

## The Fearless Girl Speech – Bea Knecht, May 25, 2019



Let's talk about career and life goals. We generally don't reach them by chance. Rather, we must plot a path, expend effort, and be resilient, because experience shows we generally don't reach our goals on the first try.

A career is more than just work. A career implies that we have people who follow us because we influence them positively. I'll talk about how to achieve this:

- First, by gaining expert status
- Second, through tool use
- Third, through culture blending and bending
- Fourth, through directive communication

Let's start with gaining expert status. It takes time to gain expert status. As a rule of thumb, it takes 10'000 hours, or 5 years at 2000 working hours each, to reach expert status. Women generally need more time on this path, because we have more interruptions on our way than men (due to offspring, care for the elderly, or working models that discriminate against women).

This is a big challenge for equality. Equality requires equal qualification. If you have to undergo brain or heart surgery, you wouldn't want a surgeon to operate on you without full education and residency.

The good news is that age 40 isn't too late to gain expert status. An outstanding example is Nancy Pelosi. She gave birth to five children and then returned to politics and is now the most powerful woman in the US.

To gain expert status, pick a topic. Think big. Think long term. Plan. Add in feasible intermediate steps. Improvise where necessary, but don't improvise the whole path. We can't improvise our way to chief physician status. We have to accept sacrifices during our apprenticeship.

On to the second point, the use of tools: We are increasingly living in a world of tools. There are tools for communicating and managing projects in different regions, programming tools, mechanical or robotic tools. Men see tools as an extension of their body. Just look in the garage of your friend or look at his laptop. The challenge for women is that we use fewer tools. Think about that. Become proficient with tools. Embrace them.

Third, company culture: a company may claim that gender equality is part of its HR strategy. But as you know, «culture eats strategy for breakfast». When women go where men are, women need to understand the culture we find there. That culture has usually grown over many years and is steeped in tradition. How does this work?

For example, men expect from each other (often idiotic) proofs of allegiance to their group, their society, their team, their company. Think of cruel entrance rituals in fraternities.

In return, men expect that they will later be rewarded for their proven loyalty – which is idiotic as well, because actual skill would be a better filter for who gets the promotion.

Once men have gained the lead, they must endure the loneliness associated with it. Not to be loved by all? A normal condition for many men. They live with that.

Men have a sportsman-like relationship with their colleagues. Like women, they certainly do not all like colleagues, but they realize a soccer team requires 11 people to properly play the sport. So if necessary, they include team members for the greater good, not because they like them.

Men can also be generous instead of being envious: When they see a colleague's nice new car, they're less likely envious in the sense that «he does not deserve this car», and more likely to think «I want that car too». Men also don't hesitate to grab a chance for a promotion.

In order for women to play in male-dominated organizations, we have to adapt.

We women are so much in need of harmony! We do not want to work with people we do not like. So we suppress conflicts before they even occur.

Unfortunately, we thereby also prevent great joint endeavors that are possible only with the contribution of all stakeholders. Let us be a little more pragmatic. Let us practice not being liked by all or not doing well with everyone, and yet still constructively working with them.

We women often hesitate. Men will not repeatedly suggest a promotion to a woman after she has repeatedly delayed accepting it or turned it down. By our weighing of all factors - understandably, because we women often also think of our environment - the chance is already gone. We're shooting ourselves in the foot. Instead, I recommend domestic partners discuss their career ambitions at home in advance, so that they may be prepared once opportunity strikes. On the way there, we need coaching. Find a coach. Better yet, find a sponsor.

Fourth point: Nobody has the time to find out what we want. If we want something, we have to articulate it, make ourselves heard, build alliances and demand it. It's silly to always be friendly and nice. We need to say no when necessary. Otherwise we are considered stupid. If we generally communicate carefully and consultatively, rather than in directive style, we may have to learn being more assertive.

That does not mean being bossy. Bossy is wrong. But say what's up.

## **Show resilience**

On our career path we will inevitably think about giving up. That's when we need to show resilience: The ability to jump back into shape through flexibility / elasticity, and the power of self re-creation after traumatic deformation or failure.

Reasons for giving up may include:

- First, when we are repeatedly ignored or overlooked at work
- Second, when we are persistently bullied
- Third, when we suffer violence
- Fourth, after having failed badly

First, how to overcome being consistently ignored. Show realistic, solution-oriented optimism:

- Start by yourself. Do not wait for others.
- Build a target image. Add puzzle pieces to the target image. Outline solutions, then test these solutions.
- Show a network orientation. Carry your inner monologue outwards. Talk to others about plans and goals, share stories of success and failure, learn from them, share knowledge, and let them validate your proposed solution.
- Show perseverance. Don't throw in the towel immediately. Remember, only with tenacity we will accumulate the 10'000 hours it takes to be an expert.

Second, recognize when we are bullied or deliberately misguided.

There is a form of bullying that is obvious. With gaslighting, it isn't obvious. The victim trusts the perpetrators and their manipulative statements. Over time, the victim begins to doubt his or her memory, perception and mind. This form of manipulation leads to a shift in the perception of reality.

If you suspect being gaslighted, try triangulating: Illuminate the situation by adding perspectives of freshly brought in people who do not have an affiliation with those who are gaslighting you.

Third, how to overcome a shock? Are we to continue blaming ourselves? Think of Professor Ford. After such an incident, contact with others, and even just accomplishing everyday tasks, may be difficult. Our outlook may be bleak. We may be afraid of the future. We may struggle with our destiny. Why did this happen to me, we ask ourselves?

Like Seinfeld says: «pain is knowledge rushing to fill a void.» All you can do is accept what happened. Move forward from here.

Fourth point: Recover from catastrophic failure.

Knowing how to fail, and accepting failure, is an important skill in a world where everything is changing. We have to constantly reorient ourselves. We no longer have one career during our lives. Flexibility is the model of the future.

Incidentally, men have more problems with that than women.

Let us instead practice self-efficacy: the belief in ourselves. Let's look forward. Let's make new plans. Let's not get stuck in the problem for too long.

## Conclusion

I spoke of careers and life goals because I like to pass on what I learned.

We live longer. Women will make up a larger percentage of the workforce. These changes give us a chance to make our work more enjoyable and rewarding.

In order for us to reap the harvest of all this advice, I end my speech with a laudation to our health. Men who marry are healthier than men who stay alone. So much is already clear. Many studies show this.

What can we all deduce from that? That women should be even better spouses?

No, the best we can do for our health is to nurture our relationship with friends. Let's help each other in stressful situations and difficult life experiences.

By networking, mixing with existing friends and finding new friends, we are doing something good for our health – and that applies to all of us, men and women!

So let's foster our being together and our health!



### **Bea Knecht**

Bea Knecht is the founder of Zattoo and a member of the Board of Zattoo. Prior to co-founding Zattoo, Bea built banking, HR, and datacenter automation software for large banks, enterprise software providers and a Silicon Valley startup and served as associate partner at a strategy consulting firm. Bea holds a BA in Computer Science from the University of California (Berkeley) and an MBA degree from IMD in Lausanne, Switzerland. (photo: KEYSTONE/Gaëtan Bally)