a promotion or when you show yourself within your company and to the outside world.

What kind of (personal) leadership, systems and culture are necessary to let female role models become more visible?

This paper is for everyone, not just for women. Because good leadership is universal. This paper is for everyone who believes in the qualities of people regardless of who they are, where they were born or what they look like. It’s a story of being yourself, being visible and being able to connect to others.

We are talking to five women. Each with their own story.

This paper is written by Anouk Minnes of Great Place to Work in collaboration with Nancy Poleon of BrandedU. As a business partner, Great Place to Work helps organizations to establish a foundation of trust, where everyone’s potential can be maximized. BrandedU is committed to helping more women to the top of their fields through their leadership program Lead to Empower.



“Tell her every day she is smart and capable and lift her up. For so many people, the role models they follow are right in their backyard. It’s their mothers, teachers, siblings, and their fathers and the men around them who every day can lift them up.”

Don’t underestimate the power of day-to-day motivation and inspiration in a girl’s life.”

Michelle Obama

Leadership starts with self-awareness and self-esteem

Leadership starts with self-awareness. Regardless of how people react towards you, when you know and trust yourself, you are strong and valuable. This also means that you can give people confidence by listening to their ideas and views. Good leaders put other people first. Nevertheless, it’s important that these leaders become visible and share their stories so other people, women in this case, are being encouraged to stand for who they are.

In this whitepaper we start with the first fundamental decision that you make as a leader: do you lead based on trust or based on control? We also share the 5 levels of leadership.

Afterwards we will talk about (female) leadership, role models and diversity with:

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|-----------------|---|--|
| Ineke Tolud | - | Manager Design & Development at Rituals |
| Sharita Boon | - | Commercial Director at DPG Recruitment |
| Mirjam Bakker | - | Teamcoach Credit Risk at ABN AMRO |
| Jayani Masthoff | - | Co-founder and director at Goudsteen & Danaë |
| Wencke Lorber | - | Commercial Director at Great Place to Work the Netherlands |
| Nancy Poleon | - | Owner at BrandedU |

We’ll finish with 7 lessons that **everyone** can use in their own (personal) leadership

The 5 types of leaders

Do you live your life from trust or distrust? The answer to this question is fundamental. For many aspects in life and especially for leadership. Do you believe that leadership is necessary to keep an eye on people because otherwise it will get out of control? Or do you believe that leadership is a means of treating people with respect and to help them develop themselves?

The consequences of behavior

The choice between one of the two beliefs has explicit consequences on behavior: are you transparent or do you keep information to yourself? Do you micro-manage or give people space to work freely? And are the best decisions being made by the leaders themselves or do you also include the views and ideas of other people?

The choice for one of the two beliefs has major consequences for the achievements of the organization. According to research a high level of trust within an organization positively impacts innovation, teamwork, focus and good energy, which results in company growth in soft as well as hard numbers.

Being scared of the unknown

Nevertheless, there are still leaders and organizations who micro-manage and are scared to hand over the reins or even loosen them. But why? Rutger Bregman says the following in his new book *“De meeste mensen deugen”: “Who stands up for humans also stands up against the powerful beings on earth. It implies that we are not selfish animals who need to be controlled, regulated and addressed from above. It implies that the emperor is wearing no clothes. An organization with intrinsic motivated people can function perfectly well without managers”*.

And if we have managers, what kind of leaders are they? How do they behave within the organization and what effect does this have on their team and organization? After years of international research on trust within organizations (especially on leaders and employees) Great Place to Work has discovered 5 leadership levels. From the leader whose behavior unintentionally damages the organization, to the leader who is a mentor and completely focusses on his or her team.

Level 1: The unintentional leader

These leaders have no clue of what impact they have on others. Their behavior can damage the people they work with or the organization considerably. Nobody knowingly chooses to be an unintentional leader. They mainly have good field-specific competences, but miss the skills a leader needs to motivate and inspire others.

