

5 Leaders, leadership

5.1 Profile of a successful BPW leader

A good BPW president is the best attractor for members. Even though “one best character” doesn’t exist, some abilities are vital for a good BPW leader.

The authentic motivation to serve women and the organization is basic. The motivation to become prestigious and powerful is human, but the members who elect a leader have responsibility to find, encourage and finally elect leaders who want to work for the organization and the members.

A leader who is working for the organization and not for her own prestige or advantage, automatically respects the organization and the members.

A true self-confidence is a basic character too. A Person with true self-confidence rest well in herself, knows what she wants, is able to perceive others and does not overrun them, communicates very clearly and feels her aggressions without acting them out. Her inner security creates a trustful and quiet working atmosphere. A truly self-confident knows her strengths and delegates tasks for which she is not very competent and appreciates all the support she gets. A leaders has to be a good team-worker and the more integration works, the better the performances.

Leaders are allowed to make mistakes. What is important, is not to blame others for one’s own mistakes.

A leadership position in BPW can be a very load task because a President cannot choose her team. She has to work with the elected Executive Board Members coming from all over the world and they are often on different pages. Being a BPW Officer or President is an excellent learning platform which empowers each person who faces the challenges.

5.2 Support for BPW Leaders

BPW Leaders in concrete difficulties should get support by a discreet hot line consultation. Countries or Clubs have to solve their challenges on their own but having a place where big concerns can be expressed without being broadcast, can calm down a situation and encourage those involved to solve the problems on their own issues.

Webinars could become a very valuable tool to present and discuss examples of leadership challenges.

5.3 Succession planning

We all know that the success of an organization depends very much on the leader and the leading team. Whereas in the paid work environment the leading team or its boss chooses and appoints new collaborators or the Board or the owners of a company decides about a new CEO, however a democratic culture works very differently. The members or delegates have the important responsibility to propose candidates and to choose and elect the best leaders.

As each member who is proposed by two delegates can be a candidate, the delegates or electors have to look closer. Being a candidate doesn’t mean being a good leader. For example a leader

has to know the organization she will lead very well. Unfortunately there are always candidates and delegates who ignore this simple fact.

Many members do a very good job for BPW and would be good leaders, but are not very ambitious to get a leadership position and do not hand in their candidacy. Such members have to be encouraged to become candidates and to take over an office.

Democratic culture means that delegates have the responsibility not only to elect but also to propose best candidates.

At the annual Leaders' Summits future leaders can meet, present their performances and get in personal contact with the Members of the international Executive Board.

5.4 "Voluntary work - democratic culture - salaried work – require different leadership competences"

See the following ARTICLE:

"Voluntary work - democratic culture - salary work – require different leadership competences"

Dr. Antoinette Rüegg, Past President BPW International 2002-2005
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Leadership in BPW requires special competences. Common leadership trainings teaches leadership competences which fits the business world. But leading voluntary workers using democratic rules is quite a different task. Therefore it is important that BPW leaders are aware of the differences between behaviours in a voluntary working organizations compared to a salary work environment. In addition, in a company the power structure allows very different leadership rules compared to an organization with democratic rules.

The following comparisons should

- show BPW leaders the numerous and important differences
- support them to lead using realistic facts and not illusionary ideas
- increase successes and avoid disappointments

1st Comparison: Leadership in salary and voluntary work

The following two tables show criteria where leadership tasks differ in a salary work environment compared to a voluntary work environment

Comparison: Salary & Voluntary Work

| Criteria | SALARY Work | VOLUNTARY Work |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Motivation | By salary (deal) and interesting tasks | Only by tasks & successes (vote, prestige) |
| Priorities | Tasks have to be fulfilled in well defined working hours | BPW has 3rd priority 1st priority = profession 2nd priority = family |
| Working conditions | Good working climate is suitable, handling difficult situation is part of the job | Good working climate is vital |
| Tasks | Get ordered and paid | Get offered |
| Not fulfilled tasks | Consequences if contract has not been fulfilled | No legal contract, any activity relies on goodwill |
| Resignations | Replacement organized and paid | Very difficult to find replacement, no capacity to introduce a new person |

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1.1 Motivation

Compensating someone's performance with money is what we are used to. For a leader money means power. For example if board members have to work only out of their own motivation, tasks and working climate have to fit very well. Board members who want a position for prestigious reasons are very quickly disappointed, their motivation to work fades away and they become a burden for an organization. Therefore it's vital that voters look carefully at the true motivation of any candidate.

1.2 Priorities

Each BPW leader has to become aware that for members and even for board members working for the organization BPW has only 3rd priority. The professional life has first priority followed by family duties. This is a fact, even they are very uncomfortable to accept. It needs a lot of time and requires an extremely flexible and innovative leadership style.

1.3 Working conditions

A good working climate and efficient time management are basic and a real challenge. Blaming each other when something goes wrong or telling again and again the same old stories of disappointments only distract everybody from the real tasks and should be avoided.

1.4 Tasks

Board members or members fulfil their tasks as long as the motivation fits. In fact in a voluntary working organization a successful leader is a person who is able to attract and "collect" people with the required motivation for performance.

1.5. Not fulfilled tasks

If an officer is no longer motivated to accomplish a task, pressure seldom leads to success. An open exchange and a new solution in the long run will yield the best results.

