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the magazine of professional coaching

BREAKING *the* GLASS CEILING

Coaching women
in leadership



VOLUME 18 • NUMBER 2
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From The Publisher

As I write this, we are in the midst of one of the most impactful situations we have ever seen in our lives. The coronavirus and the measures taken to try to stop the spread of COVID-19 continue to impact us, our families and our clients.

We will dedicate the next issue of *choice* specifically to how coaches can offer solutions to the 'new normal.' In the meantime, we can be thankful for the heroes that have risen to the support of others, especially our front line workers – most of whom are women – and thank them for continuing to be there for us despite the risk to their lives and those of the loved ones to whom they go home every day.

That group of heroes is what this issue is all about and remains a very important topic of our day: Women in Leadership!

A huge thanks to everyone who supported us with their ideas and articles. As I'm not the direct target market (but of course a huge supporter and hopefully an influencer), I relied heavily on everyone from our team as well as the writers to educate me and help with the look and feel of this issue.

I think we all learned a lot in the production of this issue of *choice*. Hearing the perspectives of the great women coaches and non-coach leaders is inspiring. Reading what women struggle with and what they put up with is amazing and on a certain level very disappointing.

What will it take to equalize the ratio of women in leadership? How can women leaders still be women in a world that is still mostly dominated by men? What will it take for women to be taken seriously as leaders?

Women have within them a unique power and style of leadership. Of course, each woman has their own unique style within that feminine leadership context.

Reading these articles, you will find a common conversation and a supportive community. Stay in touch with these women! Follow their leadership journey. Create your own. Share your own path in a positive constructive way. Be supportive and highlight other women leaders.

As many writers within these pages have advised women at all levels of leadership: be confident, don't try to be a man, stand your ground, set your goals, of course, work with a coach, belong to a supportive community, be mindful and self-aware, and by all means, own your own power.

Please join this conversation in our community and via the revitalized weekly blog at choice-online.com/blog

We hope you enjoy the great articles we have published inside these pages. It is our pleasure to source, edit and publish each issue. •

GARRY SCHLEIFER, PCC, CMC
CEO & PUBLISHER



From The Managing Editor

As women in business, women in leadership, and just women in the working world, we all have stories to tell. Some are horrific, others frustrating. What I love about this issue of *choice* is that every writer without exception encourages a positive approach to the challenges women face in navigating what is sadly still seen as a 'man's world.'

Our opening feature, "The Burden of Greatness" by Marcia Reynolds, looks at the unique challenges of high-achieving women. Next up, Chariti Gent explores how professional coaching can help all women in the workplace. Wendy Capland writes next about the 10 ways women might be sabotaging themselves as leaders, and how you can help them as a coach.

Valerie Pelan writes eloquently about how company culture creates a two-tiered system for women leaders in her feature article, aptly titled "An Uneven Playing Field." Terrie Lupberger is next with a feature exploring what to look for to maximize impact when coaching women leaders. Next, Doris Helge advises that coaching women leaders to be assertive and resolve conflicts starts with self-leadership.

And it doesn't end there! Marva Sadler provides her top 10 tips every woman needs to stand her ground boldly, confidently and powerfully. Carrie Arnold explores why women are often put in a position of "leading while silenced," and how they can reclaim their voices. Jenn Chloupek has an article about how to coach around the "controllables" and help women SHED limiting beliefs. And our final feature by Maria Connolly and Louise Santiago looks at female power through the lens of nine skills to create a supportive community.

Thanks to all of these amazing women for sharing their wisdom, insights and encouragement in the pages of *choice*. We hope you are as inspired as we are! •

JANET LEES, B.JOURN.

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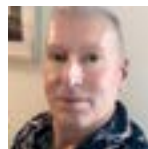
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Terrie combines her organizational experience with life-long studies in human potential that has resulted in a unique world view and approach to helping change makers grow their impact on the world. Terrie shares her ideas and experience in her upcoming book, *Looking on the Blind Side*, out in late 2020.

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Live Strong

What makes women happy consists of identifying and cultivating *strong moments*; moments that have very particular qualities.

By Kat Knecht, PCC, CPCC

When I saw the theme for this edition of choice Magazine, “Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Coaching Women in Leadership,” I knew immediately which book to choose: *Find Your Strongest Life*, by Marcus Buckingham. The book offers excellent guidelines on doing exactly that.

Find Your Strongest Life has had a positive personal impact on me and the coaching I do with women. The subtitle sums up the contents well: *What the happiest and most successful women do differently*.

Buckingham has made great contributions to the Gallup Organization’s discovery of what drives success and is the author of many books on the topic of strengths and how to put them to work.

“What makes women happy consists of identifying and cultivating strong moments; moments that have very particular qualities.”