Level 2: The on/off leader

These leaders are either in on or off mode. They can be a friend to one, but an enemy to the other. Their behavior doesn't directly damage an organization, but they also don't actively contribute to the team performance. Sometimes they have too many other responsibilities that they lack being a leader. Due to this, they are not always available when needed. They often knowingly or unknowingly use favoritism. This leads to an environment of uncertainty.

Level 3: The transactional leader

These leaders love to tick off their own boxes on a checklist. They are very good in what they do, and people are mainly satisfied about these leaders. However, they are not as future-oriented, innovative and charismatic as the level 4 & 5 leaders. Although they are heading in the right direction, their behavior is not consistent enough and they don't want to be involved in the personal lives of their employees.

Level 4: The good leader

These leaders are consistent and sincere. They set clear expectations, understand that making mistakes is human and value a good work/life balance for their employees. They are being described as easy to talk to, understanding and honest. Good leaders know that in the end responsibility lies with them and not with the team. Due to this believe they find it difficult to show their own shortcomings and vulnerability.

Level 5: The 'For All' leader

A For All leader could brag a lot, but they are not that kind of leader. They prefer to stay in the background, so people can bring out the best in their work. These leaders treat every person with dignity, regardless of their position or traits. People see these leaders as hardworking and leading by example.

Female qualities

The five levels of leadership are not typically male or typically female. Everyone - male, female or whatever you consider yourself - can be a good leader. Although it is striking that the qualities that are mentioned in level 4 and 5 are mostly female qualities. Think about qualities such as listening, starting the conversation and putting aside ego. This doesn't mean every woman is a good leader right away. But these qualities are crucial ones to be successful today and to make your organization more successful.

The 'For All'-leaders are - among other qualities - appreciated for being hard working and lead by example. They build relationships with their team members which lead to good results. They believe in empowering people and giving them the freedom to create an innovative power and organizational success.

In this whitepaper we share the stories of five female leaders. We focus on their vision of being a good employer and role model. They also share the lessons they have learned so you can be inspired and become a great (personal) leader too.



Ineke Tolud

Manager Design & Development at Rituals

Since 2009 Ineke has been responsible for the design of all Rituals stores on a strategic level. Her focus is on guarding the essence of the brand.

In 2015 Ineke won the title EZVN (Ethnic Businesswomen the Netherlands) female manager of the year.

Self-reliance is the focal point in Ineke's life. When she was 12 years old she lost her dad, the one who took care of everything to guarantee a good life for his family. Together with her mother and 8 brothers and sisters she went to live in Almelo. For her this was the moment that she felt "I will do it on my own". Ineke joined the Academy of Arts after someone told her "you're talented, you should do this". After the Academy of Arts she took a job at Hema as a designer without knowing what the job entailed. Her motto? "I'll go for it and I'll be extremely good at it. That's something I can always trust upon".

From a girl of a family of 9 in Almelo to Head of Design at Rituals. Why would this not be possible for other women? Recently Ineke met 17-year-old Lordina. At the age of 9 she came to the Netherlands with her mother. Currently Lordina is in her 5th year at high school, works as teamlead at Albert Heijn and runs her own business in braiding hair. Ineke motivated her to join Elske Doets of the Young Lady Business. In her presentation Lordina called Ineke her role model. "It was such a beautiful moment, to be someone's role model".

There should always be someone who tells you that you can take on the world. You are the best, the prettiest and you can do it! Money is not needed for this. These are the words that matter. A role model shows: she did it, so can also I do it.

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“The moment you let people experience freedom, they don’t feel like they have to justify themselves all the time.”

My vision on leadership

The most important word is simply trust. Good leadership means having a good connection and understanding, on the base of trust, with the people around me. This means that confidentiality is guaranteed and that you really get to know people, so you can value them for their talent. Basically, you work in the same way as a football coach: you position people on the basis of their talent. You wouldn't position a goalkeeper as a striker either, right?

I always work with long-term goals, what are our objectives? I'm a creative person. The moment people experience freedom, they don't feel like they have to justify themselves all the time.

