

**Remarks Delivered By
Ambassador Gina K. Abercrombie-Winstanley**

**Women Directors in Malta – Information Session
Thursday, November 19, 2015**

“Women Helping Women: The Big Picture”

- Welcome, ladies and gentlemen.
- I would like to thank Dr. Michele Gialanze and the other members of the Women Directors in Malta group for the invitation.
- I would also like to thank my fellow speakers for their insight and commitment to encouraging and empowering women leaders.
- It is my pleasure to join you here today for the first meeting of Women Directors in Malta, your mission of promoting gender equality and leadership development for women is near to my heart.
- In September of last year, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, spoke at an event to promote the Equal Futures Partnership, an innovative multilateral initiative that encourages member countries to empower women politically and economically. It encourages them to commit to taking actions including legal, regulatory, and policy reforms to ensure women lead and benefit from inclusive economic growth, and that we fully participate in public life.
- In his remarks, Secretary Kerry observed that the three women secretaries before him were defined by the barriers that they

overcame in their lives, by the barriers to opportunity that they helped break down.”¹

- For women leaders, it is not enough for us to overcome professional barriers in our own lives.
- We have to influence and reshape the systems in which we live and work.
- How can we do this? Committing to being an agent of change can seem daunting, but I would like to share with you some advice from a very good friend of mine that can help.
- Three years ago I was delighted to join an exceptional group of men and women and some of you may also have been in attendance, as we welcomed to Malta my good friend, Dr. Mary Dwyer. She spoke about the importance of women as leaders and on boards in public and private organizations. She offered some excellent advice that I would like to share with you now.
- These tips apply to everyone working to break down barriers and change the systems that influence our personal and professional roles.
- **1 - To start, have a vision for your organization.** Stay focused. The former head of Netscape said about the role of Boards: “The main thing is the main thing.” There are many distracting factors in organizations – and people who will take the organization off on tangents while pursuing individual agendas. This can sap an

¹ From remarks made at Equal Futures Partnership, September 22, 2014:
<http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/09/231987.htm>

organization's momentum, which can be a critical error, particularly in today's highly competitive markets.

- The leader, in concert with his or her leadership team and Board of Directors, must define the mission, overall directions of the organization and the goals. Promoting gender equality and the professional development of other women should be among the goals of your organization.
- **2 - Always question the status quo.** Never be satisfied with the current effort. Organizations are self-indulgent. The solution chosen is often the first acceptable one, rather than the best one.
- Are we satisfied with the current numbers of female ministers, directors or board members in Malta? If not, we need to change the status quo.
- Organizations only make major changes when there are large external forces coming to bear. The role of the leader is to bring those forces inside the organization so that the strategic implications can be addressed.
- **3 - Take risks.** Risk taking builds resilience and coping abilities at the individual and organizational levels. It's like exercising a muscle---you can strengthen it or let it wither. There are no businesses or markets in which standing still works anymore.
- The most successful leaders work at the margin, care little about peer approval, and don't dwell on how their current job performance affects their opportunity for future advancement. They are high risk takers. However, the risks must be well-

informed risks and not capricious. You must have analyzed your odds sufficiently so that you are reasonably sure of succeeding. You have to spend a great deal of time formulating your thinking before acting. A series of failures will erode your credibility as a leader.

- **4 – This one can be harder for women - Expect resistance to change and toughen up!** Do not assume civility will persist once you initiate a change in an organization. If you need approval, leadership positions are not for you. Approval-seeking clouds effective decision making. Leaders are expected to be role models and must have credibility. Don't expect to make everyone happy. As President Abraham Lincoln said, "People make their own happiness." You will not please everyone but you must do what's right for the organization, and that success will help you do what is right for other women.
- Assume that the best that you can achieve is respect but popularity is likely to elude you within organizational life. Women are more likely to think that they are not succeeding if anyone dislikes them. However, as Harry Truman said, "If you want a friend in Washington, buy a dog." Leaders have to have the courage to make tough decisions that are not popular with everyone.
- **5 - Work hard; work smart.** There are 2 points here. There is no substitute for high quality work, so set high, realistic expectations for yourself and others. As women breaking into male-dominated leadership positions and changing the gender landscape, we have to work even harder.

