



KEYNOTE April 23, 2024, European Parliament, Strasbourg

## **"Good leaders create stars; bad leaders create scars!"**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to stand before you today to address a topic that lies at the heart of effective leadership: the profound impact of "leading by example" on the mental health of each of us, women, as well of our teams and organizations.

I want to share a brief story with you at the beginning:

Last March, I was in New York for the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations, the biggest global policy-making body dedicated to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. There were hundreds of side events organized by member states, UN agencies, and civil society and hundreds of parallel events outside of the UN organized by civil society organizations. I attended also the G100 event on Justice, the Women Economic Forum New York at the Harvard Club as well a parallel event of our community at the CSW68.

So, I had the big opportunity to attend many, many different events and interact with numerous leaders, observing their leadership style and impact. Wow, what a lesson for me as a leadership coach!... especially on what not to do 😊

I observed that the one trait both good and bad leaders shared was the fact that they both lead by example. So, **the practice of leading by example** is the common denominator, a trait that transcends the boundaries between good and bad leadership: Whether for better or for worse, leaders have a tremendous influence through their actions, words, gestures, behaviors, and values, setting the tone for their guests, teams, and organizations, and directly impacting their mental health.

**In doing so, leaders wield the power to either elevate individuals into stars through empowerment or leave scars through harm.**

However, what distinguishes a good leader from a bad one is not merely **the act of leading by example**, but rather the manner in which it is executed, “the how”. A good leader recognizes the immense responsibility that comes with this power and chooses to wield it with integrity and purpose -aligning words with actions and being intentional.

If you truly believe that mental health is a crucial factor and you want to be intentional about it, there are three 'must-haves' to consider on how to positively impact, as a leader, the mental health of your people. Here they are:

**Must have number 1# Create a safe space**

**Must have number 2# Be inclusive**

**Must have number 3# Transmit a sense of belonging:**

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**->Must have number #1: Create a safe space**

**Please ask yourself: “How can I create a safe space for my community and for me as a leader?”**

No matter where you are, whether it's a Zoom meeting, an event with guests, or a meeting with your team or customers, as leaders, it is incumbent upon us to prioritize the creation of a safe space within our groups—a space grounded in principles of respect, empathy, and non-judgment. Faced with accelerating disruptions and societal and environmental breakdowns, the need for safe spaces has never been more urgent than now. Please note that the first thing people perceive is whether a place is safe or not.

When people perceive the environment as a safe space, individuals feel seen, heard, valued, they feel empowered to bring their authentic selves to the table, free from fear or judgment. They know that they will be met with understanding and support, and that their contributions matter.

Respect, empathy, and non-judgment are not just buzzwords, but guiding principles that should inform every decision we make and every action we take as individuals and as leaders.

## **->Must have number #2: Be inclusive:**

**Please ask yourself: "What action and behavior do I embody, when I'm perceived as an inclusive person, as an inclusive leader?"**

To be perceived as an inclusive leader, we must ensure that everyone strongly feels that they are being considered, treated fairly, and psychologically safe. What I observed in some events in New York is that some leaders did occasional grand gestures to impress, that were often perceived as fake.

Being really inclusive requires regular, smaller-scale comments and actions rather than theatrical grand gestures, "una tantum". Inclusive leadership is something tangible and practiced every day, it requires a commitment to considering others, actively listening to them, and demonstrating authenticity.

Creating an environment where everyone feels welcomed, respected, and valued means genuinely being open to the perspectives and experiences of all individuals, or team members, regardless of their background or differences and working actively to remove barriers that hinder full participation of every individual, on daily basis!

## **->Must have number #3: Transmit a sense of belonging:**

**Please ask yourself "When do I sense -as an individual- a feeling of belonging?"**

In general, the feeling of belonging manifests when a person feels fully integrated and engaged in a social context, creating an emotional bond and a sense of identity with the group or community. This sense of belonging is not merely a nice to have – it is a fundamental human need. Every individual desires a sense of belonging, a place where they feel valued, respected, and understood.

When individuals feel included and valued, they are more engaged, more productive, and more resilient in the face of challenges. Conversely, when they feel excluded or marginalized, or disconnected, this takes a heavy toll on their physical and mental well-being. These are exactly the scars a bad leader can create in an exclusive environment.

One of the most concrete and crucial action a leader can take to convey a sense of belonging is to demonstrate authenticity and transparency in their relationships with people. This means being genuine, open, and approachable, and showing genuine interest in the well-being and development of each individual.

## FINALE

In closing just 3 reminders for good leaders that want lead by example and intentionally establish a culture where mental health matters.

**Reminder number 1#** As leaders, we bear a solemn responsibility to nurture environments that prioritize the mental health of those we lead.

->So, let us address any issues or discriminatory behaviors and work to resolve them constructively -without leaving scars!

**Reminder number 2#** Just as a star shines brightly in the sky, individuals who are supported and guided can excel in their roles and reach their full potential.

->So, let us help them shine and succeed by first considering them on a human level, and offering mentorship, guidance, coaching, and opportunities for growth!

**Reminder number 3#** Let us not forget that we, as leaders, are first and foremost human beings and that we must commit ourselves to remaining HUMAN, it takes practice and hard work.

->So, let us stay human and invest in people with integrity and compassion!

Ladies and gentlemen, this is not just a call to action; it is a call to transformation to create a world where mental health is not just valued, but intentionally created. Let us commit ourselves to lifting one another higher, forging a safe space where every participant, especially those joining us for the first time, feel not just seen, but truly part of our community.

This is our opportunity today to create stars, leaving no room for scars.

Thank you

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