

What do Feminist principles and good leadership skills have in common?

Cleo McGee both investigates and ignites the debate of how feminism is instructive in bringing about good leadership skills and qualities. As a word 'Feminism' brings about a great deal of emotion and provokes thought in people, here Cleo illustrates her thoughts on navigating it.

Like many women in their mid-thirties who are continually grappling with the gender inequality still present in our modern society I often ask myself what 'having it all' really means. Afterall, 2020 is shaping up to be a year of immense change, a year when the world literally stood still and we have all had to re-evaluate our lives.

Women today are meant to "work like they don't have children and raise children as if they don't work." But what does this look like for women in the working world. Action Aid and Congress London have come together to explore the topic: '*Are feminist behaviours the key to leadership in a post COVID-19 world?*' in a webinar to be scheduled this autumn.

Gender roles

A greater understanding of gender roles is developing and the narrative of women and leadership is evolving, but it remains the case that women have still not achieved equality in the workplace. Women, I feel, have impossible standards to achieve if they want to be considered successful by society today. If we work hard and chase our career, we are seen to be doing so at the expense of having kids and/or not being fully present for them. How do you balance it all, how do you adapt to this new version of being everything to everyone?

The truth is although women might have more choice, they are still limited by a number of things. One of them being flexible working hours. With the acceleration of change that COVID-19 has brought about are we now able to see that flexible working, ie working from home is indeed efficient. With this new found efficiency will more women feel able to step up to the plate to take on the top jobs, knowing that there is potential for greater freedom around working hours? It still feels as if women are asked to make a choice, with the only answer I can currently see as being yes of course you can have it all, but rarely at the same time.

A conversation developed

In my role as Head of Events for Congress London a not for profit organisation and women's group, which I touched on in my first article for Maddynews. I was very excited to have been contacted by Action Aid, who wanted to explore a joint project together. We started looking into feminism, and the feminist principles Action Aid embodies as an organisation, detailing the principles they stick to and how they themselves are run as a business. We had conversations around how much society has shifted from first and second wave feminism, to now and how specifically women are seen to have more choices in today's society.

The Bell Jar

For me it felt pertinent to ask how much further from 1950's *The Bell Jar's* version of the character Esther Greenwood have we come, and is it enough? The character Esther is divided between what she is supposed to be according to the gender roles of American society in the 1950's (aka the stepford wife) and what she wants to be within herself. It is this duality of dialogue between the internal and external that I wanted to highlight and ask the question is this still happening? Although there has been a distinct shift from the 1950's

housewife, however, have we just lumped our gender role of women today into being something that is totally unattainable? Or do women feel empowered and accepted in positions of authority and as leaders?

Good Leadership

As our discussion continued we realised that the best way we could potentially affect change is through maintaining authenticity of our respective brands and through formulating a narrative that furthers the conversation about how to be a good leader. The topic is one of interest because what many deem to be typically referred to as 'masculine' traits are the ones we should look for in leaders. Whilst in opposition what we term 'female' traits are seen to be weak, or too emotionally charged and not tough enough. But what in actual fact makes a good leader, and what tools are needed to articulate an effective style of leadership, especially in times of crisis? Maybe a combination of the two?

We have already seen politically that countries with women in charge have been better at coping with COVID-19, surely this is not a coincidence! What skill sets have they formulated to get them where they need to be as both an effective leader and a strong woman, or should I say strong person? If indeed we follow the narrative that 'the personal is the political' then perhaps we can educate ourselves and open up the conversation of what makes a good leader in a time of crisis.

In response to these questions we put together a webinar with a diverse panel of women, to discuss this topic. (details of which are below). We would welcome you to join our debate. It will no doubt prove to be useful to all those wanting to adopt good leadership styles and especially pertinent in this time of crisis.

In conclusion, I am reminded of a quote attributed to psychologist Viktor E Frankl who says "between stimulus and our response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom." What if we can change the narrative of gender roles in leadership through our response to the current climate and situation and explore that space. Just an idea to ruminate on...

Are feminist behaviours the key to leadership in a post COVID-19 world?

Join Congress London and ActionAid UK as we explore crisis leadership through a feminist lens, with ActionAid's Feminist Leadership Principles as our toolkit.

Could adopting these behaviours redefine the landscape for women in the workplace? How can these behaviours improve our ability to lead in difficult times? As well as debating these questions, we'll be looking to our panel for strategies, tips and inspirational examples of strong feminist leadership from across the globe (spoiler alert, it's not only women whose leadership we're championing). We'll be joined by ActionAid UK Trustee and co-founder of The Arc Group [Eva Appelbaum](#), Director of Enterprise Partners at Mastercard, [Unette Spencer](#), and Leadership, Diversity and Organisational Change coach [Satwant Kaur](#). Moderated and hosted by our very own [Katherine Baker](#) who is Founder and CEO of [Intrinsic Energy](#), a live virtual training company, empowering individuals globally.

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ActionAid UK: ActionAid is an international charity that works with women and girls living in poverty. Our dedicated local staff are changing the world with women and girls. We are ending violence and fighting poverty so that all women, everywhere, can create the future they want.

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Congress London is a members network for women, based in London. Founded in 2016, by a group of like minded women, we host regular events in the capital led by industry experts. We are open to all women at any stage in your career, whether you're a freelancer, director, mother or starting a side-hustle in your spare time. Come to our events and you'll experience a warm welcome and a chance to connect with women from all walks of life, industries and ages. At Congress, we focus on useful topics and inspiring talks, and guarantee you'll come away with tips and techniques you can put into practice the next day. From goal-setting and personal branding, to changing professions and managing finances – we've got your career challenges covered. We believe in women supporting women and although we don't charge for membership, we do ask you to give back to our community by supporting each other – sharing your knowledge and contacts where you can.

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