

A Weekend with Joan Kirner

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There were so much to be gained from each of the three sessions that were part of the Weekend with Joan Kirner, which was organised by the Soroptimists International of Karratha & Districts. Saturday morning considered general decision making, Saturday evening community decision making and Sunday decision making in the work place. It was fascinating to listen and interact with Joan Kirner, the other guest speakers and also the Saturday workshop participants, all of who were willing to share relevant experiences. To my mind there were however a few themes that could be traced through each of these workshops and each speaker.

The primary theme is the understanding of power and this seems to be closely woven with the concept of valuing self.

In Joan's experience, many women are uncomfortable with the word 'power' and will say they don't like politics and are only interested in 'influencing'. Yet each person has power and they can either chose to use and develop it or they can chose to give their power away. Which do you chose to do? This is a good question to ask ourselves at different times and when acting in the various roles that we each have in life.

We each have the choice of how to use our power, we can either use the 'masculine' version of power i.e. use it to empower self and impose will on others (win/lose) or we can use it to empower self and others (win/win). The concept of win/win is based on everyone being empowered, which sums to more total power.

Personal power is closely tied to the concept of 'valuing self'. If you do not value your self, no one else will value you. How you value yourself can be obvious in the simple act of walking into the room. Joan noted that women tend to wait at the back upon entering a room and suggests that instead we try the attitude of "I'm really worth knowing and if you are very lucky I'll come and talk to you". A number of ways are possible to correctly value self: write job applications, carry out a skills audit on yourself, review your achievements on a regular basis and focus on the positives. Remember that everyone has something to contribute. Do not undervalue you contribution and your skills whether you are contributing at home, in the community or at work. If you haven't already, expunge the phrase "I'm just a ..." from your vocabulary!

One ramification of this under valuing of self was highlighted by Robyn Crane when she pointed out that too many women are reluctant to apply for positions as they consider that they don't have the right qualifications. Men however will tend to have a go and may in fact get the job!

So behaviour matters! In general:

- ☒ Expect to be treated on your merits.
- ☒ Always behave professionally, work within your ethics and have respect for co-workers. Be true to your own values.
- ☒ You can't do it by yourself and you must lift as you climb otherwise there is a danger of becoming a dictator. Joan stated that if you are doing well, you also have responsibility to ensure others are doing well. In other words, "I am not just ambitious for myself but also for other women and the community".

A Weekend with Joan Kirner cont.

- ☞ Don't portray yourself as a victim – if you do this you will eventually act like a victim. A victim can not be an agent for change.
- ☞ Avoid the trap of playing gender games.
- ☞ Be wary of falling into the culture through a desire to be seen as part of the team. This won't change the system. If you want change, don't be frightened to challenge.
- ☞ Language is important. Language can be used to exclude, be careful to use language that is inclusive.

I particularly liked the phrase Joan suggested when dealing with someone exhibiting bad behaviour: "Do you think your behaviour is adding to our ability to resolve the problem."

Understanding the dynamics of power in a meeting is important whether it be at work, in the community or at home. Jane stated that she hoped no one was under the impression that decision making occurs at meetings, usually decisions are only endorsed or varied. If you wish to be effective at meetings

- Shape the agenda.
- Have all the information ready.
- Have the numbers, get people on side before hand by providing a shared sense of purpose.
- Develop a meeting strategy e.g. decide when to defer an issue.
- Ensure there a minutes and that they are accurate. Ensure there is an action list with actionee and timing.

Remember people who are affected by a decision, need and are entitled to be involved in that decision.

Leadership is also necessary and two of the assets of leadership which were touched upon were:

- ☞ A clear sense of purpose. There must be ownership of the goal, but achieving the goal should be broken manageable and measurable chunks.
- ☞ Confidence along with a valuing of self. A good leader crates space and openness to allow people to contribute, knowing that their contribution will be valued. A sense of humanity and being in touch with other people is required.

And finally networking is important! Do people favours and then expect them to be returned – remember to ask! Value what you know and who you know! Joan Kirner and Robyn Crane both acknowledged that they could not have obtained the positions they did without the support of friends and families, especially their husbands.

Some final thoughts:

- ☞ To be successful you must be prepared to work hard. You will require a tough shell and a sense of humour is a great help.
- ☞ No one is perfect, we can't do all things at all times. There will be times when you get it wrong, take the opportunity to pause and reassess how to do it.
- ☞ And remember the price of freedom is eternal vigilance!