Leadership has to do with who you are and your strengths. I never followed a management course. I learned from how other managers approached me. I want to be the leader I wish I had. This means giving space to your team, letting people grow and be independent.

My role models

I get my inspiration from several people. Back in the day my role models were Whitney Houston, Clair Huxtable (as a female lawyer) and Oprah Winfrey. I saw Bill Cosby as a fatherly figure, as my father had passed away. Role models are very important. But it's also nice to have them near.

My lessons

- Stand up for yourself: eventually you've got it in you. It's nice when someone tells you: “now it's your turn”. Taking the next step is easier said than done. I see women who achieve more with less talent, how is this possible? These women have the courage and attitude: “Hi, here I am and this is what I can do”.
- In 2015 I became female manager of the year. Out of nowhere I was in the spotlight and people started to notice me. It took me out of my comfort zone, but I had come across so many women that had given me strength. We mainly work within our own small world, but many women have the same passion. Go out there and broaden your network.
- Give other people a platform and encourage them to be themselves. For example, one colleague of mine would hide her tattoos. I told her “Show the world who you are. This is what makes you special.”



Sharita Boon

Commercial Director at DPG Recruitment

Sharita has an impressive track record when it comes to sales leadership. From an early age she already knew that she wanted to work in sales, which to her opinion is the place where all the magic happens. Last year she proved her talent by winning the Women in Sales Award.

Soon after finalizing her Commercial Economy study Sharita was successful in a variety of sales functions. “Working hard, with ups and downs.” She focuses on personal leadership and enforces her team to excel. “Obtaining results is important. I would lie if I would claim that this is not the case. Above all sales concerns people. Real people with different backgrounds, thoughts and values.”

Research by for instance McKinsey demonstrates that diversity can directly correlate to an increase in revenue. “Essential information for my job. At this moment, a lot of talent is wasted by a large number of companies. Recruiters search for individuals that are similar to the people they know, who are comparable to themselves. Results improve when the emphasis is on authenticity, instead of uniformity.”

Sales skills are important, yet personal leadership is an important theme for Sharita. “In my team, everybody should have the ‘I can do it’ feeling. The largest part of the training budget I therefore reserve for improving personal leadership instead of sales skills. Who are you? What are your talents? Who is the person on the other side of the table and how can we make sure that you can influence them?”

At age 34 Sharita was promoted to her current position. “Make sure you are not a copy of your predecessor. Everybody has unique characteristics that can be used to make a difference.”

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“The more you are yourself, the more others will feel confident to be themselves”

My vision on leadership

Good leadership is not about yourself but about the enforcement of others to facilitate growth. I strongly believe in Lead to Empower. I am result-driven and want to make an as large as possible impact. I do this through facilitating leadership and helping people in their development. I lead through the following questions: What is the focus? What needs to be done? I do this to empower people and by placing the people in those position where they can excel and further develop in. It may sound idealistic, but it is not. Because, when you do this, you really get the best results. This has to do with trust. Each relationship starts with trusts and a secure work environment. There is no opportunity for growth when there is no base to be yourself.

My role models

I have had a variety of role models during my career. Florence Schmit is one of them. We worked together in an environment in which we were considered successful on the base of our masculine qualities and results. I vividly remember that following a promotion, she told me: “always remember that you got to this position by being yourself and what you contributed. The higher you get, the less diverse the group will get and the harder it will be to stay close to who you really are.”

I furthermore consider Sander van den Hout an important role model of mine. He still is one of the first people I call when I need advice, because he is always honest. He has provided me with the opportunity to get the best out of myself and to develop into the leader that I am. I hope that I will be able to do the same for others.