- High expectations beget success and high self-esteem. Low expectations produce chronic failure and low self-esteem. High productivity levels are welcome in any environment and rewarded in many.
- It is the role of the leader to raise the bar in an organization and not allow complacency. This advances the organization and active, productive employees tend to have more positive morale.
- **The second point is that you must work smart.** Effective leaders are also effective managers. Leadership and management are synergistically linked. Effective leaders know how to work expeditiously, efficiently, effectively and in a well-organized manner. They are very self-driven and focused. They have a good grasp of what's going on in the various areas of their organization.
- **6 - Think strategically and long-term.** Often we become obsessed with some immediate issue. Leaders have to think far into the future in order to position their organizations for success. Practice thinking big picture even if you don't have sit on a board.
- **7 - Participate in and exploit organizational governance to effect change.** Utilize governance systems to make change. Politically, it's a chance to gain support among key opinion leaders and constituents before you launch a change or new idea or program.
- In a study conducted by my friend, Dr. Mary Dwyer, (President/CEO of IES Abroad) in the early 90s that look at the career progress of female faculty, she found that female faculty

members by and large were not participating in academic governance committees. They were afraid to speak up. We can't expect anything to change if we don't participate. Don't sit on the periphery of the meeting table. Women tend to do this and it marginalizes our ideas from the outset.

- **8 - Persist! Persist! Persist!** Persistence is paramount to leadership success. This doesn't mean that you pursue an idea that has no chance of being successful. That would not be sensible. In fact, in being persistent you have to be savvy at picking out strategies and ideas that have the greatest probability of success and are still central to your organizational mission and directions.
- But once you've done your homework, be very, very persistent. The research shows that successful female leaders face all kinds of personal and professional barriers to success. Still, the successful female leaders rarely saw these factors as barriers but rather as challenges to be beaten. We thrive on adversity and remain persistent and goal-directed.
- **9 – Here's the hard one - Don't expect to be the beneficiary of change.** Work for change and realize that you just may not be the beneficiary. Sustainable social and organizational change is very hard, slow work.
- Sometimes leaders get disappointed if they don't personally benefit immediately. Sometimes you're building a foundation for future change that you won't benefit from directly. Having persistence and courage to stick with the long march and refusing to become bitter is essential. Bitterness is counterproductive and only turns on the individual. If you work hard at change, other professional

women will benefit from your efforts and they, in turn, can go on to help make improvements for others.

- **10 - Empower others and give them full credit.** Fully utilize others' talents and give them full credit for their accomplishments. Build a strong, effective team. Identify the strengths in every individual on your team and use them.
- **Achieve balance!** Find the level of organizational life that will allow you to achieve your goals and at the same time maintain balance in your personal life and good mental and physical health. This may mean that you need to be satisfied with not being the CEO. "Graveyards are strewn with indispensable people." Achieving balance between personal and professional lives can be especially challenging for women.
- **Don't avoid conflicts.** A certain level of conflict in organizations produces healthy tension that advances the organization by testing and challenging assumptions. Organizations that have too little or too much conflict self-destruct. The leader needs to allow constructive conflict to exist, but not to let it get out of hand.
- **Maintain a sense of humor!** Humor is vital for leaders. Using humor can also be an effective leadership tool. It is a means of deflecting group stress, maintaining clarity of purpose - as well as your mental health! Effective leaders tend to have high energy levels and be physically and mentally healthy. They are positive and optimistic about the future. You don't see many cynics in leadership roles. It takes a great deal of physical and mental energy to deal with the responsibility and stress of leadership roles.

Humor helps you maintain your enthusiasm about the future and be a positive thinker.

- Find a mentor, but be careful that the relationship is constructive. Build a network of individuals at many levels of your organization. Read, observe, and talk with others who are successful, but learn how organizations work.
- **Help others.** Help others at all levels of an organization. It's the right thing to do and in the long run, it builds a strong network for your own advancement.
- **Mentor young women:** We have a responsibility to be role models for younger women and to mentor our youths in all sectors of society. According to a September 2015 study led by KPMG LLP, the U.S. audit, tax and advisory firm, nearly 80 percent of female entrepreneurs felt that having another woman as their advisor or mentor made a significant impact on their career.²
- As you can see, working to promote women leaders and supporting other women to advance professionally is no small task. Having an organization like Women Directors in Malta is a tremendous step forward, and one that should serve as a catalyst for all women in Malta.
- Influencing broad change doesn't happen overnight, but the group of women gathered here today is committed to taking action, and

² From: KPMG Study on Women Leaders and Influences: <http://www.kpmg.com/us/impact50>.

for this I applaud you. As I conclude my remarks, I'd like to leave you with some questions and challenges to think about:

- Are you doing enough personally to support women?
 - If you are a woman, are you supportive of other women?
 - Do you view other women's success as helpful to your own or are they competition to be ignored or taken down?
 - Are you actively asking for government support for women's equality/access to the workplace?
 - Finally, can you do more?
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- **Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. It has truly been a pleasure.**