

Remarks by Shelly Lazarus  
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**Topic Points:**

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Thank you for that wonderful introduction. I am delighted to be here with you today, and honored that you would ask me to share some of my thoughts on leadership.

This is a very tough subject. Leadership is a very broad and very ephemeral issue. It's not just about how well you do can do the job, it's the way in which you do it.

We have had long debates during a meeting of the Board of Columbia's Business School about whether the school should be offering courses in leadership – Can it be taught? Is it innate or can it be acquired. Is it merely the sum total of everything the school teaches or is it its own subject? The debate rages.

We have only to look at the latest headlines to know that quality of leadership is now a national obsession in the corporate world.

We've seen those in leadership positions, people with presumed great technical

skills, demonstrate the worst kind of leadership – from the merely careless to the fully criminal.

We read of leaders who were quote “out of the loop.” They blame underlings for actions on their watch. How can they have claimed the perks of leadership without the responsibility?

But, I don’t want to talk today about greed and ambition gone awry. (You can get enough of that with the morning paper.) Anyway, in these cases the lessons are all there to be learned – if only in reverse.

The real reason I don’t want to talk about these cases is because I don’t think they are at the heart of leadership. The truth is, leadership doesn’t start in the C-Suite. Leadership is not the just the purview of CEOs. Leadership doesn’t just happen at the top. It can happen at almost every level, in every organization, everyday. It starts right where you are now.

Every time there is interaction in your business life, every time there is collaboration, every time there is team building and consensus is required, you need leadership. Every time you have to make a decision that materially affects the organization, anytime you don’t act alone, you have the chance to act as a leader.

My hope here today is that I give you some perspective, a few fresh ideas, maybe even some inspiration on how to be what I call “Everyday Leaders.” Taking the notion of leadership out of the corner suite and into your career.

Here are some of what I consider to be the essential requirements for “Everyday Leadership” A few tips from “the front.”

The first I’d offer is a bit counter-intuitive – STRENGTHEN YOUR STRENGTHS, I’d say to you before anything else.

For you to demonstrate leadership, it is very important to know exactly what your contribution is – what it is the company values you for – and then get better at it. This is actually counter to human nature. (Have you ever noticed how people behave in performance reviews? They race through the strengths, and then spend hours discussing how they can improve in those areas where they’re weaker. I guess it’s the search for the perfect person.(But it’s a bad strategy for a leader.)

I don’t think being sort of good at a lot of things is nearly as good as being the best at a few. Have you ever noticed that people whose contributions are indisputable (even though they might have flaws) are the same people who tend to be highly regarded and influential, who are viewed as leaders? That is not by chance.

And here's the little secret all the best leaders know ... As you climb up the ladder, you can always hire your weaknesses!

Being indispensable at something is a big asset. I don't know any real leaders who aren't. So focus on what you do really well (it's probably what you like to do most anyway!)

Now for my next point I'd like to tell you a true story about two high school students taking a pottery art class. Well, the art of pottery has a lot of technical craftsmanship to it; you have to work the clay just right, spend time prepping it, making sure to get all the air holes out.

One of the two students was very good at following the directions, and worked hard to make the clay perfect, and then she made these very neat and tidy pots. The other one jumped into the clay and made fantastical objects, tea pots with wild looking lids, jars that tilted and curved at all kinds of weird and wonderful angles. Really imaginative stuff. But, unfortunately, they had a tendency to blow up in the kiln. Not surprising, the one with the boring pots got an A while the one with the ideas got a C. But here's the thing: you need both these people in any organization. And in my experience, companies have too many A's and not enough C's.

Which brings me to my next point: that...

#### ORDER IS OVERRATED

In every organization there is a need for creativity, for fresh ideas, and new ways of thinking. But I can tell you as someone who comes from a business that lives and dies by its creative product – you will not find lively innovation where there is a lot of structure, hierarchy, formality, rigidity. Where there is too much order there will be too little inventive thinking. Where there is too much discipline there will be too little divine inspiration. Where order is overly regarded and rewarded, art will stagnate.

The best leaders are those that know that part of their job is to foment creativity, encourage it, keep things stirred up, open-ended, exciting and fun. So what if you have to tolerate a few broken pots now and then? The messiness is worth it. You'll always be able to find people who can do the neat and boring work, it's finding people with the fantastic ideas that lift the whole enterprise. You must not only find them, you must find a place for them in your organization. This is hard work. They are not always the easiest people. But in my experience, it's almost always worth it.

While we're on the subject of creativity,

**YOU MUST UNDERSTAND THE ROLE COMMUNICATION PLAYS IN LEADERSHIP –**  
because it's a key role.

For you to lead, there must be those who will follow you – those who believe in you, trust you, and are inspired by you.

