



Online Mentoring for Women

YWCA CANBERRA

Leadership

We probably all have an idea about what leadership is, and we can probably name a long list of people who we think of as leaders. But all too often, we don't consider ourselves as leaders, or recognise the skills that we already have, as leadership skills.

Leadership is often associated with people in positions of power, high-level managers, team captains, spokespeople, and so on. Leadership means so much more than this. We are all leaders, whether on the main stage or in our local environments. We all have the potential to be leaders in every aspect of our lives including in the home, community, workplace, business, our recreation space, and everywhere else we are.

Many of the skills that we already have, the skills that we have developed just by living our busy, challenging and complex lives, are leadership qualities. These are qualities which can be nurtured, further developed and applied to other areas of our lives – from our home life to issues of local, national and global importance – wherever we would like make a difference!

Women's leadership

So, what is meant by women's leadership? What is different about the leadership of women?

One of the key values of the YWCA of Canberra is women's leadership – especially the development of young women's leadership as a means to creating a better world in which reconciliation, justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom and care for the environment prevail.

We recognise that women have unique perspectives and experiences and can bring a different approach to decision-making and problem-solving. We believe that the community

benefits as a whole when women are contributing to decision-making.

Whether it's at home, in the workplace, or in the community, women's experiences, and therefore women's leadership, are different to that of men. This is particularly the case for formal leadership roles. Often women's leadership is undervalued compared to that of men – because men's leadership roles tend to be more publicly visible. For instance, under 10 per cent of Board Directors in Australia are women compared to over 90 per cent men*.

The proportion of women in senior management positions in Australia and around the world, while improving, is still low. While women are now significantly more visible within the federal government, in 2009, out of 20 Cabinet Ministers only 4 are women. Also, in Australia women's average weekly earnings are still significantly less than men's, with women earning 16% less than men.**

For women aspiring to positions of formal leadership, these statistics can be daunting. Only when women are fairly represented at decision-making levels, can decisions really reflect the experiences of women and be representative of the whole community.

Your leadership

Whether you have aspirations for Prime Minister or community volunteer, leadership is something important to give some thought to. You might like to consider...

- What does leadership mean to you?

- In what areas of your life do you see yourself as a leader?
- Would you like to develop your skills as a leader?
- Who inspires you?
- What is it about them that inspires you?
- Who are your role models?
- Who are some women you admire or find inspiring?
- What are the qualities you admire about them or find inspiring?
- Are there any women you consider poor role models, and why?

Equipping yourself for leadership

There are many ways you can equip yourself to take on leadership roles, and mentoring is a great opportunity to help you develop skills, gain confidence and become empowered to realise your own leadership potential.

There are also courses, books, websites and more! The YWCA of Canberra offers the Women Out Front leadership program every year. Women Out Front is designed to develop women's skills and confidence to take on leadership roles within their community.

It provides an opportunity for women to explore their own leadership, be inspired by the stories of other women leaders and reflect on the challenges for women in decision-making roles. The program includes Governance and Finance workshops for women, and is designed to build the capacity and confidence of women to contribute to community leadership through board and committee membership, and address the under-representation of women on boards.

For more information please visit the Women Out Front page of our website.

The value of women's leadership Some food for thought...

- What do you think women bring to leadership that is different?
- What do you bring?

Case study

Iceland's economy was hard hit in the 2008-2009 Global Financial Crisis. The country's economic model was high risk, being based almost wholly on stocks and shares. In

November 2008, Iceland's financial system completely collapsed and it required emergency funding from the International Monetary Fund as well as from a number of European countries. It has been described as being "caused by a banking and business culture that was buccaneering, reckless – and overwhelmingly male." (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/feb/22/iceland-women>)

One finance company in Iceland did survive – Audur Capital – run by two women, Halla Tomasdottir and Kristin Petursdottir. The company was founded by women with a vision to incorporate feminine values into the world of finance.

Female values

They founded Audur in 2007, and by the time they got their operating licence in May 2008, the economic crash was looming. "Yes, but we were very careful, and very risk-aware," they say. "Risk-aware, not risk-averse. Women are risk-aware, men are risk takers."

And now Halla Tomasdottir, the chairman, thinks that "six months after the crash, we're one of perhaps two [investment] companies in Iceland still alive, not accepting government assistance, and we won't need it. So we managed to do very well with the values we brought."

Being "risk-aware" is one of those values, and one reason why they are convinced that getting the male-female balance right is so important. "Women tend to bring a lot to the table. They think more long-term, they think about the team, and not only themselves. They think more about people, and they see other business opportunities than men."

There is another, crucial difference, they find: "Women are willing to ask stupid questions. We want to understand. We won't take risks we don't understand, so we ask: what is subprime? Who'll pay these loans back?"

(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/8048488.stm>)

*In 2006, women held only 8.7% of board of directorships in Australia's top 200 companies. This is only 6 out of every 200 directorships. Office for Women (2007). 07 Women in Australia. Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra.

**Office for Women (2007). 07 Women in Australia. Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra (pp. 69).