

Whether you are a tree hugger or you are not, it is difficult to muster up any level of professional respect, for a woman adorned with the title Senior Manager, who doesn't engage in team, refuses to be involved in the performance review process, but has little difficulty asking questions like "*could someone at your level afford to get their hair done every week?*". Someone who sporadically declares that the job you do is "*mind numbingly boring*". Where do you look for guidance and mentorship, when all that is at your disposal is a director who needs to promote her own self-importance by revealing little bits of information, such as, the only reason she promoted someone, was to prevent another member of the team feeling too superior. Inspiring leaders and managers? Obviously not. What was the criteria for promotion? Who supported the promotion? Look up the chain and you find an individual who has been caught taking morning naps in his car in the business car park and not revered for his productivity.

Contracting most of my working life, though not everyone's idea of sound decision making, has afforded me the opportunity to work with and observe various types and styles of management and leadership. Initially, I simply reacted internally. I wondered how some people even held positions of responsibility. I wondered how personality types in both management and leadership positions were so incredibly diverse, failing to identify core similarities. One position I left within a couple hours, simply because I had no patience in being spoken to monosyllabically. I have been offered two managerial positions, both of which I declined, after serious consideration. The strongest deciding factor was the analysis of my own management style. Specifically; 1. Preference towards self-motivated individuals and would have difficulty managing attention seekers. 2. Would disapprove of employees that place too much emphasis on relaxation and having a good time – would promote a more work focused atmosphere. 3. Would encourage staff to consider moral and ethical aspects of business decisions and promote a culture of integrity and fair play. It was a good baseline for me to begin being more critical in my observations. Not comparing, but a measuring starting point. A starting point which began with my own personal experiences.

I had the pleasure, and it was a pleasure, of working with the now infamous Angela Kerins, ex-CEO of the Rehab Group. For those, unaware of her trial by public opinion, the management of the Rehab Group came under scrutiny and Angela was forced to make public her salary (€250,000). Angela knew how to use a Personal Assistant. I can assure

you, an absolute rarity in Irish culture. Where this fact endeared me to her, it didn't qualify her as a good leader, but definitely a good manager, generically speaking. I found her to be funny, honest and open. She worked harder than most people I had observed, a job made more difficult, because she was surrounded by a dominant male environment who I observed described themselves as 'old school', but I would translate as controlling archaism. When the contract ended, another one, unrelated to my previous position arose. It was an opportunity to work with Angela in a different capacity, and that was the attraction. I realised I was learning from her. I identified that her honesty relaxed me and in turn the space existed for me to be myself, bringing my personal stamp. I wasn't in a rush to leave the building at 5pm. During the interview, Angela asked me a question *'if money was no object, what would you be doing right this very minute?'*. I didn't need to think. I said *'writing, I would be writing'*. I didn't win the position. Angela was honest with her reasons. *'You are a gem to work with Gormla, but I needed someone who had a passion for rehabilitation'*. I asked, *'if I didn't say writing?'*. Her parting advise to me *'don't change to fit in Gormla, the truer you are to yourself, the closer you will get to who you need to be and the more benefit you will be'*. I left. I placed her in my mental box of good managers.

Years later, this contract would teach me a great deal more. It would teach me that Machiavellianism was embedded, not only in politics, but business also. That insipidity is not gender selective. Before these lessons arrived at my doorstep, I had to experience a contract that would expose me to the power and toxicity of the clandestine relationship between business and politics, showing me the difference between business acumen and leadership. I witnessed fraud, arrogant financial wastage, and the profound lack of integrity in those society deemed and still deem to be beyond reproach. The day did arrive when I could no longer be a party to it. I advised them of my departure, prior to the agreed end of the contract. I was threatened that if I ever repeated what I had seen or heard, I would find it difficult to find another position in Ireland. I left. I placed them in my mental box of unscrupulous business men and politicians.

Then, I had the privilege of working for a software company. Personal Assistant to the Director of Finance and Administration for all the European subsidiaries. This contract, takes top billing. Firstly, when I joined the team, it was in its infancy. Its entrepreneurial stage, with the benefit of backing from the mothership in California. Brian had a gift that I

have only seen in one other business person. He not only recognised the various gifts of the individuals he had hired, but he acknowledged them publically at weekly meetings. The benefit was, each of us learned what our best traits were, the go-to people for specific information or tasks that needed to be completed. This practise achieved, for me, two very important goals. It was an effective time-management tool and it cemented a sense of team. Productivity increased, noticeably. In turn, a strong loyalty emerged. A self-determined need by each team member to assist Brian achieve his goals, locally and internationally. He encouraged, even demanded professional development. He was the first person ever, to recognise my need for challenge. So, as I proved myself, he added responsibility. Yes, like ever mortal, he had his faults, but he was the closest to text book management and leadership I had encountered. I left. I put him in my mental box of inspiring leaders.