My lessons

- Focus on the factors that you really like, that make you happy and adjust your career towards those. Stay close to your intuition. Life is very short, and I would discourage keeping a job that does not make you happy.
- Identify those factors you are good at and focus on your strong points and further strengthen those. Your strong points determine your distinctiveness and where you can make a difference, as opposed to those aspects a person still needs to develop. It is a waste to spend too much time on those.
- It is important to make time available for your personal life. I encourage people to exit the rat race every now and then, and to take a good look at themselves. Why am I making certain decisions, what is important to me and how does this contribute to my daily activities? This provides clarity and peace of mind, ultimately creating new room to operate. This is valuable for a team leader as it can be used to empower others.



Mirjam Bakker

Teamcoach Credit Risk at ABN AMRO

Miriam focusses on making connections, one-on-one or in a groups. It's the common thread in her life that has brought her where she is now.

"For about 6 years I was part of a group with whom I had studied. This made me aware of how important connections were for me and that I missed this connection in my private life and work." Miriam divorced her husband and looked for a new job. "I wanted to connect with the people around me and have a job where I can help people and organizations develop further. I wanted to be useful."

When she was 15 years old her talent for connecting was discovered. I was selected for the Dutch basketball team. "Not because I excelled in the sport but because I brought unity in the team and had an eye for detail. This helped a mediocre basketball player to the top."

Despite an undeniable good feeling for connecting, the lack of it, once cost her an important opportunity. "I was about 30 years old when I was nominated for a top talent pool of ABN AMRO. I did my job well and both my boss and manager saw this. Nevertheless, I wasn't chosen. I didn't know anyone on the board that made the decision. It was my own fault for not being chosen. I didn't invest time in building relationships, while the other candidates had. I was naïve and thought that my hard work would be picked up and be enough. This wasn't the case. If you don't connect, you will miss out on opportunities."

You can learn new things to connect with people who you find interesting. And the good side of it is, that it's mutual. Because they can learn from you.

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“When you lead to empower this also means to relinquish control”

My vision on leadership

I believe in servant leadership: you facilitate and give what is necessary. You are not the focal point, but the team and people that you coach are. You will make sure that your team can do their job. I can give as well as take space. I want to achieve good results and will intervene where necessary. I want everyone to feel valued and to be able to tell their story. And I look at what that person needs to perform. This is different for everyone. Over the last year I've started to manage more in my own way. I do it my own way. Every day I want to add value to someone and that someone can be everyone.

My role model

Linda de Mol is a power woman who has it all. She comes across as genuine and warm and delivers quality. Everything she does, she does well.

My lessons

- Invest in yourself, especially in your own development. Who are you and what's important to you? I find it totally normal that people between 25 and 40 invest in themselves. I like to see young people who are aware of themselves and their surroundings more and more. This generation has this more than my own.
- You should stay true to yourself and don't make decisions because other people expect this of you.
- Connect with the right people. With people that make you feel good, people that can be of value to you and you to them. Think of networking as socializing.
- It's not bad to ask for help. Invite someone for a coffee with the message: "I find what you do inspiring and I can learn from you."



Jayani Masthoff

Co-founder and director at Goudsteen & Danaë

Twelve years ago, Jayani decided to change course and founded her own company. This decision arose following a journey to her birth country Sri Lanka, where she realized that she wanted to help people to be their true selves.

On multiple occasions she decided to take back control into her own hands. “My hands are my beacons of which I am proud. They symbolize my own true identity, the path I need to follow and prevent the classification by other individuals. Only I do that.

At the age of three Jayani was offered for adoption. She was living with her family on the streets of Colombo. After the death of her little brother due to malnutrition, her parents decided to provide her with a better life opportunity. When I met my birth dad about 20 years after, following a return to Sri Lanka, he grabbed my hands and said: ‘I made the right decision. You do not have working hands.’ That really touched me. Nowadays when I hold my hands, I feel who I want to be at this moment.”

What makes Jayani stand out is her authenticity. She is who she is because of a number of life lessons that she has encountered. She has learned that it is ok to say no. “It is accepted to return those responsibilities that are not yours, yet that is a difficult process. Just like the lesson that doing your outmost best sometimes is just not good enough. This is not because you’re not good enough. Working hard is very different from having to do your best whilst continuously failing. It should go without saying.”

