



BSR Conference 2010
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Calling All Remarkable Leaders

Breakout Session Summary
Wednesday, November 3, 2010 | 2:45-3:45 p.m.

Speakers

- » **Joanna Barsh**, Director, McKinsey & Company
- » **Kara Hurst**, Vice President, BSR (moderator)

Highlights

- » Identifying what makes you happy and what you are good at are key ingredients to being a successful leader.
- » Learning to be an optimist can help you overcome obstacles.
- » Leaders need sponsors who push them to take risks and learn from failures.

Memorable Quotes

"If you sponsor one person, you will have given a major gift to the world." —Joanna Barsh, McKinsey & Company

"You have to find what you were born to do and leave the result to destiny." —Joanna Barsh, McKinsey & Company

"If you take your strength and use it every day you will find your passion." —Joanna Barsh, McKinsey & Company

Overview

Becoming a leader requires understanding who you are and finding meaning in your life. Barsh said she knows this firsthand through her own leadership journey, which was built on optimism and joy in both her personal and professional life.

When Barsh began researching leadership six or seven years ago, she found very little research on women leaders. She and her team at the McKinsey Leadership Project carried out 145 interviews around the world, primarily with women leaders, to determine the main components of centered leadership.

Throughout the session, Barsh shared personal stories and video clips from interviews, as well as tips for emerging as a leader through five key elements of centered leadership: meaning, framing, connecting, engaging, and energizing.

Meaning is about finding what makes you happy and identifying your strengths. To understand your strengths, she suggested thinking back to what you enjoyed doing when you were a kid and recalling that feeling. She also recommended using personal assessment tools such as www.authentic happiness.org.

Framing is about seeing obstacles through an optimistic lens. She argued that pessimism can lead to a downward spiral in which a person merges all adversity and ruminates on it. People can learn optimism by first separating fact from assumption, secondly by learning to dispute, and thirdly, finding alternatives when in a difficult situation. Learning from setbacks is vital to becoming a leader.



In discussing connecting, Barsh distinguished sponsorship from mentorship. Mentors are important advisors, but sponsorship is something different. A sponsor is someone who evaluates you, believes in you, and helps you find opportunities. Sponsorship is about taking a risk on someone and being there to help him or her learn from failure. Barsh compared the sponsor pushing you to take advantage of opportunities to a fellow skydiver urging you to jump out of the plane when you're afraid.

Engaging is about acknowledging and overcoming your fears. We all have fears, she said, because we all have basic needs and want to be valued. Some of us have a fear of public criticism, and some are afraid of being rejected. Barsh argued that if you let fear paralyze you, it stops you from growing. She suggested giving fear a name and thinking about what this fear is constraining you from doing. By writing a note to your fear, you can diminish it.

Energizing is about finding what gives you energy and balancing your deployment of energy throughout the day. Barsh suggested thinking about what energizes you along four parameters—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual—and asking yourself each morning, when you have the most energy and what you want to have happen today. For parents, she suggested trying the approach of “three good things.” Ask your children to tell you about three good things that happened in the day, then one bad thing. She said it takes three positive instances to counter one negative one.

Barsh asserted that if you master four or five of the elements of centered leadership, the chances that you feel like a leader go up to 70 percent, but the feeling of satisfaction at work or personal life goes up to 83 percent.

During the Q&A session, a participant working on sustainable procurement asked whether it is true that perfectionists are more negative about life and, if so, whether Barsh had any tips for overcoming this. Barsh responded that the problem with perfectionists is that they tend to run out of time, so they give up things they like. The key, she said, is to decide what is important.

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