This book begins with the author’s assessment of The Ten Myths about the lives of women. These myths opened my eyes to new truths and shed light on the confusion many women feel about why they are not happy.

Here are a few examples:

MYTH: As a result of education, better jobs and pay, women are happier than they were 50 years ago.

FACT: According to surveys of more than a million men and women, it seems that women are less happy than in the past, and less happy than men.

MYTH: Women become more fulfilled as they get older.

FACT: According to a 40-year study, the results show that this is true for men but not women. Women become less satisfied in the most important areas of their lives as they age.

MYTH: If women had more free time, they would feel less stressed.

FACT: A study shows that every hour of free time doubles a man’s feeling of relaxation but does nothing for a woman.

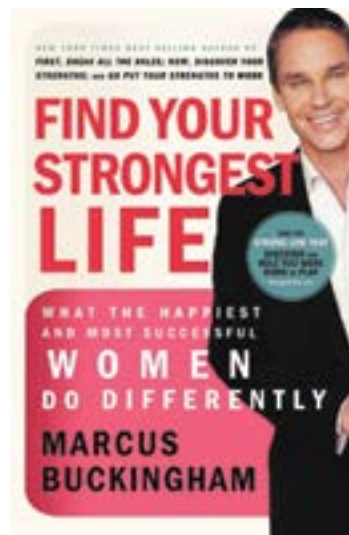
The author explores these and seven other myths to identify the core problem and then offers a solution for women who want to live a stronger life.

In the first chapter, there is an entertaining and enlightening story about how the author appeared on Oprah’s show to film a Career Intervention special. Along with a group of coaches, the intention was to help women identify what they wanted in a career and coach them to create that for themselves during a three-month program.

Buckingham became intrigued with the dissatisfaction revealed, in part because he wanted to help his wife and daughters as well as the 100,000-plus women who responded to the show’s message.

His primary discovery is that what makes women happy consists of identifying and cultivating *strong moments*; moments that have very particular qualities.

To help the reader discover these moments, he outlines nine Life Roles to identify as most like you. These are:



Adviser, Caretaker, Creator, Equalizer, Influencer, Motivator, Pioneer, Teacher and Weaver. In each role, he identifies the moments that are most likely to be strong ones for that person and how to cultivate and nourish those moments.

The author poses these questions to help women further identify these moments. How often in your life ...

... do you have an emotional high?
... do you look forward to your day?
... do you experience timelessness?
... do you feel invigorated at the end of your day?
... are you doing what you like to do?

Like a good coach, he offers strategies for identifying these moments and turning them into habits that create one’s strongest life!

This book is also full of amazing exercises and powerful questions that help the reader explore this territory. As a coach, I found the roles, exercises and questions extremely helpful in my work with my female clients.

The book ends with the author’s advice on using Strong Life Tactics for your career, relationships, parenting, planning your future and getting back in the boat after a setback.

Buckingham’s mission with this book is to help women discover their strengths, value them and express them in the world. I highly recommend it for every coach who wants to have a greater understanding of women and to support them in creating their strongest life. ●

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By Garry Schleifer,
PCC, CMC

I've come to discover that I am a writer. That's not something I would have said a year ago, but now that I am writing for several blogs, as well as this column for choice Magazine, I consider myself a writer.

What makes me a better writer, maybe a great writer, is Grammarly.

I know because their tagline tells me it's so ... "Everyone Can Be a Great Writer."

I've been using Grammarly for well over a year now and learned about it totally by accident. Now it's one of those things I can't live without.

It's a Google extension that I use for emails and documents both on my computer and in the cloud. It basically works wherever I do. You get corrections from Grammarly while you write on Gmail, Twitter, LinkedIn, blog posts, and all your other favorite sites.

Grammarly goes beyond just grammar and spelling. It tells me how well I'm doing and how I compare to other users, which makes me feel I'm upping my game. And they're always working to make me a great writer (I think it's a journey) by adding things like tone and style.

If you want to reduce distracting spelling and grammar mistakes, and who doesn't, this is the perfect tool for you.

TRANSFORMIKA COACHING CARDS

By Marcy Nelson-Garrison,
MA, LP, CPCC

Transformika is a unique collection of cards organized around six themes (or suits): Prosperity, Transformation, Exclusive, Instrumental, Performance and Existential. Each card in a given theme focuses on a common challenge or topic.

For example, topics under the Transformation theme are: fear of failure, work-life balance, dealing with emotions, boosting self-confidence, and habit change – all common topics we run across as coaches. Each card offers a homework suggestion and 10 coaching questions to help you guide your client toward greater awareness and action.

The deck was created as a self-coaching tool, but I can see coaches using this tool in a few creative ways. Pull a relevant card to use during a coaching session. Choose a card that is a hot



topic for your clients and build a short online course around it. For workshops, ask participants to draw a card that represents a current challenge, and journal responses to the questions. And lastly, gift it to clients when they complete with you.