That her compass is pointed into the correct position is shown by the fact that her business has grown into a beautiful company with 25 employees and over 40 associates and freelancers. “Make sure that nobody puts a label on you. Dare to stand up and disapprove that kind of behavior.”

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“Never touch someone else’s being”

My vision on leadership

Good leadership helps other people to show who they really are. Subsequently you facilitate the process of them becoming who they want to be. Change, development and people are not manageable. But they can be facilitated. As a leader you are the person who facilitates within predefined boundaries that are known by the whole team. This is what the organization stands for and this is who we are. Individuals should also be able to say: “This is not who I am”. As a leader you identify what is needed by an individual, the team and the organization. On these levels you join the conversation, you lead and coach. In theory the leader always comes last and demonstrates role model behavior. Sometimes leadership is difficult due to the responsibility that I feel. You shouldn’t walk away from that and also experience more difficult aspects. In these scenarios I need to be an example, whether I want to or not.

My role models

I didn’t have any role models myself. Retrospectively that would’ve made things better. Not being all alone in all that which you experience. I was adopted and raised in a Caucasian environment. For that reason, I always was different and unusual. I was always told: you have to work harder than others. I on the other hand always thought that I didn’t have to work harder. I will just do what I feel like. If people of my own ethnicity would have told me: “you can do much more than you are aware of”, that would’ve been good to hear. Now I only realized at the age of 18 years old “my mind can accomplish quite some things”.

We sometimes do not realize the effect we have on other people, yet when you do what you believe in with good intentions, great things beyond expectations can be accomplished. This differs between people. Your share is marginal, but because it is the personal it helps support the other person. If not today, then at a later stage in life.

My lessons

- My motto is: “never touch someone else’s being”. You’re allowed to judge somebody’s decision-making, be honest about it and say, “this is not acceptable”. Nevertheless, when you notice that somebody is negatively affected by this then it’s important not to judge. Instead you get together and look for solutions.
- You should always want to be in control. Certain things happen in life. Take a step back for a moment and tell yourself who you want to be, and act upon it. In the past I never knew how important I was. The fact that you were born means that you are extremely important. You are meant to be around. When you recognize that, nothing is going to change your identity anymore.
- When you get into a weaker position, for instance due to failure or external factors, you automatically want to be in charge again. It is a normal counter reaction to keep control, yet the worst you can do. Experience the helplessness and talk about it, hence solutions will present themselves. People will understand. However, if you rely on power, the other will be personally affected and pushed into a reacting, and not acting, position. This will affect the professional relationship. It can happen, but it’s definitely not good.



Wencke Lorber

Commercial Director at Great Place to Work

Since 2018 Wencke has been responsible for the growth of Great Place to work the Netherlands. Creating a great place to work is her mission. "Working at a great workplace, motivates people to perform better."

For Wencke everything is based around trust. "The 'importance of trust' is underestimated by many." However, according to Wencke this is the way to let your employees excel in their work.

Wencke's views for her mission began when she started to work at Discovery Channel. "After my first month they wanted to talk to me. This made me a little anxious. However, this feeling was unnecessary, because they showered me with compliments. This confused me. But I also realized how valuable it is to create a comfortable and carefree environment. This is important for your confidence, your power to innovate and for the commitment of your employees."

Wencke often compares it to being at home. Let's say you have children: would you leave them in a hostile environment? Where there's no attention for someone, no warmth, just sweets to eat and no safety fence at a steep staircase. Although employees are not kids, they still need an environment that is filled with trust.

Through giving employees the carefree feeling as if they are still kids, they will have a more positive view on life and can pay it forward. "This way of giving back results in great achievements."

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“Creating a safe haven is the base”

My vision on leadership

Good leadership is to not compare people, listen to everyone's opinions and include everyone in the decisions that need to be made. The ability to listen and objectivity are important. It's human to have a better connection with one person than the other, but a good leader finds a way to make sure it stays fair for everyone. Give people the feeling that they can always come to you. You don't have to tell me everything, but if you feel like talking, know that I'm here. Furthermore, I'm convinced that it's better for a leader to see the glass half full instead of half empty.

