

Remise des insignes de Chevalier dans l'Ordre national du Mérite à Florence Jeantet

(18 septembre 2018, Résidence de France à La Haye)

*Discours prononcé par Florence Jeantet, Vice-présidente Développement par
l'Innovation de Danone Baby Nutrition et Présidente du comité Pays-Bas des
Conseillers du Commerce Extérieur de la France*

Thank You Monsieur L'Ambassadeur, thank you for welcoming us here at the Residence de France tonight, a highly symbolic location for this ceremony.

Dear Friends, Colleagues, this is a very special moment for me to be here in front of you, an immense honor to receive this distinction from my Country, France... this is also as intimidating as the first question that came to my mind when I was informed about this great news ... Why me?

It did cross my mind that this is maybe because I am a woman, parity becoming the request ... dear ladies, for once this may have been a chance ... and a woman visible in a large Company but also contributing to represent France abroad thanks to my role as "Conseiller au Conseil Economique" and more recently as Chairwoman of this department.

So, an expatriated woman for many years now cumulating, juggling with being a woman at managing my sweet home, being a spouse, a mother, a leader at high level in a large French company Danone, while trying to continue to support, help and listen to as many people as possible... all this with a high level of exigence towards myself, but also with people, those closest to me, (sorry about that!)

This distinction has only a meaning for me if I dedicate it to all the women present here tonight or thinking about us wherever they are, not able to be here physically today, I dedicate it also to the women of my Family who made and are still making who I am today.

I know I share with You all the challenge to cope with multiple daily lives but there is only one, Our life!

So, dear ladies, tonight this is for you and I am only of You!

Is there any recipe to be here in front of you, distinguished, I do not think so, I am looking for it everywhere, but like you I know that the ingredients are, my personal history of life, lessons I have learnt through it and without any doubt all the people I have met, people that mark, imprint, reassure, but also time to time push me/us to go beyond oneself.

This distinction comes at an important turn / moment in my life, an emblematic birthday that coquetry forced me not to disclose. This is the moment to thank women who did structure me, built who I am, have impacted the first decades of my life... without any doubt my Great Grand Mother, my Grand Mother and my Mother who have educated me. 3 generations of women who went through all the 20th centuries massive changes and still did every day miracles to keep all the family happy, proud, healthy and educated. I have inherited from them courage, self-abnegation to help others, obsession to progress but also an immense desire to be free and independent ... I am the first one, the first generation who did it ... you have the beginning of the key of my beautiful and easy character, but also my profound attachment to freedom for me and for others.

They have also taught me that to obtain freedom but also to defend it. Education at high-level will be essential. This is how I went through my Studies, till the end with a lot of success, and all at Public School or Public system. My thoughts and Thank You go to all my teachers and professors, who already, with not too many means, or facilities, in a small town in the south of France managed to transmit pleasure and importance to learn, curiosity, rewards from hard work, and who are still following what happen to me till know.

Learning of exigence, rigor, resilience came during my «classes préparatoires» Only the French can understand.

After all these steps, I was at last equipped to start exploring and experimenting with my freedom but to also defend it .

At this stage, this is essential for me to think about and thank the Man of my Family - my Grandfathers, my father, who fought and risked their life's to defend our values, our freedom. They made the exemplary choice of engagement, went beyond their own existence because that was the most important and the only possible choice to be in line with who they were, or are.

This is not an easy legacy, but fortunately, in my comfortable life none of the decisions I have to make are that difficult nor critical... this is never the freedom of the nation, only, just My teams, to achieve some targets, figures... a little more simple... this is where my sense of duty from my people and for others, my sense of responsibilities, consideration for decisions and consequences come from ..I / we have Always the choice!

I should admit here that I am not always able to manage the emotion, that passion that I put on some discussions, some actions... never forget I come from the South of Europe... and this is always with best intentions... Sorry and apologies if I have hurt some of You 🙏

During my Professional carrier I have been very fortunate, both at Danone and at Unilever, to be managed by remarkable bosses – « big Bosses», able to live with these important values for me every day, always concerned and caring for the team's first and still remaining loyal to their duties and Company. They saw me much bigger than I have ever seen myself, opening for me incredible opportunities that brought me here today.

