

Women at the Top Leadership Research

It is always interesting to be curious about the ripple effect of role models, inspiring teachers, trail blazers bravery. How are those doors opened, glass ceilings dissolved, seemingly insurmountable cliffs scaled, limitations challenged, assumptions overturned? Is it simply one courageous or foolhardy person or a combination of many making those ripples spread way beyond what might be thought possible?

With BWB – Bristol Women in Business now in its 4th successful year connecting women both from corporates and large businesses in the city the opportunity to input another dimension became clear. Inspirational women at the top by sharing their story have influenced, intrigued and encouraged the realisation that we are all role models, inspiring teachers, brave trailblazers.

As a result my inspiration has been to invite women at the top to share their thoughts regarding leadership and create this series of interviews. I began with five questions and as the first interview was coming to a close two more questions were determined to be asked – What question would you like to have been asked? And then to ask the interviewee to answer it which was fun. And the other question was ... who would you like to be interviewed or suggest that I interview?

Katharine Finn - Regional Leader, PwC West and Wales; Assurance Partner

third in the series - interviewed on 15 March 2017 by Halina Jaroszewska

You have no doubt inspired a lot of aspiring leaders – from where (or from whom) do you draw your inspiration?

I have drawn inspiration from a combination of experiences and people at different times rather than solely one person or instance. My role models have not just been women though it is important for women to see other women in leadership or important roles so that they can see that they could be in their shoes. Early on in my career I could never imagine myself in a top job but I worked for a client where both the CFO and CEO were both female and this led me to think that I could do that job. I also had a mentor who was in a senior leadership role who shared not only her successes but also her failures. This was inspiring to me as I had previously believed it was not possible to show any sign of frailty and lack of self-confidence yet still be successful but this woman showed me that it was ok to show these feelings and still be successful. One particular point was during six weeks of coaching where my coach asked me "If you really think you want this job? Go for it". This quelled my self-doubt and inspired me to believe that I could take on a senior leadership position.

What would you say have been the biggest developments in leadership that you have witnessed in your years as a leader?

When I started in the profession 27 years ago there was a much stronger hierarchical culture throughout the workplace. I used to go to a lot of audit clients where they still had director and senior management dining rooms separate from the staff canteen. These days a senior position or title doesn't automatically command respect – quite rightly, respect has to be earned and there is now a more open, inclusive leadership across many aspects of the workplace and certainly across PwC. This is a style that I try to embrace and one where we are as open about our development areas as our strengths.

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What do you think are the most significant trends and challenges faced by leadership today?

One of the most significant challenges is how does the world of work adapt to different expectations from different generations. There's lots of evidence that organisations are facing a real challenge of discovering what millennials want from the workplace and this can be a particular challenge for an established brand. With flattened hierarchies now more prevalent in organisations this then raises the question for leaders of what their role should be within these flattened hierarchies.

What do you think today's leaders should be doing to keep moving leadership to a new level?

Leaders should be prepared to engage with change and embrace it. They must think about the impact of demands from the workforce; listen to different points of view and adapt style and position to be relevant and keep ahead.

What advice would you give to young aspiring leaders?

Firstly you should be yourself and enjoy what you do. You should take every opportunity to learn about and do different things and don't be scared to ask for what you want. If you don't tell people you want to be promoted they will happily assume that you don't. At one point I asked the question – is this going to help me get to Director?

I'm often asked questions about appearance. I remember being anxious the first time I wore trousers to work! How one looks doesn't affect your ability to do your job but attention to appearance can still be important in client interactions – at times dressing “up” or “down” depending on their culture!

What question would you like to have been asked? - Were you always clear about what you wanted to do?

I am Regional Leader of PwC West and Wales but when I left school I didn't imagine my career path would take me to this role. I don't think everyone has to have a clear idea of what they want to do and the road to your goal can have some twists and turns along the way. Sticking to one single focus is not for everyone and instead taking on different experiences and seeing where they lead can work better for some.

Who would you like to have / recommend to be interviewed?

Baroness Vadera, Chairman of Santander and Carolyn Fairburn Director General of the CBI

**To discuss how Halina Jaroszewska can help
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Halina helps fast track and aspiring leaders, also key teams, to turn uncertainty into a powerful tool for exponential growth. Her aim is to enable clients to switch surviving into thriving, take business and personal performance to the next level and maximise their potential during challenging times.