My goal is to let our employees feel as carefree as children. This, together with a safe environment is the base to be creative in your work. I would love for every employee to be able to experience this as it's very beneficial for your own development.

My role models

Cara Antoine (CMO of Microsoft) taught me authenticity. If I look in the mirror, I know that what I'm going to do today is 100% me. I don't get tempted to do something that doesn't suit me. I'm aware of who I am and I have the right to be me.

Indra Nooyi (former CEO of Pepsico): “All CEO's should run the company for the duration of the company, not the duration of the CEO. My success should be judged on how well my successor does, not just how well I did.”

My lessons

- The birth of my son Louis, changed me as a human being, at home as well as at work. Before this I was occupied with performing well and busy with what people thought of me. I was mainly busy with my appearance and where I stood in my career. After Louis' birth the worst thing that could happen was him getting ill.
- From this moment on I decided that I'm going to speak up at work. I always tried to stay polite, like the true Belgian in me. I was careful with what I would say because I feared losing my job. Louis' birth took away this fear and gave me peace. Opinions of others don't get to me as much anymore. I wish this for everyone, because it feels so good. Now I work much on being authentic.
- It's important to break the silence and talk about it. But you can only expect this from your colleagues if you open up yourself as well. With this you show your vulnerable side, which doesn't mean that you cry a lot at work, but if crying helps, then crying is ok.

‘To make a change, you first need to believe that you are not afraid to look at it different.’

Diversity and inclusion are current topics. What does diversity bring? What do we and the system need to do to be inclusive? These women share their views on this theme:

Wencke

Everybody contributes to innovation

“Employers: create a safe environment. Employees: take responsibility and show what you can bring to the table. If these themes stay on the agenda, then it will come alive more. But you shouldn’t do it just to do it. People from different backgrounds and with different views can contribute to innovation, which leads to better business results. Actively participate as an employee. Authenticity is leading in this, dare to be yourself and show a side of you that people don’t know yet but perhaps will contribute.”

Sharita

Diversity delivers results

“Diversity is about valuing differences amongst each other and use these to help improve each other. Apart from all the moral convictions, diversity helps an organization to become more creative and innovative. It also helps to maximize the potential on the recruitment market. This eventually leads to a better commercial results.”

Ineke

Google maps on 1 location

“We work with many different nationalities in our organization. It makes for good conversations. Did you for example know that in Sweden you can’t wear red to a wedding, as this means you’ve had a romantic relationship with the groom? I see that there is less diversity in other departments, which makes me think that they miss out on so much. Young, old, male, female, different backgrounds: through this diversity I experience more growth, get new insights and I have great conversations. And sometimes also fantastic holiday stories. Every day feels as I’m in a new holiday destination. My advice for other organizations is to broaden your horizon, look at what you already have in-house and throw out the biases. Hire someone who has a different look at the world.”

Mirjam

It starts with awareness

“Diversity is an invitation to a party and inclusion is that you can join the dancing. Inclusion is being taken seriously. We followed an inclusiveness workshop with the management team. It starts with awareness. It’s in the small things, such as not using a Dutch name when it’s hard to pronounce someone’s name. I find it important that everyone gets the same chances. Do we need to change our hiring policy? Or if we notice that some people feel comfortable around me but not around men, what is causing this? Are we too soft or too scared to give an honest judgement? Or are we too hard and don’t see the valuable insights? These are questions we need to discuss with each other.”

Jayani

A question of quality?

“Change comes from personal leadership, context and the system, then comes culture. People often think that a change in culture is necessary. Culture is nothing else than arrangements that you’ve made with one another. If it would be this easy then you can change the arrangements and do it completely different tomorrow. It’s in systems and roles. Just as a family system: when you go home, you feel like child again. And each time when you leave you think this is not what I wanted, but it happened again. Organizations also have systems, that the male culture is still there is because the role of male aspects still exist. Systems need to change.

