



## Strange bedfellows: Leadership and self doubt

It's tempting to believe that strong leadership is a question of making decisions with certainty, knowing what is right without doubt. A strong leader inspires and motivates others to follow, to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts, whether leading a nation, a town, a company or a kids' hockey team.

Often all we see is the finished product—from strong leaders it's a clear vision of where they want to go and how they want to get there.

The process is the messy part, where wrestling with conflicting priorities occurs, trade-offs are whittled into place and sometimes the only way forward is to take a leap of faith, especially in rapidly changing environments. There is seldom an obvious right choice.

This is especially true in our industry, where every leader of every team, group, division and company is facing unprecedented economic challenge, technology accelerating the tempo of business by the minute and a wholesale change in consumer expectations and habits. It requires creativity through constant reinvention and visionary thinking. Yet it also demands an almost surgical ability to slice and dice the onslaught of data and trends while near-military precision is required to execute plans that have been plucked from the chaos.

Whoever said leading was easy?

Leadership development is a vital part of CWC's mission and we've given much thought as to how best to equip members to lead in this challenging environment. While the requirements of leading are the same for women and men, attitudes to leadership are often quite different, thus bringing disparate challenges to the task.

Confidence is an ongoing issue for women and thus is its flip side, self doubt.

Do women have more self doubt than men, or is their sensitivity to it greater? Do men ignore self doubt, or do they just hide it better? I suspect women are more likely to interpret it as a sign that they may not be up to the task but, regardless, it's an important topic to cover in the pursuit of leadership development for women.

I was reminded of this when I was invited in December to participate at a meeting of the American Democracy Institute in Washington to launch a mentoring program to groom young women for public leadership roles. As a "power mentor", my role was to facilitate a group discussion on leadership.

I was honoured to participate and humbled by the task. After reading a few of the CVs, I wondered what possible value-add could I provide in the way of wisdom or guidance to these amazing young women. They were Rhodes scholars, West Point graduates, founders and leaders of organizations, senior political advisers, White House staffers.

In short, I was assailed with self doubt.

I desperately tried to recall the nuggets of wisdom I've heard about how to listen to doubt without letting its insistent voice silence your own; how to move forward yet avoid over compensating with hubris.

So I sought out one of the mentees whose academic and professional

qualifications made me dizzy just to read them. Still shy of 30, she had accomplished things that anyone would be grateful to have accomplished in an entire career. Now she had a young child and was pondering what next. She felt adrift, unsure what direction to take without the highly-structured environment that had thus far been such a part of her career path. She wanted to hear how other women managed, what paths they chose, how they made their decisions.

I shouldn't have been surprised that self doubt was probably the biggest challenge she faced at that moment. And as I was mentally kicking myself for not picking up on it sooner, we moved to another highlight of the agenda.

Madeleine Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State, gave an entertaining, insightful, humorous and meaningful account of her path to power before taking questions. I had to ask. "What has been the biggest challenge in your career?"

I shouldn't have been surprised by the answer. "Self doubt."

What a relief to confirm that we are in such good company with our self doubt and, more important, that it needn't sabotage our ambitions and achievements.

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