

LEADERS in Action

Jason Womack interviews VALERIE EGAN



Valerie Egan is responsible for Girl Scouts of the USA's Talent Acquisition, providing strategic direction to enhance candidate experience. Before joining GSUSA, Valerie held recruitment roles at Linde and AT&T. Valerie has experience working for Merrill Lynch in human resources, specializing in technology and college recruitment and employee relations. She holds a B.S. in Marketing Management from St. Peter's College and an MBA from Pace University. For the past 13 years, Valerie has been a member of the Morris County NJ Chapter of SHRM holding leadership positions including Vice-President of Programming and President.

Q&A

Jason Womack: *Do you have a simple way to think about how leaders get better?*

Valerie Egan: Leaders get better by leading. From my experience, leaders can improve two skills: preparation and follow up. Success often comes down to "being prepared." Leaders will benefit from creating time to adequately prepare for a meeting, whether they are attending or leading the session.

The best leaders anticipate what will come up, and will be prepared to bring clarity to the situation. Bring a fresh perspective, a new way of looking at the topic of discussion.

Document your conversations and the decisions that were made. Clarify what people want. The more efficient leaders are in running meetings and hallway conversations, the more easily everyone can focus on the big picture, the larger goals of the organization and your department. Step up, take mental or written notes, and pay attention to the feedback.

JW: *What was your Defining Moment as a leader?*

VE: I once worked with a recruiter said to me, "I have done all the recruiting, I've gotten all the candidates, and the client is flip-flopping. I'm at a total loss." She was at a total loss and had to rely on me. I felt that I needed to help her rebuild from the foundation.

I know there is always a process, steps and stages to build from. Everyone appreciates a backstory, it helps leaders understand how things work, and then they can gain a clearer appreciation for what's being done.

Q&A with Valerie Egan

From the private sector to serving in the nonprofit world, Valerie Egan shares how she listens, communicates and leads.

This interview encourages leaders to take mental and/or written notes, pay attention to feedback and body language, and clarify intentions.

Continued

JW: *What will leaders increasingly need to include that up until now they may not have had to study in great detail?*

VE: Leaders should be able to share their experiences: what they have learned, how they have changed and how they may have turned something around.

If [a candidate?] said to me, “Here are the 10 things I’ve learned, 5 of them were successes and 5 were failures,” I’d be very interested in listening.

There is also much to be learned from feedback. It is the way leaders grow. By evaluating the things that are harder for me to do or accept, I’m equipped to be more open in the future, to see something new or different.

JW: *What do you think are the most important questions effective leaders need to ask of themselves?*

VE: Ask yourself “How am I communicating? How am I leading?” Leaders need to influence in various mediums: face to face, over the phone, via email and through video. The workplace is spreading beyond the office, and leaders need to be aware and connected even if they don’t have a physical presence in an office.

In the past, managers would work side by side with their colleagues and team. Today, many still sharing space, while others work remotely. Leaders will have to learn to connect with remote team members and be accessible.

JW: *Are there questions that leaders ask themselves regularly?*

VE: “Am I still learning something?” Throughout my career, I continue learning new things. I even moved between divisions in organizations I worked for in the past.

Most recently, I’ve moved from the private sector to serving in the non-profit world and even though I’ve been in the talent acquisition world for 25 years, I’m still learning.

JW: *How do you listen — and what do you listen for — so you hear more than what is just being said by those you lead?*

VE: I ask for stories. If I ask someone to give me an example, we get beyond the facts.

I note everything - especially body language - because their words might be different than what their body is expressing. Sometimes, people need assurance that they are being heard. They want to trust that they can share, but past experiences may be clouding their ability to answer the prompt you’re giving.

JW: *How would you define your leadership philosophy in just one sentence?*

VE: Ask the question you want the answer to.

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