The theme quality through diversity is an interesting one. Look at our government: there’s not one single person of color in the current ruling government. Does this mean that a selection has been made on the base of quality? And that nobody was better than a white person?

We need to tell each other the truth: we couldn’t find them so we weren’t able to judge if they were good enough. You need to actively look and want to grant it to someone. If you don’t want me to sit at the table, then I can work as hard as I want, but I will never make it. Yes, a quota is a privilege that we get as women. But if someone is born a white male is a privilege. Doors open without you having to work for it. Then others should also get the privilege of not having to do something, except doing their job really well?”

About female leadership: visibility, sisterhood & systems

The number of women in high positions is low in the Netherlands. And if there are women in high positions then they are often not visible. We asked these women about leadership, visibility, “sisterhood” and the women’s quota.

Sharita

A kick in the butt

“Having female role models is important. I’ve always been surrounded by a lot of men. This didn’t change when I chose to work in sales. This industry is mainly male dominated. And if the group (in this case women) is less than 30%, you will unintentionally adjust to the majority. I had to pay attention to stay true to myself and not change my female traits.

When I was nominated for the Women in Sales awards, I hesitated to take part. My manager really had to give me a kick in the butt and helped me see the bigger picture. “If you find diversity important then put your money where your mouth is and take the stage. It’s not just about winning.” I needed that kick in the butt, and now I take the stage wherever I can to expand my impact on diversity.”

Wencke

Don’t forget to use your feminine qualities

“I think Dutch women need to take responsibility more. The Dutch woman is ok with settling. There’s nothing wrong with that, but then it’s an ‘issue’ that “us, women” are being left out. It’s totally fine if you want to be a stay-at-home mom, but if you want a career, you need to work for it.

I’d like to let the new generation know: you can be everything you want to be and you don’t need to conform to typical masculine behavior to get there. Women should not forget to use their female qualities. And don’t change towards more masculine traits when you are in a certain position. Then they become bitches. In general women are better at listening and have less of an ego than men. Leadership comes from their intuition instead of their ego. Furthermore, a women’s ego doesn’t get hurt that easily. Simply because they are not as self-centered. Perhaps that’s why women can be better negotiators. It’s not about who wins, but how we can both benefit.”

Jayani**Changing the system all at once**

“Getting somewhere is in part initiated by yourself, depends on luck and needs to be awarded by others. I can get the best out of myself, be visible yet that still is not sufficient. The system should also allow me something. If we as humans would have been able to do it on our own, we would already have succeeded. It is not about the hard work when something does not work out. It depends on collective factors, as well as our unconscious bias. For that reason, I consider it important to install a women quota at once in order to change the system. An example is a long-term study by the VU (free university of Amsterdam) on female circumcision in villages. Information can be provided, tell people how to change, say that we all want to change. However, change only happens when a 55% majority in the village is against female circumcision, only then will it all change to 100%. Thus, you need numbers in order turn everything around at once.”

Miriam**Everybody needs a stepping stone**

“I’m aware that I’ve always been privileged, with a good stepping stone and am assertive, through which I had a great career. I’m also aware that this is not the same for all women. This is a problem for which we can find a solution through connecting with each other. We often see that white men feel threatened: “women are being favored”. But as long as it’s 75/25 and the policy is to get from 25 to 30 then it’s not suddenly 100% women. There has to be room for everyone. Create the awareness that people from a different background are just as good. It’s about inviting them to participate.”

Nancy**Blind auditions**

“During the ‘70s orchestras in New York wanted more women. This never worked out, only men were selected. For that reason, they started with ‘blind auditions’. From that moment onwards it was only about the music, resulting in more female hiring.

The female quota is some sort of a blind audition. It helps to eliminate the gender bias. Naturally a person selects similar individuals with who they have most in common. The quota helps us to search in another way and forces us to look at it from a different perspective. It’s not only the responsibility of women. Companies and HR in particular, must work on their own unconscious bias.”