To inspire; you must communicate. Communication is not a subset of leadership; it is at the heart of leadership. It is not by chance that some of the world's greatest leaders were known as great communicators – Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, FDR, Martin Luther King come to mind.

But before you think I am adding speechwriter to your to do list, just consider the amount of time you already spend communicating with your peers, your superiors and your subordinates. Hours and hours of the day.

What is the quality of this communication? Is it candid? Is it helpful up and down the ladder? Is it working hard? Is it effective? Is it inspirational? Every communication, whether it's a presentation or a discussion in a conference room, or even an e-mail, is a chance to communicate effectively, clearly a chance to build credibility, trust; an opportunity to inspire –in effect, to be a leader.

If you understand your role as a communicator, then the next two points become obvious corollaries of each other:

1. SUCCESS DOES NOT HAPPEN IN A VACUUM AND?
2. LEADERSHIP IS NOT A SOLO ACT.

Let's take the first one. Nobody gets to a successful position running the race alone. It's astonishing to me that I still run across people who consider themselves on the "fast track," but think that their own smarts will be enough to see them right up the ladder. Nobody gets to the top of the corporate ladder without the help of others on the rungs above and below.

I speak from some experience. There are 10,000 people behind me at Ogilvy & Mather, and despite the media fixation on the CEOs at the top, I know that I am powerless without the spectacular people with whom I work. I try to never forget this, to never take it for granted.

So leadership is all about partnerships. I always say, "Give me ten terrific people and together we can accomplish anything."

Your challenge is to find the partners you can succeed with. Find ways to motivate them. Find ways to build a team. This is a very personal and idiosyncratic endeavor – because team building is as unique as the individual – But it has to start with individual commitment. You have to believe it's important. You have to want to do it.

I have experienced an enormous amount of team effort in my career at Ogilvy and with my clients over the years. But I assure you that it was not because it was mandated by Human Resources. It was just a matter of sharing; sharing a mission, sharing credit, and sharing enthusiasm for a job well done. This cannot be faked. If it's not genuine, you will be found out.

I would suggest to you that the spirit of partnership and mutual endeavor is something you must initiate at whatever level you're at – even if you're just starting your career.

Now I don't mean being the loudest at the meeting, or the pushiest. It's about seeing what needs to get done, and finding ways to help everyone do it. You don't have to have all the answers yourself. You don't always have to be right. Leadership is seeing what is right and making it happen. And knowing, really believing that anyone's success is every one's success. I love Dwight Eisenhower's definition of leadership. Leadership is getting someone else to do what you want to get done because he wants to do it.

This lesson is greatly aided if you will remember another leadership axiom I know to be true: ALWAYS TRY TO FOCUS ON THE OUTCOME, NOT THE PROCESS.

There are too many people who mistake activity for action. They buzz, they make lots of noise, move things around, check-off lists but never seem to move the ball down the field, when that's really the whole point of the game. All the busy-ness masks results (or the lack of them!)

You must be accountable for results. That's leadership. It's not about how much time you spend in the office, but about how much you achieve.

Another thing I have learned:

YOU MUST SEEK OUT DIVERSITY.

I'm not talking about the diversity that's about laws and quotas and being politically correct. What I mean is embracing different styles, different backgrounds, different ways of looking at things. Whether it's in hiring a new person or building a team, don't limit yourself to look-alikes.

I hate walking into a room where everyone looks the same, talks the same, thinks the same. I think it's crazy to be afraid of people who don't look like you or think like you. Don't be afraid of them; hire them!

David Ogilvy, who founded Ogilvy & Mather back in 1948, and who was as much a student of management ideas as advertising, once said, "If each of us hires people

who are smaller than we are, we shall become a company of dwarfs. But if each of us hires people who are bigger than we are, we shall become a company of giants."

I believe in meritocracy. I believe that talent, hard work and creativity will always and should always win out over gender, quotas and bias. When it comes to an idea, I don't care who has it or where it comes from, however, high or low. Whether it's male or female. It's irrelevant. Ideas are the great leveler so: Here's another leadership thought: IF YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE AN IDEA, MAKE IT A BIG ONE.

This is so true in my business, but don't limit the need for great ideas to advertising. The need for great ideas exists in every kind of job, in every kind of business. The key is to ask yourself, Can this idea be bigger? Can it be better? Can it be bolder? What more can we do? Does this idea yet capture the imagination of anyone? Or everyone?

Find ways to answer those questions that begin with the words "What if?" or "What would it take?" These are questions that stir the blood and the imagination – Ask them, and you'll be amazed at the freshness of the thinking! These are the questions leaders ask.

