

Leadership Confession

by Petra Brask

The aircraft's window pane feels cold when I thoughtfully lean my head towards it. I glance over the soft cottonlike clouds without really seeing them. My mind is still at the conference center at the mighty ocean near Ystad, in south of Sweden. I already miss the people I have met for the first time in my life. In less than a week, they have become so close to me that it feels like we shared a lifetime. My intention was to evaluate the quality of the trainers, looking for talents to another project I am leading. Therefore, I was clueless as to what would happen to me.

“What happened on that leadership training, Mom?” It’s been a few days since I came home and my daughter’s eyes are sweeping thoughtfully over my face. “You’re different.” I smile and ask if she means different good or different bad. She takes a deep breath and says. “You are happier and have more energy. You always do, but you are calmer now.

How do you react when you are in new a group? How comfortable do you feel? What thoughts and perhaps prejudices do you have?

That and more on team performance I would experience and learn when my taxi stopped outside the conference center on Monday after a very confusing taxi ride from Sturup Airport. Sometimes I am amazed at some taxi drivers’ lack of direction.

For five days, I would get a clear map on team performance and the art of going from an inefficient team to high performance team, but I would also find a new place in myself.

We were eight expectant leaders from organizations and companies throughout Sweden. Three men and five women. Our trainers are Måns Lindblom and Gudbjörg Petursdottir (yes, she is from Iceland). The other participants were yet unnamed and unknown to me. I only knew that the two experienced trainers were psychologists and looked competent enough to deal with a world catastrophe.

During the evening of day one, I had a nice conversation with two of the other participants, and we found that we had already learned so much. We understood a team’s process and their development stages. We had learned key factors needed to create effective teams with people who have space to display their talent. “But I hope it gets a little more intense emotionally. I have colleagues that have taken this course and cried all week. “Says a composed dark-haired woman. Cried?! Why would we do that? I immediately think that it is not for me since I’m mostly here as an observer.

The next day started with more tests and group exercises where we had to evaluate each other. Everyone was still in a fairly good spirit, even though we struggled with numbers and the art of giving feedback based on the first impression we had of one another. It’s not easy to sit in front of a new acquaintance, and express yourself in terms of whether you feel that they want to control others or not, if you feel they include you and are open in their communication. We still had no idea that this was just the beginning.

On Wednesday we were a happy and relaxed group. And the trials began. We were tested to our limits. The exercises were suddenly not as comfortable anymore. We were expressing our greatest fears. “What are you lying to yourself about?” I got a lump in my throat, when a man in the group said. “I sometimes lie to myself about knowing more than I really do. I wonder when the world will see that I am a fraud. ” A woman on his left said, “Thank you. “And with emotion she continued. “I sometimes lie to myself that I’m better than everyone else.” When it was my turn, I just wanted to say. “I do not know, I cannot think of anything.” And that’s when the trainers said. “If you feel that you cannot think of anything, please look extra carefully for the answers within yourself. Continue the exercise. “That was all that I needed. And what a relief. Imagine being there in front of strangers with whom you feel comfortable and having to recognize your imperfections as if it was the most

natural thing in the world.

You who read this blog may wonder what on earth I am talking about? What did I get myself into? Haven't you heard of similar experiments in the 70s? Maybe I would have thought the same if someone had told me.

The ultimate test of our team efficiency and increased leadership skills were noticed in the final exercise on Friday. We were asked to choose the most appropriate leader for our group. We did not know then that even after such a knowledge-filled week, only 20% would succeed in appointing a leader within the time frame. They gave us 30 minutes. What if we would not make it?

Each day contained reflection, exercise, theory and exercises. Every minute the trainers tied a closer bond between us. In the end of the week we were surprised to have shared our life stories. I cannot remember when I did cry so much and yet laugh at the same time. And it was a long time ago when it seemed so easy to be a human.

It was painful to leave my new friends on Friday afternoon. Still I longed so much to get back to my main team, my beloved children and husband.

A warm thank you to the trainers and the participants of this important week in my life. I wish I had received this knowledge long ago. Thank you to my friend Anna, who already took this training, for your caring coaching throughout the week. Thanks to all of us. My family met a little different, but calmer and happier mom.

Wishing you a whole weekend

Petra Brask

"Daring to admit your weakness to others is great, but to admit it to yourself is greater."
Johan Wiklund (1962 –)