

# IMF Chief Christine Lagarde on Leadership and Crisis Management

*The following are excerpts of an interview by Lillian Cunningham published July 13 in the Washington Post.*

Question: How do you define leadership?

Answer: To me, leadership is about encouraging people. It's about stimulating them. It's about enabling them to achieve what they can achieve — and to do that with a purpose.

Others would call it a “vision” but I'd rather use “purpose” because I think that everybody has a purpose in life and that when collectively people work together or practice sport together, they have a joint purpose.

Q: How have you transitioned between managing short-term and long-term challenges?

A: On dealing with [an IMF internal crisis and an external crisis when I arrived], it was a question of making sure that everybody was on deck, prepared to deal with the issues and completely motivated by the mission of the fund — which is to make sure that we put all our expertise, our money, our technical assistance and our ability to advise together to fight the crisis and to procure some stability.

I have a theory that women are generally given space and appointed to jobs when the situation is tough. I've observed that in many instances. In times of crisis women eventually are called upon to sort out the mess, face the difficult issues and be completely focused on restoring the situation.

Q: Have you learned anything about your own leadership skills or weaknesses from leading during a time of crisis?

A: I learned that you can constantly improve and that you should not be shy about your views and about the direction that you believe is right.

I also learn constantly about how much people can achieve, how much they can give, how much they can go beyond themselves, step out of their comfort zone and give a lot more than they ever thought they would or that you ever expected them to do.

And it's a constant process to learn how much you should step in after having listened and how much the team you work with can exceed your expectations.

Q: Words that constantly come up in describing you are “charismatic,” “presence,” “ability to command a room.” Do you have any advice on how to cultivate those traits?

A: It's a question of feeling confident about yourself — being reconciled with your own identity and your own body. ... The second step is about being honest and telling the truth.

Q: What's the best piece of leadership advice anyone's given you?

A: There's one encouragement that I was given once by my American father in the family I stayed

with when I was 17. Whenever I had tough times he would say: “Don’t let the [negative people] get you.” [That means] Hang on with the work that you are doing and just don’t give up.

Stand up.

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