Here's another thing: You must – EMBRACE RISK!

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Always do what you're afraid to do." It's a terrific line, isn't it? But, as much as I love it, I've also found that people tend to talk about risk in binary terms: You either take it or you don't.

I think there's another way to look at it. Risk is always with us – Therefore, you always have to take it. But it doesn't always have to be a life-or-death, winner-take-all decision.

The way I've found to prepare for risk, to make the best decisions, is to always keep experimenting.

Now we certainly all know people who are not comfortable with experimentation. I think they're afraid of failing. (I heard a brilliant speech by John Cleese: He said, "In organizations where the first priority is `not to fail? (you know those organizations where the watch words are Whatever you do, don't make a mistake...just don't screw it up) there will never be innovation because innovation, by its very nature, is all about trying something that has never been tried before.")

To achieve true innovation, organizations must make it OK to fail, comfortable to fail, particularly when the initiative was brave and unprecedented.

Personally, I'm not happy unless I have a lot of pots on the stove – Things I'm trying out. Three quarters of them may be wrong (courage!), but a quarter of them may be

right. And if you don't have four brewing at all times, you won't have your next program, your next chapter, your next success.

So I encourage those small, quiet experiments that you have percolating off in the corners. All of a sudden, you look over one day and realize, "Hey, that one sort of works!" And you're off!

I confess that I may have had an advantage here because in my career you learn the value of test marketing early on. You'd be surprised what you can learn from folks in, say, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

So when it comes to risk, I like to keep a sense of perspective. Let's try not to bet the farm. Let's try not to throw caution to the wind when the outcome is irreversible, but let's do keep experimenting?

And please don't forget the "P" word – PASSION.

I'm thoroughly convinced that you will find one consistent attribute in all great leaders. Passion. Passionate beliefs, passionate communication, passionate action, passionate commitment and follow through.

Look around you. Who are the people you really admire, the people who inspire you? Who is on your list of great leaders? I'm willing to bet they are people who are passionate about what they do.

Unfortunately, words like 'exhilaration,' 'joy,' 'love,' and 'passion' are not words usually applied to business. But not only can words like these be part of the business world, I believe they are the key elements of success, and essential to true leadership.

Because, in the end, the most important thing I have to suggest to you today is to try to: DO SOMETHING YOU LOVE.

I know this is easier said than done. I know many people need to make a living and perhaps wish they had the perfect job. But I'm here to tell you that NO JOB is perfect. If you find things about your work that you love, it will make your work and your life so much better.

When expectant mothers ask me how to achieve that ever-elusive balance between work and family, I tell them to make sure you love your job because, I promise you, you will definitely love your children.

I think finding real fulfillment and joy in your job is the ultimate challenge, and it's the secret to leadership. If you truly believe you can't find it in the place you are today, then you need to find it somewhere else; but you must find it.

I consider myself one of the lucky people to have spent my career doing work I love. I love the art and science of marketing and advertising. I love the people. I love ideas. I love seeing results. I even still love the first moment I see advertising I worked on TV or in a magazine. That joy is what continues to get me up everyday and off to the office. I suppose if you put the question to me personally, it is the joy in my work that gives me the stamina, the vision and the inspiration I need as a leader.

Now, I started out today with the question of whether Academia can teach leadership? I don't know the answer to that, but I will say that I don't think corporations can teach leadership.

I think what corporations can do is provide an environment in which leaders can emerge, where leadership experiences can happen, (and truth is there are a great many more opportunities today for that at every level.) But at the end of the day, I would suggest to you that leadership is an individual pursuit.

And what that individual route demands is – THE COURAGE TO BE YOURSELF.

Being a leader – adding value to an organization – is all about being yourself. There is no blueprint to follow. Think about it; the very nature of being a leader is that you are not a follower.

Being yourself sounds great, but I know you know it takes courage and self-confidence.

That's not easy, but who said leadership was? Leaders are courageous and they are self-confident. They speak up. They ask hard questions. They say "no." They don't just go with the flow. They sit at the table. They are not necessarily polite (although there is always a "nice way" to say anything, I find.) They are not afraid to say what they think and do what they think is right, even when it goes counter to conventional thinking or "orders" received from management. Not easy – but definitely in your control.

So in closing, all I can do is to urge you to take the challenge on, the challenge of leadership. Go do whatever it takes to get yourself in a position where you love what you do, where you care about what you do, where you want to inspire others, build great things, do great deeds. Be a leader. Go do it, Deloitte, the world, needs you to. And I promise you that, on the way, you'll find balance, you'll have fun, you'll find fulfillment. Is there anything more someone could offer you?

Thank you very much for listening this afternoon!