When I speak of types, I refer to business, industry, social, political, local and global. I have attempted to find commonality amongst them. It is difficult. From the basics, the difference between men and women, to specific gender styles, to knowing that those with excellent business acumen don't always convert to excellent leaders.

It has been my experience in the business world that, men are far better at networking and that women are far more hierarchical. There are those that would argue that there have not been enough women in positions of management for me to make such observations, but all the same, I have done so. Here are, what I believe to be, demonstrable examples. In one business, one of the women, who held high office, created a 'Women's Network'. During the same period, a group of male managers and directors set up a forum to explore the business of Carbon Trading. I had an interest in both. I telephoned the woman in question and asked when the inaugural meeting was to be held as I was interested in joining the group. The response "*thank you for your interest Gormla, but we are looking for professional women, women of influence*". I contacted the all-male forum, who were delighted to have numbers and interest. Years later, the Women's Group opened its doors to 'non-professional' women, interestingly enough, most given the stereo-typical tasks that their male counterparts would have assigned them by expectation. This behaviour threw up a few questions for me; a) is it cultural? b) is it due to the lack of vision or originality and therefore the drive to emulate the male? c) is it sector specific? or d) has the conduct of female mortals in the corporate setting necessitated obstructiveness?

Spanning thirty years, I have only observed two women openly mentor or facilitate another woman in attaining a top level position. All the women who reached management or leadership roles were mentored, managed or supported by a male. More questions; a) is it because there are more men in the corporate world and therefore they are more influential? b) is it because, the women (with whom I have spoken) have vocalised that they did not want to be seen as feminists? c) is it biology?

Other gender specific behaviours that were stand-out noticeable (so much so it became observational entertainment for me) were; (excluding women with whom I had developed a strong professional connection) in sending out emails requiring a response, all men were likely to respond, but on average, only two out of every five women would. In organisations where I was present during promotions and promotion announcements, I would mentally tally who had been promoted based on their behaviours prior to the promotions being made public. Outstandingly, men displayed a higher level of confidence in their interactions, women became more guarded and stand-offish. Women had high levels of risk aversion in all areas of the work environment than their male counter-parts. A small, random example. A fund-raising committee decides on abseiling down the side of a building. A male in a position of manager and higher would be more likely to utilise his influence to make it happen. A woman would, in my personal experience, use her influence over the safe and mundane, such as make-up nights. Men are more responsive to 'out of the norm' thinking than women, above mortal status in the working environment. All women will view another woman, irrespective of level, who is slightly different or non-conformist in attitude with great caution and will sometimes be blatantly obstructive. Men utilise the behaviour as a means to new thinking and new ideas.

The styles of management are numerous. The reluctant leader. This leader tends to be an introvert. The RL seems to be successful based on superb observation, does not lean towards gender, but towards merit. Allows those they manage space to ascertain what the issues are and create solutions, having an in-built ability to interject only where absolutely necessary. And utilise mirroring as an effective listening tool. The insipid leader. Their need to be liked overrides professional objectivity. Though often likeable, one of the most difficult to trust, because of their need not to upset people they are close to. The inspirational leader. This leader is quietly confident, not influenced by what others think of them. The IL is very good at identifying and utilising the skillsets of those around them. The

driven leader. This leader started their working life with a specific plan, a vision. They are exceptionally good at building teams that, not only support them, but are fiercely loyal. People who have a reasonable level of confidence in their ability, a confidence that grows under the DL. DL's have no patience for whiners, can't doers or slackers. They give 150% and have no comprehension why everyone else does not. Exceptionally hard task masters and unapologetic. Yes, they are my favourite leaders and managers. I was extremely lucky to have worked with one, and observe another. Female and male.

But, just because they are my favourite, does not make their core similarities a definition of good management and leadership. It does however, tell me, that the responsiveness and production of the workforce is, without any question strongly influenced by style. Did these leaders reach the top because they stand above mere mortals? Are they more intelligent? More capable? A better knowledge of the business? Divine business acumen?

