

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?

Laura Stamboulieh, Partner, Public Sector Advisory - UK Consulting, Cushman & Wakefield

fourth in the series - interviewed on 9 May 2017 by Halina Jaroszewska

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

This may sound strange, but I don't necessarily look to others for inspiration, I just do what feels right and hope that my actions and behaviours have a positive impact on people. If the question is 'what, or who, inspired me to get into property?', then I recall that I was obsessed with building Lego houses (two or three storeys with proper floors!) at a very young age and then designing housing estates at the age of 11. I'm not entirely sure why – perhaps it was because my dad was a Quantity Surveyor and he used to talk about the projects he was working on. Then, in my early teens, a family friend's daughter had gone into a property related career which was very unusual back in the early 1980's. She was a Project Manager on large construction sites in London. I quite liked the idea of doing something a bit different, especially a career that was traditionally dominated by males! I've been specialising in public sector advisory for just over 20 years now. I relish the variety of my work and supporting clients to make robust and informed decision about strategic property matters. During the years, I've developed an interest in public sector collaboration and I am spending more and more of my time bringing multi-sector partnerships together to deliver better outcomes – in a sort of mediation role. It's interesting that I have ended up in a 'consultancy' role, rather than a 'technical' surveying route. I think this combines my mum's people-skills from her career as a head teacher, with my dad's practical property expertise.

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

One of the biggest developments that I have witnessed is the need for leaders to be highly agile to cope with increased pace and complexity of the business environment. The workplace has evolved considerably since my career began with new technological advances that drive a faster rate of communication and client expectation. In addition, our clients and staff have access to information sources that provide more 'choice' and, consequently, leaders must

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be in a highly competitive state at all times to prevent 'business leakage'.

From an equality and diversity perspective, I am pleased to see more female leaders but, sadly, there are still too few in the boardroom within the property industry. I was a member of Cushman & Wakefield's equality and diversity group (now called Inspire) for a couple of years during which time I led the Gender workstream. It was clear that attracting talented women into our business in the early stages of their career is not an issue for us, but retaining them is the challenge – particularly once they enter motherhood. Moving forwards, I suspect that this may become an increasing challenge for our talented males too, as many are now sharing childcare duties and require similar levels of flexibility. This will be an issue for leaders to address moving forwards.

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

I think the retention of talented staff will become more and more of an issue for a variety of reasons. Traditionally, staff have been committed to their employer (a job for life etc), but I have noticed a big change in this, particularly in the past 5 years. Now, the younger generations appear to welcome change and want to experience new things. This makes them bolder in their decision making and prepared to put their 'careers' on hold whilst taking time out to satisfy their curiosities eg. travelling the world. Linked to this, I constantly wonder what role technology will play in the future when our youngsters (and future workforce) are just so absorbed by social media. What will they expect from their working environments? What role will 'the office' play in the future?

I also think that leaders will become more and more challenged to ensure that their business, service lines and advice is bespoke to the needs of clients and of an extremely high quality to counterbalance the commoditisation of services. As trends, such as the GIG economy kick in, society can access solutions and answers more quickly (and more cheaply) potentially putting traditional services out of business. Purple Brick is a prime example of estate agency becoming a 'virtual' service. Robots are, allegedly, being taught to 'feel' and 'think' but I think we are a long way off robots being able to give professional advice. It is therefore vital that leaders make their organisations the 'advisor of choice' and capable of interpreting outcomes and providing high quality advice, and accept that the 'process-y' elements of service can perhaps be done 'virtually'.

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

It's easy to think of leadership as just being something that occurs at the top of an organisation, but it obviously happens at all levels. Maintaining and nurturing a pipeline of leaders is vital. All too often, however, people are put in a position of 'leadership' because of their title, but not because they are skilled at being a leader. Whether you are a first-time manager or leading and managing at the top of an organisation, I think it is essential that the right leadership skills are possessed, or proactively developed by the organisation.

In maintaining the pipeline, I think that women should be given equal opportunities to men and that this will require senior leaders to highlight 'talent' and talk to them about future leadership responsibilities and the support they require – otherwise we will not get females into the board room.

Finally, I think that leaders should have the courage to stand aside and let others take the baton when it is time to do so, where this is possible. It is about having self-awareness.

What advice would you give to young aspiring leaders?

You can't be a good leader without a good team. This sometimes requires 'difficult' discussions, but if they are undertaken in a productive manner, then this will lead to positive results. Outwardly praising the successes of team members, and not taking the praise for yourself, is also important.

I would warn against 'the ego' and overtly operating a hierarchy. It may be acceptable to 'have an ego' amongst one's competitors, but having a high opinion of yourself in the company of colleagues is a turn off and does not always command respect. The hierarchical approach to leadership is not productive in my view and can also repel staff. Whilst it is important to have a 'leader', staff need to understand that, in a day to day working environment, they are equals, and the only thing differentiating them from colleagues is their experience and capability.

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I would say that leaders must be prepared to roll up their sleeves and get involved in the nitty gritty from time to time to maintain an awareness of day to day operations and issues and, most importantly, to give visibility.

I am a big fan of 'personal development' and I strongly believe that leaders must positively support this. I am a Governor of a local FE College and a Mentor. Whilst my time is constantly under pressure, I always look for new challenges. I encourage my team to work on their profile and their personal and professional development so that they are well positioned both internally, amongst colleagues and externally in the public domain.

It is important to involve your team in the development of the business plan so that everyone has ownership and can see the big picture. I believe that this avoids operating in silos.

Finally, I would share my motto: "don't fight life – it just happens" and advise aspiring leaders to "be who they are" and seek inspiration from themselves.

What question would you like to have been asked?

I guess I had anticipated a question like "**How do you hope people see you?**" in which case I would have answered: "As being extremely supportive of my colleagues, collegiate, and not 'silo'd' in my thinking. They would probably say that I am an absolute stickler for 'adding value' – and that I won't take on a piece of work if I feel the client can do it themselves. That I am very aware of our company brand (and my personal brand) and not damaging it. As such, colleagues would probably refer to me as a bit of a workaholic and passionate about delivering high quality work for clients. I think that people would say that I am not afraid to let it be known when I disagree with something and that I will push for an outcome that I strongly believe in. Finally, I would like to think that people would say that I am a good leader and mentor!

Who would you recommend me to interview and if they agree would you be able to introduce me?

Sarah Jane Watkins is the Principal of South Gloucestershire & Stroud College where I have been a Governor for 2 years. She is a remarkable woman and so highly committed to delivering the best outcomes for her learners, many of whom have some serious personal issues.

**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.