

Speech Marry de Gaay Fortman, WILL, 31 January 2014

1: introductie en statement

As the chair of the Round Tables and as the chair of WILL 2014, I take great pleasure in having been allowed to open this conference.

This conference where a large number of ambitious and talented professionals has gathered. Good for you that you are here; most welcome!

I would like to begin by making an important statement: Can we, can you, in this world, make the difference, socially and businesswise (and I stress both!)?

My answer, with full conviction, is: Yes we can and we WILL!

And this conviction is the reason I'm standing here to create - together with all invited speakers and with you - a basis / a platform that may contribute to further developing this ambition.

2: wat is will / ontstaansgeschiedenis en ambitie

But first some things have to be explainedwhat is WILL exactly? What is Women in Law & Leadership?

To me it is very clear in any event what we DON'T want to be. WILL is not a new feminist movement. The group of self-confident female professionals we wish to address and of which group you are representatives, have already made the choice for a career. WILL is not a platform to discuss the "them and us" differences of viewpoints between men and women.

What IS it about then? It is about me BELIEVING – from my 25 years of experience in various social and managerial positions –

that women need women (and sometimes just 1.....) to make progress in their career or to get more balanced teams especially in those environments where the number of women in top positions is significantly underrepresented.

A good real-life exampleCarolien Gehrels, elderman of Amsterdam, has seen to it that in the past five years at least 1/3rd of all assignments for both managerial and supervisory positions in participating businesses must be womensometimes 1 influential woman is needed.....and that is true at all levels.

The deeper-rooted motivation for me being here has to do with the fact that I also BELIEVE in the effectiveness of gender diversity in the make-up of teams. Research has shown, and it's been my personal experience, that more diversity within management boards/teams leads to better decision-making (with better results), to more innovation and more connection.

What is more.....and by all means important to observe Men and women learn from each other and reinforce each otherand more than that.....in terms of leadership.....where male and female leadership come together and may be complementary to each other, people's performance improves. Wherever. Any which way! Yes, we can make the difference and we WILL!

WILL - as a network platform - is a significant instrument that can contribute to this.

I would like to take you back in time. It was early 2004, I was Managing Partner at Houthoff Buruma and I received an email from the former director of OSR, Ank van Eekelen. She wanted to organise meetings for female lawyers only.

I hesitated.....I liked networking, but networking for women only.....? That is when I was called by Mirjam de Blecourt (Board Member at Baker and Mckenzie). It was the first time we spoke

each other...we immediately clicked. We then met for the first time, and this was how the foundation was laid for the first Round Table (Woman Leaders in Law). The female partners of the 15 largest law firms were approached and at the first meeting our godmother, Els Swaab, gave a very inspiring speech to us!

The theme of this first meeting was "the position of the female lawyer". All the persons present brought along facts & figures from their firms. It was special and at some moments hilarious.....but also frustrating. All these intelligent, involved and passionate womenhow sad to see their ambitions being so marginalized in the representation of their firms.

The Round Table grew into an intimate meeting place for inspiration, for bonding between supposed competitors and for cooperation. We learnt from one another! The scope of the function of the Round Table became broader and themes such as leadership, personal development and career were discussed with each other in an open and confidential atmospherean important function for many of usfor more than 10 years.....how time flies.

One of the outcomes of our network became the creation of the Woman Leadership Program, organised and developed by OSR.

The aim of the program was to help young female lawyers to achieve their ambitions. An important instrument for this was the Mentoring Programme. Young lawyers were linked to a partner of another firm.....and were able to discuss personal subjects in a confidential settinga system that works very wellwith visible results. Since then OSR has trained more than 100 female lawyers and 36 % of the participants has since become a partner! Some of them are present today, Inge de Laat, Kamla Be anson, Nathalie Eeken.

The meetings spread unchecked..... and after a while also female top politicians and female top executives in the business services sector in the Netherlands soon followed and gave speeches. The network broadened and the themes were not only approached from a purely lawyer's perspective but were connected with the social context. Experiences were exchanged, contacts made, the passion for the profession, ambition, social involvement and female leadership being the main themes.

The network has since expanded to such extent, that apart from the Round Table a platform is needed – with a broader reach. To achieve even more connection and to get inspired, not only in the Netherlands but eventually also internationally. That is the ambition for the next 10 years! A network for women in legal top positions not only in the legal sector but also in the corporate sector and government. Marjan Bastiaan, director of OSR, has taken the first steps and she will inform you about this soon.

And here I am, in wonderful Amsterdam...more than 10 years after that first e-mail and call....."Marry do you want to set up a women's network.....?"

[3. visie op netwerken \(algemeen en gericht\)](#)

It may be clear that the network – in my view – is very important. A network delivers! Networks connect and broaden horizons. They are not only of importance from a career perspective and essential businesswise, butabove all things they also build a bridge between the corporate sector, politics and society.

And my advice in this respect is....make use of it and participate! Don't be too critical but dare to experience. Also at our firm, Houthoff Buruma, I sometimes experience that female talents are cautious about women networks. They do not want to be stigmatised... but my message is: it is not about "being a woman" ... Don't be cautious and too critical (men don't do that either, actually,

in that respect we can learn from them).... It also helps to understand the importance of bonding. Make use of it

But: do be critical on what you spend your time on. Networking is essential but...do it focussed...do it very focussed!

I get my energy from those activities and networks that can make a contribution to society. That's what I invest in. It makes it possible that as an attorney I can operate at the interface between the public and private sector in socially and politically sensitive matters. Something I like doing most of all.

Also my social efforts and activities are focussed. For example, the deeper-rooted motivation for me to join the board of MVO / CSR Netherlands (Corporate Social Responsibility) is because I believe in sustainable development. On the basis of that conviction I commit myself to such an organisation and to people who play a part in that field of influence.....that is how I try to contribute.....very focussed.

As you will notice today's speakers are focussed women, each of them in their own way. I mention Nancy McKinstry, Corinne Vigreux, Mirjam de Blécourt, Laura Empson, Heleen Dura van Oord, Princess Mabel van Oranje and Nice Nailantei Leng'ete.

[4. uitnodiging tot actieve participatie WILL en afsluiting](#)

It is no coincidence that you are here. Those of you who have heard me giving a speech before, know that I believe in "synchronicity"which was defined by Carl Gustav Jung as the situation where two or more events are meaningfully related, where something else than just coincidence is at stake. Also for today I hope and assume that a special connection will be accomplished and that added value is created in areas that we could not have thought of before. That is why we should dare to anticipate the things that happenand things are created....

Women in Law & Leadershipa new network and new leadership programmesconnecting female legal top professionals and leaders, that is good news, a fine initiative. Thanks to OSR.

That is why I am grateful for having been given the opportunity to open this conference. Boardrooms are changing ("Davos" slowly changes colour).....but I have faith. Yes we can make a difference...and we WILL.

Thank you!

Marry de Gaay Fortman, partner Houthoff Buruma and chair WILL
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