



# It's time for women to run for office

Halla Tomasdottir

0:11 I feel incredibly lucky to be from a country that's generally considered to be the best place in the world to be a woman.

0:23 In 1975, when I was seven years old, women in Iceland went on a strike. They did no work that day, whether they held professional jobs or had the work of the home. They marched into the center of Reykjavík -- 90 percent of women participated -- and peacefully and in solidarity asked for equality. Nothing worked in Iceland that day, because nothing works when women are not at work.

1:04 Five years later, Icelanders had the courage to be the first country in the world to democratically elect a woman as their president. I will never forget this day, that President Vigdís, as we know her by her first name, stepped out on the balcony of her own home, a single mom with her daughter by her side as she had won.

1:36 This woman was an incredible role model for me and everyone growing up at that time, including boys. She frequently shares the story of how a young boy approached her after a couple of terms in office and asked, "Can boys really grow up to be president?"

1:57 Role models really matter, but even with such strong role models who I am so grateful for, when I was encouraged to run for president, my first reaction was, "Who am I to run for president? Who am I to be president?"

2:16 It turns out that women are less likely to consider running

than men. So a study done in the US in 2011 showed that 62 percent of men had considered running for office, but 45 percent of women. That's gap of 16 percentage points, and it's the same gap that existed a decade earlier. And it really is a shame, because I am so convinced that the world is in real need for women leaders and more principle-based leadership in general.

2:55 So my decision to run ultimately came down to the fact that I felt that I had to do my bit, even if I had no political experience, to step up and try to be part of creating the world that will make sense and be sustainable for our kids, and a world where we truly allow both our boys and girls to be all they can be.

3:30 And it was the journey of my life. It was amazing. The journey started with potentially as many as 20 candidates. It boiled down to nine candidates qualifying, and ultimately the race came down to four of us, three men and me.

4:07 I can assure you we had our own drama in Iceland. So our sitting president of 20 years announced initially that he was not going to run, which is probably what gave rise to so many candidates considering running. Then later he changed his mind when our prime minister resigned following the infamous Panama Papers that implicated him and his family. And there was a popular protest in Iceland, so the sitting president thought they needed a trusted leader. A few days later, relations to his wife and her family's companies were also discovered in the Panama Papers, and so he withdrew from the race again. Before doing so, he said he was doing that because now there were two qualified men who he felt could fill his shoes running for office.

5:04 So on May 9, 45 days before election day, it was not looking too good for me. I did not even make the graph in the newspaper. The polls had me at 1 percent, but that was still the highest that any woman announcing her candidacy had earned. So it would be an understatement to say that I had to work extremely hard to get my seat at the table and access to television, because the network decided that they would only include those with 2.5 percent or more in the polls in the first TV debate. I found out on the afternoon of the first TV debate that I would participate along with the three men, and I found out on live TV that I came in at exactly 2.5 percent on the day of the first TV debate.

6:06 So, challenges. The foremost challenges I had to face and

overcome on this journey had to do with media, muscle and money. Let's start with media. There are those who say gender doesn't matter when it comes to media and politics. I can't say that I agree. It proved harder for me to both get access and airtime in media. As a matter of fact, the leading candidate appeared in broadcast media 87 times in the months leading up to the elections, whereas I appeared 31 times. And I am not saying media is doing this consciously. I think largely this has to do with unconscious bias, because in media, much like everywhere else, we have both conscious and unconscious bias, and we need to have the courage to talk about it if we want to change it.

6:57 When I finally got access to TV, the first question I got was, "Are you going to quit?" And that was a hard one. But of course, with 1 percent to 2.5 percent in the polls, maybe it's understandable. But media really matters, and every time I appeared on TV, we saw and experienced a rise in the polls, so I know firsthand how much this matters and why we have to talk about it. I was the only one out of the final four candidates that never got a front page interview. I was sometimes left out of the questions asked of all other candidates and out of coverage about the elections. So I did face this, but I will say this to compliment the Icelandic media. I got few if any comments about my hair and pantsuit.

7:47 So kudos to them. But there is another experience that's very important. I ran as an independent candidate, not with any political party or muscle behind me. That lack of experience and lack of access to resources probably came at a cost to our campaign, but it also allowed us to innovate and do politics differently. We ran a positive campaign, and we probably changed the tone of the election for others by doing that. It may be the reason why I had less airtime on TV, because I wanted to show other contenders respect.

8:29 When access to media proved to be so difficult, we ran our own media. I ran live Facebook sessions where I took questions from voters on anything and responded on the spot. And we put all the questions I got and all the answers on an open Facebook because we thought transparency is important if you want to establish trust. And when reaching young voters proved to be challenging, I became a Snapchatter. I got young people to teach me how to do that, and I used every filter on Snapchat during the last part of the campaign. And I actually had to use a lot of humor and humility, as I was very bad at it. But we grew the following amongst young people by doing that. So it's

possible to run a different type of campaign.

9:18 But unfortunately, one cannot talk about politics without mentioning money. I am sad that it is that way, but it's true, and we had less financial resources than the other candidates. This probably was partly due to the fact that I think I had a harder time asking for financial support. And maybe I also had the ambition to do more with less. Some would call that very womanly of me.