The deck is beautifully designed, includes coaching affirmation cards, and is a potent addition to your toolbox.



FEET FIRST

By Marcy Nelson-Garrison,
MA, LP, CPCC

Metaphors are powerful. They allow us to talk about things in new ways, they make complex ideas accessible, and because metaphors are generally visual, they engage more of our senses. That's why I'm excited to tell you about this new, hot-off-the-press card deck called Feet First. It is a box of foot metaphors and I love it!

We use our feet in so many ways: to walk, stomp, stand, tiptoe, climb, splash, etc. Really, think about how many foot-related phrases we use every day: reboot, kick it in gear, jump in, run with it, step up, toe-tapping and I could go on.

This deck is filled with fun and provocative images of feet doing a variety of things. Each picture will invite associations and stories that hold meaning for the individual and give you plenty of coaching opportunities. This makes it a perfect tool for group coaching, team building, workshops, retreats and individual coaching.

The images can be paired with any open-ended question to be used for introductions, intention setting, debriefing, processing, and completions. No matter how you use it, the experience will be memorable, and your clients will get a-has and insights.

This is a must-have tool for your toolbox.

LAST PASS

By Garry Schleifer, PCC, CMC

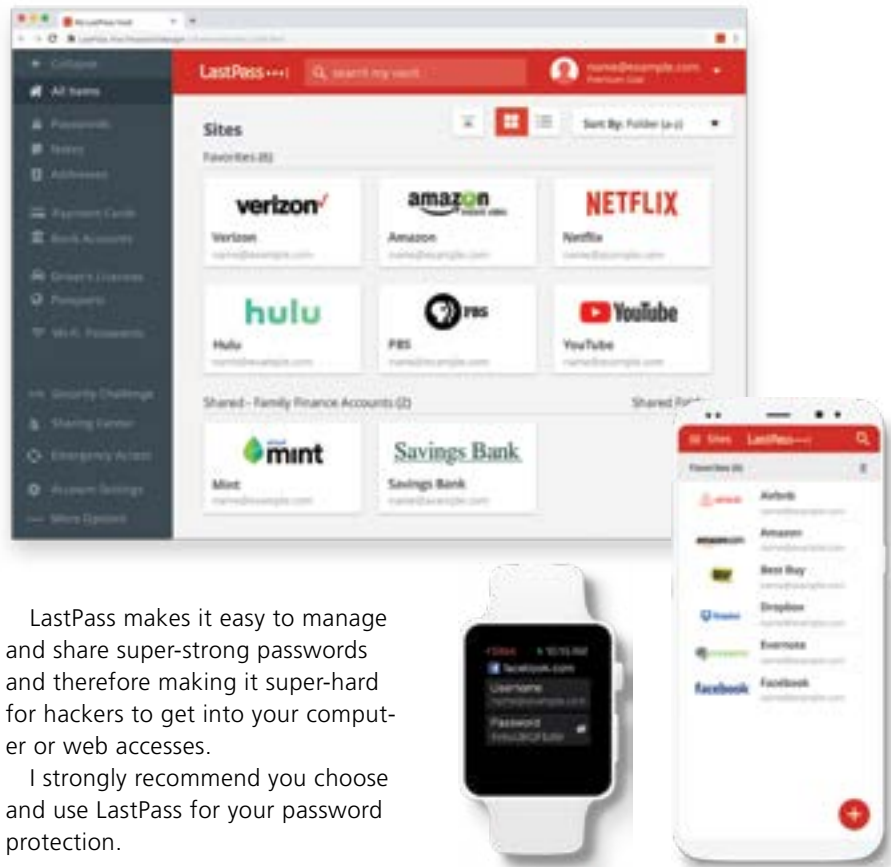
In this era of mass computerization and hackers around every corner, it's more important than ever to protect yourself with strong, encrypted passwords. But if you're like me, I was creating passwords I could remember, and I was reusing the same password in many places. Too many places, making it very easy for hackers.

Until now.

LastPass is a freemium password manager that stores encrypted passwords online. The standard version of LastPass comes with a web interface, but also includes plugins for various web browsers and apps for many smartphones.

