

ACHIEVING STATUS

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*OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES: WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP IN
FIRMS AND CORPORATE LEGAL DEPARTMENTS TELEPHONE SEMINAR
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- I. Over the past 20 some odd years that I've been practicing law, women have achieved a place at the table, yet it is still true that the percentage of women who are sitting at the head of the table is quite low. For example, the March 1999 American Lawyer, which was dedicated to "Women in the Law— The Story of the Century— how far have women traveled," showed that even in firms where there are a large percentage of women attorneys, relatively few make partner and even fewer are managing partners or on the management committee. A recent Texas Lawyer carried an article on the low percentage of tenured faculty at Texas law schools.¹ Although the numbers of women partners in law firms have increased dramatically over the past 20 years, "No question, there is a subtle cultural bias that makes it more difficult...Women have to be better to be seen...," says Marina Park, Managing Partner for Pillsbury Madison & Sutro.²
 - A. This paper will address some of the practices of successful women in our culture so that we can determine whether to make changes in our lifestyles and workstyles to enable us to become successful.
- II. What do successful women leaders actually do to achieve status and build credibility as leaders.³
 - A. Key factor is self esteem/self confidence — allows women to perform well in a variety of settings, for example:
 1. To seize and maintain control over situations;
 2. To put your ideas across and follow through with ideas;

¹Texas Lawyer, November 30, 1998; "Dean Denies Vote Denotes Glass Ceiling"; Janet Elliott.

²American Lawyer, March 1999; "There's something about Mary"; Susan Beck.

³Banks, Cristina G., Ph.D.; Ostroff, Cheri L., B.A.; Souter, Elizabeth J., B.A., Final Report: "Motivations, Aspirations, Perceptions, Opinions and Work Styles of Leadership Texas Women"; University of Texas at Austin, 1983.

3. To establish contacts with people you do not know who will be helpful sometime in the future;
4. To present an appearance of being in charge;
5. To have influence over others by convincing them you are right; and
6. To stand up for your beliefs even though they are unpopular.

B. Personal traits

1. Sense of humor - - useful for getting out of tight spots like personal attacks, establishing friendly relationships with people, overcoming discouragements, appearing approachable to others;
2. Flexibility--useful for juggling career and family obligations and demands, reducing stress by creating “breathing room” and opening self up to opportunities;
3. Dedication--useful for focusing on important issues and following through when it is needed, sustaining effort on difficult tasks and guiding efforts in a meaningful direction;
4. Responsible--involves taking responsibility for actions and decisions, accepting consequences of actions, building integrity and respect; and
5. Decisive--involves the ability to take a stand and stick by it, and lets others know what you care about.

C. Organizational savvy

1. Knowing who the powerful members of the organization are;
2. Knowing how the game is played; and
3. Knowing how best to utilize others’ talents and expertise.

D. Interpersonal styles

1. Know the facts and lay out rationale thoroughly;
2. Determine why others are having trouble with our idea and address their concerns;

3. If not able to convince others with rational argument, consider using bargaining and negotiating or trading favors or cashing in chips;
 4. When need to enlist cooperation of peers but project is not a priority for the peer, but cannot be completed without the peer's assistance try:
 - a. Meeting with peer one-on-one; tell why project is important and why peer's input is essential to its success.
 - b. Make it easy for the peer to assist; do all the background work.
 - c. If all else fails, bargain, negotiate or call in chips.
 5. It is important to establish credibility through image building by actively developing personal contacts.
 - a. Become a known quantity in the work place.
 - b. Let others know how you can help them.
 6. Learn whose experience to utilize and establish contacts with them before you need assistance; and
 7. In handling personal attacks do not respond with direct confrontation; say "Let's get back to the issue" or "That's not relevant" or "I understand why you feel so strongly, but I don't agree" or "Let's keep this on a business level".
- E. Professional appearance--dress for the part and don't wear anything distracting. Women are still judged by their appearance.
1. Although we may not need to wear the floppy bow ties which were so prevalent in the 70's, a recent test by the Austin American Statesman concluded that the Ally McBeal style (the TV lawyer with tiny skirts) does not work for real attorneys. "The men transformed her from an attorney to a sex object," commented Susan Douglas, a communications professor at the University of Michigan and a visiting professor at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas this fall.⁴

III. While I certainly agree with and utilize the practices that the women in the survey discussed,

⁴Austin-American Statesman, January 4, 1999, "Ally for a Day", Section E, p. 6.

there are some additional skills that I have found to be invaluable.