The Harvard Business Review, placed Lars Sorensen of Novo Nordisk at the top of its ranking for best-performing CEO. When he was asked his secret – his response was 'luck'. If it is based on only luck or ability, then why are the top suites laden with white men? On what basis has it been decided that all other mortals do not have that ability? Is it really purely white patriarchal tradition? Are women instruments in their own inability to break-through the glass ceiling? If they are, how are they owning that? What are they doing to address it? One woman interviewed in RTE stated "*when we have the numbers in situ, we can have the meritocracy conversation*". But, for me, as woman, I find tokenism patronising. My logic dictates that women begin analysing their own business behaviours, because, women do behave noticeable different than their male counter-parts. Measuring themselves against the male, is indicative of a lack of confidence, originality, and quite frankly, vision. They need to hold their male-counterparts accountable with more fearlessness. An example. On the 8th March 2015, International Women's Day, a business Tweeted '*we have a five year plan of what we are going to do for women in business*'. My reading of that statement is one of passive-aggressive. We, the men, will decide how you progress in our business. You need us to go forward. Yet, I did not hear one objection or one commentary. That language is subliminal corrosive.

If women are to attain equality and equal representation in the world of business, they must look at their own conduct and attitudes, and not under-value the obstructiveness of them. It was categorically transparent that the Financial Regulator, Patrick Neary was professionally dismal. Upon his resignation, he received a bumper settlement and a healthy pension of €120,000 pa. Comments, by both men and women ranged from *'well, that's typical'*, *'plonker'* and *'at least he is gone' 'we have learned good lessons'*. When Angela Kerins came under scrutiny, women were particularly vicious in their condemnation of her. She was witch hunted by the Oireachtas committee – taking the high moral ground on the spending of public monies. I do not accept women continually pointing the finger at patriarchy. We are also culpable.

Then, there are those who attain positions of great influence, but are not leaders. They are simply defaulted leaders. Those who have accumulated phenomenal wealth. Two very well-known businessmen, I hasten to add, over copious glasses of wine, told me; *"businesses do not become successful because they played by the rules, they are successful because they learned how to break them, and found people who supported that breakage"*.

So, where does that leave mere mortals, who, at every turn, are held accountable by law and white men of privilege?

When the Irish Water debacle came to the fore, I knew that public demonstration was a futile action to initiate change. (I must be honest and declare myself. I am someone who thinks that clean water to drink and bathe in is a privilege, one that I am willing to pay for). I did however, silently object to the manner in which the company was formed and set up. As I read the papers and watched the news, the one thing that interested me was how the objections were managed. Sloppy and what seemed to me an arrogant *'flipping off'* of the public by both Irish Water and the Irish Government. Surprised? No. Going on experience, that deal was verbally agreed at least eighteen months before it came into the public arena. So, I made a bet with myself. A bet, because my observation over a thirty year period has exposed to me that, the behaviour of any business owner or leader is directly reflected in the employees of that business and how the business itself is managed. My mental bet was, when Irish Water started collecting monies, they would be sloppy about it. The action of cheap. In April 2015, I telephoned Irish Water to give them my details. It took about twenty

minutes. They advised they would be posting the bill. In June 2015, I received a letter, with a threatening tone, that if I did not contact them and give my details, there may be consequences. Again, I telephoned them, and repeated my details, and paid the bill by credit card, because I had not received the bill. Another twenty minutes. In July 2015, I received a telephone call from them to confirm my address. It was incorrect, I became irate. Another twenty minutes. In October 2015, I received another phone call to confirm my address. It was incorrect. I asked to speak to the individual who managed the database. She laughed. Inspiring leadership or management? Obviously not. Disrespect for the mere mortals? Absolutely. Look up the chain.

What I find entertaining now, with regards Irish Water, is the new discussion by various members of political parties, about the abolishment of such charges if they are elected into power. Denis O'Brien did not walk away from the table without a signed agreement. Breach the contract, the Irish tax payer will pay for it one way or another. The Irish public would have better served themselves in setting up a Go Fund Me account to take legal action against the Government challenging the awarding of the tender in the first instance.

But, I digress. I began my discussion attempting to ascertain what qualities make a good leader, a good manager. It is difficult to pinpoint, simply because, the diversity of personality will be impacted by differing styles. So, it is reasonable to look at qualities that can be universally applicable;

Persistence is a quality necessary for success. It does not however, convert to good management. Introspection leads to a higher level of empathy. Empathetic leaders are good and for the most part, inspiring. Listening is crucial to good management and leadership. Confidence in utilising intuition, lends to attracting like-minded team members, increasing productivity. An entrepreneurial mind-set, an ability to take risks. An excellent leader is one who incites a sense of value in all those they lead. An inspirational leader creates the sense that '*we are all in this together*'. The two qualities, irrespective of gender, style or industry they all have, are passion and purpose.