But even with one third the media, one third the financial resources, and only an entrepreneurial team, but an amazing team, we managed to surprise everyone on election night, when the first numbers came in. I surprised myself, as you may see in that photo.

10:10 So the first numbers, I came in neck to neck to the leading candidate.

10:23 Well, too early, because I didn't quite pull that, but I came in second, and we went a long way from the one percent, with nearly a third of the vote, and we beat the polls by an unprecedented margin, or 10 percentage points above what the last poll came in at.

10:41 Some people call me the real winner of the election because of this, and there are many people who encouraged me to run again. But what really makes me proud is to know that I earned proportionately higher percentage support from the young people, and a lot of people encouraged my daughter to run in 2040.

11:09 She is 13, and she had never been on TV before. And on election day, I observed her on TV repeatedly, and she was smart, she was self-confident, she was sincere, and she was supportive of her mother. This was probably the highlight of my campaign.

11:35 But there was another one. These are preschool girls out on a walk, and they found a poster of me on a bus stop, and they saw the need to kiss it.

11:46 This picture was really enough of a win for me. What we

see, we can be. So screw fear and challenges.

11:58 It matters that women run, and it's time for women to run for office, be it the office of the CEO or the office of the president. I also managed to put an impression on your very own "New Yorker." I earned a new title, "A living emoji of sincerity."

12:23 It is possibly my proudest title yet, and the reason is that women too often get penalized for using what I call their emotional capital, but I know from experience that we become so good when we do just that.

12:46 And we need more of that.

12:50 We celebrated as if we had won on election night, because that's how we felt. So you don't necessarily have to reach that office. You just have to go for it, and you, your family, your friends, everyone working with you, if you do it well, you will grow beyond anything you will experience before.

13:11 So we had a good time, and I learned a lot on this journey, probably more lessons than I can share here in the time we have today. But rest assured, it was hard work. I lost a lot of sleep during those months. It took resilience and perseverance to not quit, but I learned something that I knew before on the one percent day, and that is that you can only be good when you are truly, authentically listening to your own voice and working in alignment with that. As a good sister of mine sometimes says, you may cheat on your intuition, but your intuition never cheats on you.

13:58 I think it's also very important, and you all know this, that on any journey you go on, it's the team you take along. It's having people around you who share your values, your vision, but are different in every other way. That's the formula for success for me, and I am blessed with an amazing husband, here today, an incredible family --

14:23 and great friends, and we came together as entrepreneurs in the political arena, and pulled something off that everyone said would be impossible. As a matter of fact, the leading PR expert told me before I made my decision that I would do well to get seven percent. I appreciated his perspective, because he was probably right, and he was basing it on valuable experience. But on the one percent day, I decided here to show him that he was wrong.

14:53 It's very important to mention this, because I did lose a lot of sleep, and I worked hard, and so did the people with me. We

can never go the distance if we forget to take care of ourselves. And it's two things that I think are very important in that, in surrounding yourself with people and practices that nourish you, but it's equally important, maybe even more important, to have the courage to get rid of people and practices that take away your energy, including the wonderful bloggers and commentators. I took a lot of support from others in doing this, and I made the decision to go high when others went low, and that's partly how I kept my energy going throughout all of this. And when I lost my energy for a moment -- and I did from time to time, it wasn't easy -- I went back to why I decided to run, and how I had decided to run my own race.

15:48 I called it a 4G campaign, the G's representing the Icelandic words. And the first one is called "Gagn." I ran to do good, to be of service, and I wanted servant leadership to be at the center of how I worked and everybody else in the campaign. Second one is "Gleði," or joy. I decided to enjoy the journey. There was a lot to be taken out of the journey, no matter if the destination was reached or not. And I tried my utmost to inspire others to do so as well. Third is "Gagnsæi." I was open to any questions. I kept no secrets, and it was all open, on Facebook and websites. Because I think if you're choosing your president, you deserve answers to your questions. Last but not least, I don't need to explain that in this room, we ran on the principle of Girlpower.

16:47 I am incredibly glad that I had the courage to run, to risk failure but receive success on so many levels. I can't tell you that it was easy, but I can tell you, and I think my entire team will agree with me, that it was worth it.

17:32 PM: I can't let you go without saying that probably everybody in the room is ready to move to Iceland and vote for you. But of course we probably can't vote there, but one thing we can get from Iceland and have always gotten is inspiration. I mean, I'm old enough to remember 1975 when all the Icelandic women walked out, and that really was a very big factor in launching the women's movement. You made a reference to it earlier. I'd love to bring the picture back up and just have us remember what it was like when a country came to a standstill. And then what you may not know because our American media did not report it, the Icelandic women walked out again on Monday. Right?

18:13 HT: Yes, they did. PM: Can you tell us about that?

18:16 HT: Yes, so 41 years after the original strike, we may be the best place in the world to be a woman, but our work isn't

done. So at 2:38pm on Monday, women in Iceland left work, because that's when they had earned their day's salary.

18:47 What's really cool about this is that young women and men participated in greater numbers than before, because it is time that we close the pay gap.

19:01 PM: So I'm not going to ask Halla to commit right now to what she's doing next, but I will say that you'd have a very large volunteer army should you decide to do that again. Thank you Halla.