- A. Communication skills are essential for articulating one's own view point and understanding others.
 - 1. Public speaking skills are helpful whether one is presenting a report to a small group or saying a few words at the annual holiday festivities.

- B. Leadership/Management skills are equally essential. No matter how well versed you are in some esoteric area of the law, success brings with it the responsibility of managing. There is no magic to good management. Management skills are learned.
 - 1. The major task of a manager is to be a problem solver.
 - a. Typical kinds of problems which managers must solve include — organization personnel skills, analysis of work flow, establishing and monitoring meaningful report systems, operating a liaison between the system and the employees.
 - 2. In today's organizations, one must also be a leader. There are five ingredients that are key to developing good leadership in today's environment according to Joseph Jaworski, Chairman and CEO of America Leadership Forum.⁵
 - a. Compelling vision and the capacity to translate the vision into reality;
 - b. Power with the capacity to mobilize people and the resources to get things done;
 - c. Congruent, exemplifying the highest values of the organization;
 - d. Entrepreneurial with the capacity to recontextualize a situation by developing fresh approached to long standing problems; and
 - e. Transforming with the capacity to direct people through fundamental change: personal, institutional and societal; encouraging personal renewal which in turn can lead to organizational or societal renewal.

- C. Although one of our greatest assets is sensitivity, developing a thick skin is a must. We cannot afford the energy it takes to be upset when someone is insulting or condescending.

⁵Best of Business, 1985; Joseph Jaworski.

1. In a study by Mary Ann Devanna, she said the most successful women did not become bitter, they “accepted the social reality and operated within that context.”⁶
 2. Ms. Devanna also felt it was critical to successful women to have developed their own internal standards of excellence.
- D. Last on the list, but probably first in importance is working out a compromise between work and family with which we and our families are comfortable.
1. If we plan to establish a reputation, drop out of the workforce or cut back work hours significantly to rear a family, and then return, we must plan extensive and expensive re-tooling. Continuing legal education is required in Texas, but it is essential for the woman who is taking a break from her career to parent to maintain knowledge of changes in the field and to maintain communication with attorneys with whom she has worked in the past. It is often necessary to plan to return to law school for some additional credits prior to returning to a full time career.
 2. In dual career families, the lowest stress levels occur in marriages where both spouses want to be employed and both share the housework and child care. “Involvement of wives and husbands appears to be more equal in dual career families,” nonetheless, “wives in dual career families tend to report perceptions of inequity even though participation by both spouses was reported to be rather equal.”⁷
 3. An aspect of success is supportive family relationships. The operative concept here is that male/female support is generally seen as a dependency. Ideally, “spousal support is an interpersonal process involving both giving and receiving as well as mutual empowerment and strength...by understanding and reconceptualizing the relation between gender and dependency, we can move beyond viewing dependency as a characteristic on which wives and husbands differ to viewing dependency as a complex interpersonal process that serves as a vehicle for the development of mutuality between partners.”⁸

⁶Mary Ann Devanna is Research Coordinator at Columbia University School’s Center for Research in Career Development.

⁷Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, Feb. 1993, v. 28, “Spouses’ Family Work Participation and Its Relation to Wives’ Occupational Level”; L. Suzanne Dancer and Lucia Albino Gilbert.

⁸Psychology of Women Quarterly, 1994, vol. 18; “Reclaiming and Returning Gender to Context”; Lucia Albino Gilbert.