

Being a Woman Leader: Reimagining “Themyscira” in Child Psychiatry

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“The world is not ready for all you will do.”
– Hippolyta, Wonder Woman 1984¹

A mystical island shrouded in fog, invisible to the eye, a fortress of limitless potential hidden from the rest of the world. Themyscira is most well-known as being the home of Wonder Woman in the popular DC comics franchise. Child and adolescent psychiatry is a specialty that has a robust majority of women, but there are overall still significant gender disparities in academic rank and leadership positions in the field.² As the legendary land of strong women, Themyscira is evocative of concepts of what distinctive leadership in psychiatry and medicine can stand for: guidance of others through motivation and inspiration (managing vs leading,) critical examinations of need for stability and need for evolution and change, support and advocacy (mentorship vs sponsorship,) maintaining integrity to the core values professionally and personally (core values,) and embracing an attitude of growth and empowerment through service (servant leadership.) We explore perspectives of each of these areas crucial to the development and fostering of leadership roles.

Managing vs Leading

“The role of a leader is not to come up with all the great ideas...but to create an environment in which great ideas can happen.”

– Simon Sinek³

Being a woman manager or leader brings unique perspectives, challenges, and opportunities. How do we navigate the cultural and historical waters when women have not traditionally been in leadership positions for so long? How do we forge forward to lay down the foundation of our own terrain for our island of strength and forti-

tude in the shifting landscape of leadership in medicine? Managing and leading are synonyms of each other, yet distinct, as some managers do not exercise leadership, and some may be leaders without having any management positions. Both involve effecting others to achieve set goals. Management, though, nominally consists of controlling a group or set of entities to accomplish a goal, while leadership refers to an individual’s ability to impact, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward organizational success.⁴ Influence and inspiration separate leaders from managers. Managers often work from a perspective within the system or organization, whereas leaders focus on prioritizing resources and usually operate from the viewpoint of the entire system. Leaders can empower their team and inspire the desire to reach a goal, but without a manager in place to direct staff, they are unlikely to reach that goal. Managers can be essential during crises or emergencies; they set deadlines, create order, establish rules and solve problems. Leaders are crucial during creative discussions; they introduce strategic approaches, inspire behaviors, encourage commitment, and consider strengths of each team member. Leading or managing may not be mutually exclusive. Both leadership and management can be equally important and synergistic for productivity within the workplace. To be an effective leader, though, one must explore their own core values as foundations to inspire managers who will then inspire the team.⁵

Core Values

“Core values are the heartbeat to your ‘why’.”

– Shi Chen⁶

A core thread that ties together why we are compelled to be women leaders must be rooted in the intrinsic values that we build the foundation of our Themyscira on – the pillars of our community to help those that we lead and those that we serve, reflecting “The Golden Rule,” the moral and guiding principles of treating others as one would like to be treated themselves. Individual core values will differ and flex in their prioritization, but the spectrum of these core values are ingrained with self-respect, pride, confidence, and self-awareness in knowing one’s skills, abilities, talents, and experiences and the worth they engender. These core values must be continuously developed. Other core values of being an effective woman leader include cultivating competency and achievement as well as balancing wisdom and humility. One must know when to remain in an

observational role, when to speak up, and when to take a step back. Admitting one’s mistakes and learning from them are a natural part of personal and professional development. However, reflecting on those experiences and then utilizing and cultivating lessons learned to the benefit of others further fosters mutual growth and teamwork, which women leaders emphasize. Similarly, a leader should invite collaboration and clear effective communication as core expectations, both within themselves and amongst others, to motivate and inspire both community and autonomy simultaneously.⁷

We highlighted just a few but there are many other core values (Figure 1) that one may have and at different settings. Furthermore, one should reflect on one’s values frequently to be an effective leader, especially a servant leader.

Figure 1. Core Values



Servant leadership

“...It begins with a natural feeling that one wants to serve...as opposed to wanting power, influence, fame or wealth.”

– Robert K. Greenleaf⁸

What makes a good leader? Confidence and power? Sensitivity to employees' needs? Attention to diversity and inclusion? No leader can do it all. But in health care, a field that is rife with uncertainty and challenge, a woman leader must be sensitive to both the rapidly changing environment and the needs of all stakeholders. An effective leader must be able to balance attention to immediate concerns while also investing in the system that meets those concerns. This means investing in the *people* that make up the system and their well-being, in addition to prioritizing customer satisfaction and the bottom line.

To borrow from the principles of servant leadership, a leader who helps employees to discern their unique contributions to the mission of the organization, who upends the hierarchy by allocating power broadly, and who is a servant first and a leader second is a “servant leader.” This means a leader who knows what it is like to be in the trenches and makes decisions based on the experiences and needs of those with boots on the ground. Servant leadership requires expressing authentic humility, leading by moral authority, creating the environment for the development of more servant leaders at all levels, and making concern for the professional growth of all employees a priority. These are the traits which women tend to exemplify. By investing in individuals, we can create a culture that feels more equitable and imbues a sense of belonging, regardless of power or status within the organization. In medicine, where the oppressive and often patriarchal hierarchy is ubiquitous, we must demand this approach to leadership to move towards a workplace that is more equitable and just.⁹

Mentorship vs Sponsorship

“While a mentor is someone who has knowledge and will share it with you, a sponsor is a person who has power and will use it for you.”

– Herminia Ibarra¹⁰

The principles of mentorship and sponsorship are key elements for leadership and are particularly important for women in leadership to create a culture where women elevate each other. Effective physician leaders recognize that mentorship and sponsorship are critical to their employees' career advancement in an equitable fashion.¹⁰ While mentorship may involve a mentor's private time, advice, and support, sponsorship involves the sponsor's public use of connections and leverage to catapult a protégé's career toward leadership. While mentorship programs are more easily embraced by leadership, formal sponsorship programs may be more challenging to implement as they may require one to publicly recognize someone with whom one has not yet built a trusting relationship. Replacing the binary constructs of mentorship and sponsorship with a continuum from mentorship to sponsorship roles offers leaders a potentially more organic model toward sponsorship. In this regard, a leader may serve in an evolving continuum of private to public roles for an employee from mentor (coach and advise) to strategist (share “insider information” about advancement) to connector (make relationships with influential people) to opportunity giver (provide a high-visibility opportunity) and finally to advocate (publicly advocate for a promotion).¹¹

Using the principles of core values and servant leadership, a woman leader may create an equitable and just culture in which leaders at all levels strive to advance their employees through this continuum from mentorship to sponsorship.

Conclusion

“So, I stay, I fight, and I give, for the world I know it can be.”

– Wonder Woman¹²

Women must be true to their core values that will guide them to be a servant leader who can then mentor others. Mentorship and/or sponsorship is a life-long experience that can also make us accountable to be an effective leader. Women in leadership need to be warriors in the changing landscape of child psychiatry as a catalyst to mold and shape a new and re-imagined Themyscira, a professional home evolving to fit the needs of our patients, our colleagues and teams, our students and trainees, our communities and ourselves.

Take Home Summary

Women face many challenges in becoming leaders within child psychiatry, but can also contribute in unique ways, including leading by empowerment, self-respect and awareness, servant leadership as core values, amongst many others. The world and the landscape of child psychiatry are ever evolving, and women as leaders can play a critical part in its growth by celebrating and strategically utilizing those unique perspectives and skills.

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