



Dagrun Dvergsdal.

## Dagrun Dvergsdal: 'Character building creates strong leaders'

Dvergsdal Consulting AS takes an unusual approach to leadership development. Its highly skilled and educated team helps leaders and organisations to build strength of character, which they believe is the cornerstone to great leadership.

By Line Elise Svanevik | Photos: Dvergsdal Consulting AS

Backed by a diverse team made up of clinical psychologists, theologians and doctoral graduates, CEO Dagrun Dvergsdal believes that what makes her company unique is the varied competencies and skillsets amongst her consultants. "Our team knows a great deal about leadership and organisations, and they know about teaching and experience-based pedagogics," Dvergsdal explains. "We also need to have clinical competency in

order to be sensitive to the diverse needs of our clients."

While building a basis for her practical approach, Dvergsdal has sought inspiration from many prominent scientists and authors, among them Jim Collins. She has also had conversations with Charles Handy and has worked together with Jim Collins on a leadership development programme.

After many years with organisation development work in Aker Solutions Oil & Gas, Dvergsdal did a short stint working for London-based Creative Learning Consultants. Realising she was bringing in a majority of the clients, Dvergsdal decided to set up on her own in Oslo, Norway. "I realised I had a methodology and clients that I could continue to develop on, and it was the very subject and being true to my ideas that became my starting point," she says.

### Meeting customers where they are

The consulting business works across many different sectors, yet manages to create specifically tailor-made solutions

for each and every individual and business it works with, instead of taking a one-fits-all approach. "It is a very complex thing to do – there are many working hours you don't get paid for when you aim to create an individual approach to each client. We make cases on the company's own projects, which could be a success project, but it's almost easier to create awareness through the projects that give them a pain in the stomach," she says.

During first encounters with new clients, Dvergsdal listens to the examples they provide to figure out whether they can make a case out of it. "We create real leadership situations and expose the leaders to these situations while video-taping the sessions. Then they have the opportunity to make their own observations and discoveries as they watch the video-taped material. In order to support people in expanding their competence, we are looking for unused, or potential, resources that can be made accessible. For each person to become the best leader they can be is the goal."

Dvergsdal recently worked with a client who had decided he wanted to quit being a leader. "After working together for a while, he said to me 'you managed to start with me and my actual situation – otherwise it wouldn't have worked'. We need to meet the clients where they are, for example by sitting in on their meet-

ings and listening and observing before we begin," she explains. This client did not quit – he became a very successful leader of extremely complex projects.

### Developing awareness and expanding capability

Dvergsdal believes that leaders should build and develop their strength of character rather than be provided with tools that brighten the CV and provide quick fixes. "We think that quality is the most important thing, and we contribute to providing quality leaders that help the individual, the company and society," she says.

"We want leaders to mature and get a value-base to stand on; they shouldn't be closed to new opportunities – they should be humble enough to continue to learn," she continues. "If we focus on measuring tools, then we get a 'diagnosis', and we believe that makes people stuck where they are, rather than providing them with an appetite for learning and developing. In the classic expert role, I would find out what's wrong and provide a solution, but I'm much more of an enabler – I meet people where they are."

### Building trust to save time and money

Dvergsdal's book *Expanding your leadership – a journey towards building character* addresses these issues. For three years, she worked with the management team at Kværner's Edvard Grieg project,

which won the highly acclaimed Project of the Year 2016 title by Petroleum Economist.

Her approach to working with the team was to try to quickly establish an atmosphere of openness and trust, while attending directly to their present situation and ongoing challenges. In order to achieve this, she chose working methods characterised by an open and direct dialogue, for example by addressing the 'what' and 'how' of each person's prioritised leader tasks and offering feedback.

In doing it this way, she deliberately chose not to use a test or laboratory-like approach lacking in connection to the everyday life of the team. While reflecting on the team-building process in retrospect, team members underlined the crucial importance of really listening to and learning to trust each other.

This increased the essential quality of being able to make good decisions continuously and in time, thus enhancing the overall efficiency of the project. "Considering that time is money, there can be no doubt that trust was important for the business," says Dvergsdal. "In this sense, profit and so-called soft values go very well together."

For more information, please visit: [www.dvergsdalconsulting.no](http://www.dvergsdalconsulting.no)



Expanding your leadership versus traditional leader development

#### Essential concepts:

- 1- Expansion of competence versus repairing weaknesses
- 2- Fundamental discoveries versus correction of actions
- 3- Discover by learning impulses versus teaching someone to..
- 4- Character-building versus instrumental approach
- 5- Learning from within versus general input from the outside

*"To work with Dvergsdal Consulting is so much more than a journey in one's own consciousness and the development of leadership skills. Where others practise individual skills, Dvergsdal manages to take leadership development to include the whole team as a producing group, and where the experience becomes that we are one. We become magical when the leaders give their genuine dedication to their individual tasks as well as each other's. Then it becomes a team performance and, for me, that makes the whole difference in how I want to act as a leader."*

– Eva Kristensen, managing director of Ulstein Design & Solutions AS