Except Bridgette Heller, who is here today, they have all been male. They all have been / are exceptional leaders that I continue to admire and thank them sincerely!

I want to thank them also because they did not consider me as a woman but as a professional, while being for most of those years, the only woman amongst them, in technical or business function typically male functions...remember quotas did not exist, nor "heforShe" or "Eve". This did help me to clearly understand that men and women do not operate, nor feel in the same way. Consequently, the only way out was to adapt myself to this male world where most of the time I was the stranger. A world where recognition or expression of needs have to be voiced... this is not going by itself. Ladies, they are not decoding at the office, neither at home... I should have been aware by now, an example of my own beloved father that still today "I have simply done what I had to do" and seems I was OK"... so why such a buzz. I tell you there is a big benefit, it does teach you modesty, and ability to "stay in your place" but it did at least for me generate the anger / the acharnement to move away from this status of servility, eagerness to fight for my freedom, egalite, recognition of all as individuals, not as women! You understand why This distinction today has a very symbolic meaning, a little revanche from a long-lasting obligation. So, dear gentlemen, please think about your daughters, your wife and women colleagues... Equality is not a given, as with freedom it has still to be acquired and defended every day and often at a high cost (at least an emotional one)

Too sum up not easy to sum up in the person, the feminist, the feminine handle power... and remain with a healthy spirit.

At this moment, I have to turn to Bridgette and thank her, beyond being my boss, but the amazing role model inspiring many of us! Thank You!

This time to thank my teams, today and past teams for all what I have learnt from them, but also for all these incredible human relationships... I exist and was existing as colleague or leader, and be able to successful because it is You individually and collectively. Thank You all. Thank you for your understanding, unconditional support in many occasions, for your sense of humor, for our big laughter and tears.

It would have been even more difficult without precious and inremplacable help of my dear PA / EA, personal assistant... the true power women behind the curtains managing much more than my agenda, but my life with extreme rigor and kindness. They are always there to listen to the team when I cannot, excuse, support myself on my bad days... Without You my life will be hell, will never be able to combine my job and other activities, like attending the Conseil des Conseillers economiques. Esther, Lorraine, a big big thank you!

And this is thanks or due to this representation as Conseiller au conseil Econonique for more than 10 years already, and chairwomen for about 24 months that we are here! A very special thank You to You Mathieu for embarking me in this process, your kindness and hard work with us. Thank You to my CCEF colleagues, a noble assembly, for the quality time but also fun we spend together, in spite very busy duties, we always find a way. And together, I believe we give a nice image of what is France today, thanks to our diversity, our Companies we belong to, our roles and competences, our personalities. This is also La France of today!

I have also a home Sweet home to run... A big thank you to Mahjouba, Salome' Nanny, but much more ... a "mother" substitute also for me, With Esther, they are the key of my organization and mental health.

My life will not be the same taste without unconditional friendship I am nurturing from the deepest of my heart. Friends are the family that we choose and this is even more true when we are far away from home sweet home. With These Friends for 30-45 years, for some more recently we are sharing the high and the low of our life, this has no value and I have no words to express how essential this is for me. A big, big thank You for the ones who have been able to do it today – the dates was a challenge for many, for the others we will celebrate also later.

My story will not be complete without thanking my dear husband, Jean-Claude.

A big thank for you, walking our life path together for now already for 18 years, we are a solid couple of quite stubborn and independent individuals... this is not "a long calm river" But I should confess that in my life balance I may not give you the space, the recognition that you deserve... but I know you are here, always ... so, I should say it Merci and I love You!

I wish to close with few words for my beloved Salome, my daughter, thank you for who you are and who you are becoming ... but please now this is about You finding your way, your woman way, free I hope but this is going to be YOUR choice. The way I found, the way that is distinguished today is My way... this should not be anything else than a source of reflection, no pressure, no competition... I know this moment is also special and important for you, but I wish that this day / moment stay as a reminder that what is important is the way / path but the end nor the destination"

Sorry, if it was a little long, Hope that I did not forget anyone!

A huge thank You to all of you for being here, to be who you are on my Way... and this medal is also Yours!