1.6 Resignations

Where in a business replacements gets organized and are paid, a resignation in a voluntary working organization brings a special challenge for each leader. It can happen that a board member accepts the role to organize a function and overestimates her competences, and then tries to blame others for her difficulties and finally quits shortly before the event. In such situations a leader has to be able to step in and take over the task because introducing a new person would cost more time and energy then doing an additional job.

Comparison: Salary & Voluntary Work

| Criteria | SALARY Work | VOLUNTARY Work |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Changes | Can be ordered | Have to be negotiated, very time consuming, have to fit motivation |
| Tasks which nobody wants to do | Salary compensates lack of motivation | What to do if nobody is available for a task ? |
| Team partners | A good team is favorable, but working with difficult partners is part of the job | A good team is vital. Not fitting partners costs a lot of time and energy and can block work |
| Conflicts | Stress by conflicts are part of the job, bosses can give orders | Can kill motivation and end work |
| Critics | Paid staff has to tolerate or accept critics | It is like criticising the gift a voluntary worker offers |
| Appreciation, thank you | Mainly by salary, appreciations are welcomed | Satisfaction by successful results, Appreciations and thank you have to compensate the salary |

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1.7 Changes

Where changes in a salary work environment changes are ordered and managed, they have to be negotiated with voluntary workers. This is not only a time consuming task but finally the new task has to fit the motivation of the person concerned. Therefore voluntary working organizations are not very flexible and changes often need a lot of time.

1.8 Tasks which nobody wants to do

If performances get compensated by a salary, persons can get found for any job. But if motivation and task have to fit, there are always tasks which get passed around and impede or even block a whole team. Here too, sometimes to accomplish a task oneself costs less time and energy than looking for somebody who is willing to do the job.

1.9 Team partners

If a president cannot choose her executive board members, good knowledge of human nature and psychological competences become essential. Working in a team with elected members can be a big challenge for any team member. Accepting the task to work in a team in which members can hardly work together is a very efficient training field. One has to learn lessons which one never would accept in a salary work environment. Several presidents say very openly that after their presidency they were a different person than before. I'm one of them. I underestimated the challenging task but also the personal maturity which develops by accepting such challenges. Finally, this personal maturity was more valuable than any salary.

1.10 Conflicts

BPW is a wonderful place to become a competent conflict manager. In a voluntary working environment people are more open and yet more honest. To feel comfortable they realize that they have to be true to themselves which again triggers more conflicts.

1.11 Critics

As a voluntary worker offers her performance as a gift, criticism is very difficult to accept. Who likes to be criticized for a gift? As criticism cannot be avoided, it has to be formulated very cautiously. BPW is a wonderful training field for practicing constructive criticism.

1.12 Appreciation, thank you

Good results, successes and a personal satisfaction have to compensate for the missing salary. Therefore appreciation, recognition, awards and thank yous are imperative for voluntary workers.

2 Working in a DEMOCRATIC culture

Many BPW board members are not aware that leadership in a democratic culture differs tremendously from leadership in a business. Leaders a democratic environments have to know that

- decisions go slower
- information is very time and energy consuming
- and terms ignore valuable know-how and experience

COMPARISON: Working with or without DEMOCRATIC culture

| Criteria | NO democratic culture | Democratic culture |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Leader and her team | A CEO chooses his own team, characters which do not fit will not get hired | A BPW president has to work with elected board members even the characters do not fit |
| Terms | CEOs, experts, employees quit not along terms and can use their experiences for years | If board members are well installed in office, they have to leave ► big loss of know-how |
| Decisions | A CEO can give orders and his team can take quick decisions | Important decisions have to be voted and voters have to get informed = very energy and time consuming |
| Dismissals | Everybody can get fired at any time | It is nearly impossible to fire an elected board member who does a bad job |

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2.1 Leader and her team

Working with an elected team is a big challenge. Leaders have to be aware that such teams work less efficient.

2.2 Terms

On the one hand, terms give the opportunity to train leadership for many members, which is a very important experience for women. On the other hand, an organization suffers because a lot of knowledge and experience gets lost by terms. This loss can be partly compensated by involving past board members in special tasks. The new BPW concept "Member initiated Taskforces and Projects" ensures that competent experts do not have to leave after terms but can continue working in their fields of expertise as long as they are motivated to do so. With this strategy BPW can keep competent experts who support the performance of the organization.

2.3 Decisions

Important decisions have to be voted on and voters have to get informed. This information is a very energy and time consuming process and needs a lot of sensitivity as the delegates have to understand the real issues. This is very tricky especially in an international organization where only 20% of the members have English as their first language. On the one hand leaders have to be aware of this fact but on the other hand our organization still doesn't use the new media sufficiently for an efficient information.

2.4 Dismissals

It is nearly impossible to fire an elected board member who does a poor job. Members want to know why somebody should leave and very easily members invest their time and energy in fights and gossip instead of constructive work. Competent leaders will find ways to bypass a difficult executive board member.

3 CONCLUSIONS

As common leadership books do not mention these important differences, they should become part of workshops for future BPW leaders. Successful leadership in voluntary working organizations with a democratic culture requires a lot of emotional competences. Where manipulation is a common tool in the business environment it seldom works in a voluntary working environment in a long run. Good expert knowledge, flexibility, true respect and empathy are competences which bring the best long term success.