

Key note speaker Lene Espersen 7 of May 2015

Inner Wheel convention

Thanks a lot for the invitation to make this key note speech for you today.

When I talked to the organizers of this convention They asked me to speak for 10 minutes about being a woman in a very male dominated world – and what to do about it.

First let me point out I have always had high self esteem. Being the oldest of three sister my parents gave me responsibility and trusted my judgement,. This is the foundation every set of parents should give to their kids.

You need to believe in your self. And trust your values.

I grew up in a small fishing village in the north of Denmark, coming from a family of fourth th generation fishermen and fish exporters.

I did not fancy ending up with heering and mackerel as my partners – I wanted to study medicine – and was fortunately (is there any such thing as luck or is it destiny) to apply to United World Colleges where I was elected to represent Denmark on an international school in Canada with full scholarship.

It change my life completely. Being send all across the Atlantic ocean and the American continent to British Columbia – living with 200 students from 80 different countries – made me curious to understand the world and I became very self reliant.

When I returned home to Denmark – I did not want to study medicine, but economics and international affairs. I graduated and worked for a couple of years in the private sector. Then I ran as a candidate for the Parliament and was actually elected. Wauw!

For some reason the media has always had a keen interest in me. I was elected with two other young women representing the conservative party . We were “ nick named”. April , May and June. And never ever have the press called three young men in politics **Huey, Dewey and Louie.**

This just made us more close and more determined to have success.

Madeleine Albright once said:

I love being a woman and I was not one of these women who rose through professional life by wearing men's clothes or looking masculine. I loved wearing bright colors and being who I am.

I was exactly the same. I became MP at the age of 28 and wanted to dress accordingly. So I got another nick name. The talking cleavage.

There was justice. So even though the press apparently wanted to put very chauvanistic descriptions on me, it

didn't seem to bother the voters because I had through hard work and lots of cooperation with other MP's made a lot of real benefits and progress for my voters. So I ended up for consecutive elections being the conservative politician with the most personal votes.

When I became Minister in the Cabinet I started off for seven years as minister for justice and home affairs – in US terms attorney general. This was in 2001 just after the 9-11 terror attack on US. I gave birth to my first born son 2 weeks after being appointed minister and had a short maternity leave of 5 weeks. I was immediately (by some "expert" – a woman of course) named unnatural mother (ravnemor). I think hundreds of men before me became a father while they were a minister, No one ever accused them of being a bad father.

I wanted to tell you these small glimpses from my past because it is evidence that women and men are still not treated the same.

SO what to we do about it. Well I decided to rather show than tell. I let a network follow me for 1/2 a year to show everybody that I was able to be a good mother and an excellent minister, I was supported by my family and colleagues and most importantly my husband. This is my advice number one. Always make your spouse your equal

and demand the same from him (except breast feeding)
han can give a bottle of milk though.

Secondly . You deserve a career as much as your better half. So tell him/ her to help at home – the cooking, laundry, bringing out the garbage. Otherwise you end up giving up on your dreams.

‘Thirdly remember another wise quote from M.A:

I also think it is important for women to help one another. I have a saying: There is a special place in hell for women who don't.”

— Madeleine Albright

If we dont support each other – don’t expect the men to do so.

Fourthly as I started up by saying. Believe in yourself. I you are in trouble remember the wise words of Michael Jackson . Start with “the man / woman in the mirror”. Don ´t make yourself a victim but control your own destiny.

A famous Danish Writer Karen Blixen – you probably remember Meryl Streeps interpretation of her I Out of Africa “ once said: First God created man , then he created

the woman. I do the same thing. First I create a draft – afterword I create the real thing.

I love strong women – and try to encourage young women to choose the same paths as other women with success. We are able to do that if you don't perceive our selves as the weak sex .- and this is also the reason why I despise women Quotas. I want to be chosen because I'm the best.

I would like to wrap up by quoting another strong young girl - Pippi Longstocking who said. :

When you are extra strong you have a special obligation to me nice to other. Remember that.

Thanks for giving me the floor.