Women's Empowerment Principles
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A THOUSAND REASONS FOR SEVEN PRINCIPLES

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Ladies and gentlemen

Equality means business. This is my deepest conviction. Equality is not just a question of justice and fairness, but also a question of economic reason. Now we all know that the economy doesn't always act rationally. If this would've been so, we wouldn't have to be here today to launch the seven women's empowerment principles. Economic rationality is part and parcel of a historic and social context. What is considered economic, rational and fair in one era can be highly questionable in another cultural and historic period. In this regard, I don't see fairness and justice and the economic benefits of equality as contradictory terms, but rather as closely interwoven lines of argument in the here and now, not only in Switzerland but also in the international context.

Every form of justice, every form of rationality must be negotiated as part of the social discourse, must be supported by a certain majority of the population, and changes over time. If we look at the posters and arguments used more than 40 years ago to oppose voting rights for women in Switzerland today, we have to smile or think them absurd. But at that time the majority of people saw the issue differently. And in 50 or 100 years from now, our descendants will hopefully smile about our current discussions and campaigns to raise awareness of equal rights when the equal participation of women in the economy will be taken for granted. You will notice that I'm an optimist. But even if that were the case social change requires that we regularly re-examine the actual status of the equality of men and women, and also of Swiss people and foreigners, of young and old, time and time again.

But now I would like to convince you that investments in equality are profitable for every company. Very often such investments aren't even expensive but simply require a new mindset, with new images in our heads and the willingness to try something new for a change. As ten minutes isn't enough time for me to list 1,000 reasons, I'll focus on just a few, but hopefully convincing, reasons.

If we in Europe wish to survive in the face of global competition, we need **innovation, creativity** and **commitment**. You can achieve this in your company if you are committed to equality. I'll tell you why:

1. Innovation requires an open management culture (principle 1) and the inclusion of "other" perspectives
2. Sustainable profits are founded on fairness and transparency (principles 2, 3 and 7)
3. Equal treatment improves the quality of management (principles 4 and 7)
4. Equality motivates people to take a critical look at their own convictions
5. Equal treatment leads to better use of available resources and the adjustment of existing structures (principles 4 and 5, partly also 6)

Ad 1: An article in the «Sonntagszeitung» in mid-February carried the headline «When intelligent people take idiotic decisions». This refers to the concept of «groupthink». Groups that work closely together, where all the group members think in a similar manner and develop a strong consensus run the risk of taking the wrong decisions. The financial crisis clearly demonstrated what happens when dissenters are excluded and ignored. A management culture that is open to other perspectives and allows a «sensitive listing to counterrealities», that gives enough room for manoeuvre, and does not look for scapegoats is usually more innovative and successful than strict monocultures.

Yes, it's more difficult to explain our business logic to a new team member, but there's a chance that the critical questions of my new colleague will let me recognise blind spots, and that a sensible look at my current processes will allow me to continuously improve my business. Thanks to their experiences, their socialisation background and social roles, women often bring new perspectives to a company. Performance studies such as the cited McKinsey study as well as other studies don't conclude that women are better people or better managers than men. The results are often shaped by the inclusion of «dissidents», or «diversities», people who think differently, who, with their view or with their questions contribute to the introduction of improvements, new product ideas, and new processes in a company.

Ad 2: Companies have a social responsibility, and there are various ways of living up to this responsibility. In any case it's clear that companies who accept this responsibility and don't turn a blind eye to injustice are more successful in the long term. Transparency and fairness are the mainstays of relationships that are viable in the long term: the Confederation and larger companies can use their procurement units to ensure equality of wages, for example, or give an order to a young company run by women. SMEs, on the other hand, can give female employees who took a break to have children the chance to return to work, or accommodate the requests of young fathers and mothers to work part-time. These employees are certain to remain loyal if they are treated fairly, receive fair wages and have career opportunities that suit their personal skills. These employees will remain with the company through a crisis or a period of rapid growth that requires an extra effort on the part of the workforce. Specifically as an SME, maybe located in a less attractive region, you'll find it increasingly difficult to find good people. Can you as a company really afford to ignore 50% of your potential workforce? If you have an image as a company that isn't very sympathetic towards families or women, you'll find it difficult in the coming years to recruit the best employees. Good and very good employees can choose where they want to work. And these days, a good work-life balance is one of the most important factors influencing the choice of employer for the majority of well-educated people, much more important, for example, than salary, as has been confirmed by a number of studies. At this point I would like to mention the tools and materials provided by the Federal Office for Gender Equality, which you'll find outside in the foyer, including Logib, a free tool that you can use to find out quickly if you have problems with wage discrimination in your business.

