

EWMD Intl. e.V. 2010 Basel Conference – Sept. 4, 2010
Nicole Meissner / Opening Speech

Dear **EWMD members**, dear **guests**, dear **speakers** and - being in such a nice environment - dear **Novartis employees**, we are happy and proud to be hosted today for our 26th' conference of EWMD in such a nice setting.

This even more so as Novartis is our newest addition to our prestigious group of **corporate members**.

I would like to take this opportunity to first and foremost thank our Sponsors for this conference, who have made this event possible:

Sandoz

Microsoft

Hexal

Ernst & Young

And - as mentioned - **Novartis**.

Thanks a lot for your support!!

This conference is a good example of the **resources and capabilities** of both our individual members with their **devotion and energy** for the EWMD topics and our corporate members with their **organizational backbone, structure and resources**. Combining these forces enable us to become as a unit much larger and more efficient than the sum of the individual parts.

Hence, I am looking forward to a day packed with **inspiration** and new **insights** and last but not least a good share of **networking**.

Coming to our topic of today I can only say: **It is about time!**

Women tend to be **patient**.

And here I am not only talking about the last 26 years we have been trying to enhance the presence of women in management positions with our activities in EWMD – I am talking about the last - say - 2000 years.

We have been silently waiting to contribute our share to the worlds dealings but progress has been slow.

For sure we do **not want to deny the differences** between the genders and for some occupations one might be **more capable or suitable** to fulfill the task than the other.

If you want some **woodcutting** in a forest, it might not be a good idea to ask someone who weights less than 60 kg with freshly manicured fingernails...

On the other hand, if all men had a built-in desire (and ability) to make a big career, somebody would need to explain the existence of **male bus drivers**.

What is it that keeps women from moving up the ranks? Certainly it is **not a lack of mental agility or intellectual capability**.

But perhaps two other factors do play a major role: different **style in communication** and the **socio-economic environment**.

With regards to the latter there is currently an interesting book published by the French philosopher **Elisabeth Badinter** – who until recently was a professor at the Ecole polytechnique and also sits on a supervisory board and has raised 3 children. She talks about the **conflict of women trying to be mothers** and still having an equal role to men in their professional life.

Some societies do not support the **idea of a working mother** very well.

This is not so much only a question of adequate offers for childcare – but even more an **emotional approach** by the society as such.

The German word “**Rabenmutter**” illustrates this nicely – or should I say not so nicely. It labels a mother who is uncaring to her child for going to work instead of staying at home.

With this approach **Germany as a society is currently paying the price**. There are only **1.3 children per woman** – compared to almost 2 in France.

Apparently, quite a few young women in this country are opting for a professional career instead of having a family, as they are not allowed to have both without a constant bad conscience and great personal sacrifices.

And on the other hand, those who do **opt for the family** are probably lost for the business world for quite some time and most often are facing a **career setback**.

In order to overcome this dilemma, **we need to change the mindset from within**.

When it comes to the other factor – the **communication style** – yes, there are differences.

But whoever said that all has to be the same? This is the **core concept of diversity**.

Cats and dogs don't get along too well if they never had encountered each other before. A **cat wagging her tail** is about to attack, while a **dog might** misinterpret this signal as a **very friendly** gesture.

However, if you raise them together, they would still display the same behavior, but would not misunderstand the other and get along pretty well.

A similar thing happens in upper management. Women in decision boards might be perceived as an irritating factor when they follow their habit to question given hierarchies and looking at issues and problems from a completely different and sometimes more emotional angle than a man would do.

Yet again, once we see more men being exposed to this type of communication; they might be able to appreciate and value the different approach.

This leads me to talk about **gender representation in decision boards**:

According to a recent study, the **US** is a lot better than Europe, but yet on a very low level of **15,2 % of women** being represented in decision making board of the **Fortune 500** companies.

In Europe, taking **Germany** as an example, another study shows only **2,5 % of female members** in management boards of the largest **200 companies**. For supervisory boards the situation is slightly better, but only because most of the large companies have a statutory employee representation.

These results have been confirmed by our very own **EWMD Study “Women on Board”** where we have taken a closer look at the situation in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. Here, we have also asked for **success factors** which have been relevant for the few ladies who made it to the top in these countries.

The named **self-confidence, assertiveness and a structured career planning** amongst the top factors.

In all of the above, **mentoring** might be a forceful tool to help women to understand and develop the necessary skills for **advancing in their careers**.

And on the other side of the fence: the **more senior male mentors** are confronted with the obstacles young female managers have to overcome, all the more this might also **change their own perception**.

Now, the mere **concept of mentoring** is a very male oriented scheme. Mentor was the name of the man **Odysseus** was bestowing the **education of his son** upon, while he was away. He was asking him to teach him **“all a man would need to know”**.

So yes, it is **hierarchical** and it is designed to go **from senior to junior**. Most mentors currently in charge will be men. But taking my cat & dog example – it can work both ways and make both sides understand each other a bit better.

A good mentoring relationship will be most **rewarding for both participants**, not only in a positive outcome for the

career development but also in the process of personal growth during the discussions.

Most of our **corporate members** have long ago realized what a **powerful enabler** a mentoring program can be and have their own designs up and running.

Today, we will receive input from some of these companies as well as from the participants side.

What are the **tricks of the trade** to make this a successful journey?

Can we measure the output?

Is being a mentee a secure ticket for the next career move?

And from the perspective of EWMD – is there also a way to **rethink this concept** to get a more “**female touch**”?

Bear with us and be inspired through the coming hours.

Leading more into this topic it is now a pleasure for me to hand over to our moderators for today to lead us through an exiting journey!