Make yourself visible

Nancy Poleon, owner of BrandedU, personal mission is to help women reach the top of their fields. Up until she was 37, Nancy worked in the music industry. Personal branding is what most artists need to stand out. There are thousands of singers and hip-hop-artists: how do you get to the top and how do you stay successful? Personal branding is the way to get there.

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In 2010, Nancy was voted Dutch music manager of the year. After which she was regularly invited to events where she saw women who were doing a good job on the podium yet noticing that some women sometimes did not know how to get there. This was the trigger to utilize her experience of branding of music artists to creating tools for Dutch women to become more visible from their own authenticity.

Another reason was the observation of a big misbalance at the top. For a long period, male leadership has been the status quo. What do we tell young women who are searching for a role model? Nancy's personal mission therefore is to help more women to the top.

The 4 things most successful women do

"I started BrandedU because from experience I had seen that women in business face the same challenges and opportunities as men, but they don't have the networks, the role models and mindset. My goal is to get more women to meet each other, learn from lessons learned and most importantly I think it is important to make role models visible to draw inspiration from so women can think of themselves as leaders.

When you look at successful career women you see that most of them do 4 things:

- Are part of a business network
- Follow training and coaching programs
- Strategically use advisors and mentors
- Have a clearly defined personal brand and are visible"

Personal branding

“With BrandedU we focus on increasing the visibility of women because this is an important factor when it comes to career building and personal branding is the tool that helps us with that. Show what makes you relevant. A strong personal brand will help to accomplish career goals faster. However, do it in an authentic way, avoid getting a burn-out because you are working too hard. Start with questions like: What do I want? What are my limiting beliefs? What are my core values? Who is in my network and do I need a new network?”

Sisterhood & Role models

“A mindset that I am cultivating is that of sisterhood, as a way for more women to move forward in today’s world. We need more women to lift each other up and pay it forward to other women coming after them. It’s really about the Pipeline. Female role models are the drivers of success when it comes to the talent pipeline. More women leaders can make a big difference by using their personal brands to empower the next generation. I firmly believe that you can’t be what you can’t see like Marian Bright Edelman once said, and that is why I love to highlight the women who are forging the way for other talented female leaders. Because success leaves clues. Meaning, as women rise to the top, they leave behind habits, lessons learned and example behaviors that we can model.

So, we need to be hearing more stories from real women. And hopefully other women are not only inspired but also ready to transform their new insights into action. Without other women to look up to, many young women are self-selecting themselves out of a leadership career path before they even really give it a chance. I also believe that we need more role models that are similar to us (in background and experience) so we can imagine the path they took to get where they are. Yes, heroines like Oprah and Michelle are great, but our role models need to be closer to who we are. Role models play an essential role in shaping our goals and ambitions, there are so many studies that show how important this is.”

In 2013, a study by The Glass Hammer and Accenture found that: “The vast majority (83.3 percent) of women in tech who said they wanted a C-Suite job also said they had a role model.

What everybody can learn



BRANDED / U.

1. Leadership starts with you

Get to know yourself. What do you want and what do you stand for?

2. Oprah Winfrey attitude: “You teach others how to treat you”

Be yourself, yet be aware of the fact that certain actions can leave an impression.

3. Pippi Long stocking attitude “I never did it before, so I think I can do it.”

Just do it! What is the worst thing that can happen?

4. Sisterhood

Help each other instead of battling each other. Broaden your network, particularly outside your comfort zone.

5. Stay aware of your own unconscious biases

Be open, dare to change your point of view, and increase your empathy.

6. Make yourself visible

Your story matters!

7. Be a role model

A small comment or action can already make a sizable difference in somebody's life.

The mission of Great Place to Work is that organizations utilize everybody's potential by trust, leadership and meaningful values. This increases the innovation power consequently leading to growth.

The mission of BrandedU is to bring women to the top of their fields by helping them develop their personal brand.