Ad 3: I now come to my third argument, «Equal treatment improves the quality of management», and would like to give you a few examples from my experience as a consultant. When we introduce equality controlling in a company or an NPO – not a very spectacular measure per se – in nine out of ten cases we also see an improvement in other management processes and tools. Equality controlling simply means that one or two binding equality objectives are derived top-down from the company's strategic objectives and implemented, and that this process is reviewed regularly (as part of the normal reporting cycle and using the normal controlling instruments). At a large bank, for example, this resulted in the adoption of a more professional approach for the entire HR Controlling unit as the bank noticed that it was very time-consuming to prepare statistics separately by gender. The HR Controlling unit was consequently restructured. In a media company our small intervention resulted in the revision of the entire employee assessment process. The company noticed that gender effects systematically distorted the assessments and therefore also the performance salaries. The process itself and the criteria that apply to the employee performance assessment were therefore reviewed and the managerial staff was trained to be aware of the traps of stereotypical judgements when assessing performance. None of this was part of our mandate or even our intention, but the "gender lens" which we turned on these companies and the questions we asked exposed the weaknesses in their management processes and instruments. Repairing these weaknesses brought these companies efficiency gains.

Ad 4: This point is often the most difficult for all of us, but at the same time also the «most cost-efficient»ß to implement. Thinking for yourself doesn't cost anything. Why can't I imagine that a woman with three children can also be a top manager? She must by necessity be able to delegate and organise very well. Why do I think that the young father who wants to work part-time is not committed enough? Doesn't he demonstrate extreme commitment through his wish to also play an important role in his family? Why do I always think I have to check on my female employee's work, but I can trust my male employee to do his best without my supervision? Why can't a woman manage a tunnel construction site? Why should a man not be a good kindergarten teacher? As manager you can accomplish much if you support someone who doesn't choose to live in a role-conforming manner. It really demands courage for a woman or a man to choose a career that is not typical for their gender. If you as manager support someone like this, you create a ripple effect. You underline that it's OK, you create rolemodels which others can follow, and you make a major contribution to the open

management culture mentioned under point 1. Obviously you should carefully back and support the career of someone like this, but you can be sure of their loyalty because you have given them a chance.

Ad 5: Every company needs employees who do more than agreed in their contracts, employees who give creative intellectual input. From an economic viewpoint it is irrational to let a good female employee go after the birth of her child instead of complying with her request to work part-time. Every new appointment to middle management costs a company between 60,000 and 130,000 francs. This includes advertising the job, going through the recruitment process, inducting the employee, not to mention the loss of know-how and the risk of employing the wrong person. It will always be cheaper to reorganise the work and enable a good employee to work part-time. Often this will in any case be temporary only, as the employee might be happy to increase her working hours again after a few years. In Switzerland around half a million women with a secondary or tertiary qualification are unemployed or employed part-time at a level far beneath their qualification. You don't have to be an expert in statistics and economics to understand that this is a waste of a very important resource. At the same time we have armies of managers who suffer burnout, which again leads to enormous costs. Here it might be a good idea to ask what we think is "normal" in a company. Nobody can work productively for 60 or more hours per week. How many meetings are really necessary? Can the issue not be discussed via telephone conference or cleared up by e-mail? What budgeting processes are sensible, and to what extent? Are the career paths offered by our company really the only ones that make sense? How many hours in the office are needed in which management positions? Might it not be more important to be reachable rather than available on site? Wouldn’t it be better to lead result-oriented? An open management culture will then necessarily also lead to structural adjustments.

Women are not better people than men, but interpersonal communication in a spirit of partnership aiming for equality will make every company and every society more successful in the long run. As a company you play a key role in this process of change, and you should take this responsibility seriously. You will gain

- a high degree of loyalty and commitment from your employees,
- new perspectives,
- more efficiency,
- better quality,
- more innovation
- and more inner freedom.

Thank you very much for your attention.