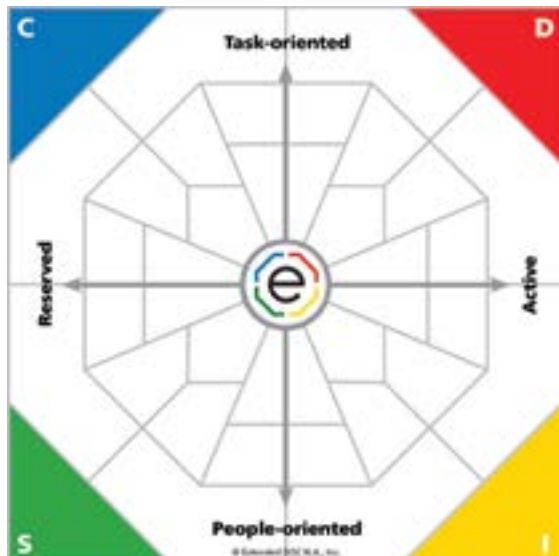
At the advice of many members of my team, we are using the premium version, which allows the creation of folders and the ability to share select passwords with my team.

There is even a version for families.



LastPass makes it easy to manage and share super-strong passwords and therefore making it super-hard for hackers to get into your computer or web accesses.

I strongly recommend you choose and use LastPass for your password protection.



EXTENDED DISC®

By Marcy Nelson-Garrison, MA, LP, CPCC

Assessments are not only a great way to attract clients, they can lay the groundwork for powerful coaching results. The Extended DISC® is one of the best.

The reason this assessment is so valuable is that it gives you an accurate measure of your client's hard-wired communication style and behavioral preferences.

It tells you how clients see themselves, their natural behavioral style and their perceived need to adjust. From there, you and your client have a solid baseline to explore the six DISC styles and how your client can adjust to fully maximize their potential in any situation.

The tool can also run paired results. There are many possible

uses for that information within a work environment.

Imagine pairing yourself with your client; how valuable would it be to see how your style interacts with their style? You can easily see where you are both 'comfortable' and what happens when things go 'south.' You will know exactly how to adjust for your client to succeed.

When your client can leverage their natural strengths, understand communication style differences and have the awareness to make adjustments in service of better communication, they will experience more confidence and more success.

This tool will make it so much easier!

Links to products reviewed by Marcy are available at marcysproductreviews.com

Links to products reviewed by Garry are available at Garryslist.com



THE SITUATION

“In a workshop on gender diversity in the workplace, my client (the only female on the executive team) shared that sometimes women’s voices are not heard in decision-making. She said other women often report to her that stating their idea gets no response, then moments later, when a man says the same thing everyone thinks it’s a great idea. The CEO responded, ‘That would never happen in our company.’ What coaching would best support her?”

How do I support my female client?

THE EXPERTS WEIGH IN

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®, CEC

Your client, as the sole female leader on an executive team addressing an inequality (in this case, gender), invokes past injustice. In an article titled “*History Backfires: Reminders of past injustices against women undermine support for workplace policies promoting women*,” the authors Ivona Hideg and Anne E. Wilson address this issue. (Source: *Journal of Organization Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Vol 157, January 2020, pages 176-189.) In the article, they posit that reminding people about past injustice against a disadvantaged group (e.g., women) can invoke social identity threat among advantaged group members (e.g., men) and undermine support for employment equity policies by fostering the belief that inequality no longer exists. The CEO’s comments reflect this idea and the research in the article con-

firm his response is typical given the situation as described by your client. (I recommend reading the entire article for more details).

First, work with your client to help her understand that she and the CEO are facing an issue that is prevalent in workplaces worldwide. Second, a possible solution mentioned in the research reframes an approach that your client might find helpful. While acknowledging the past inequity is essential, also presenting to the CEO the value women bring to the company will help to mitigate any defensive behavior the CEO may exhibit.

Your client should base her comments on facts. She should get data showing how women add to an overall organization’s strength. And without women in leadership, this company may not be competitive in attracting great female leaders to grow the bottom-line, profits. In recognizing the progress to be made, the CEO may shift his

focus from self-protection to open acknowledgment of the problem. Together, they can work to create a collaborative process that isn’t accusatory but focused on the growth of the individuals and the company.

And finally, please remind her that this process will take time, and to be patient. Climbing is slow; falling is fast. Do not move so quickly to resolve the issue that further negative unintended consequences are created. Please work with your client to thoroughly acknowledge any unproductive personal emotions she has grappled with and address them to her satisfaction. Then design an approach using data as to the value women bring to leadership to the organization.

Coach her to develop alternative strategies while remaining committed to creating equity in the workplace. This plan can support her growth and all the women who will follow behind her.

By Suzi Pomerantz, MT, MCC

Ironic, isn't it, that in a gender diversity workshop, when the only woman on the senior leadership team expresses that women are not heard, she is actually not heard. Unfortunately, this is not uncommon. According to the most recent data from Catalyst (1/1/2020), women comprise only 5.6 percent of the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and 26.5 percent of executive leaders. Since men and women communicate differently, and most organizational leadership has historically been male, women's communication styles are not often recognized.

As the only female on the executive team, she's in a unique position to influence her C-suite colleagues and increase their awareness about the experience of women in their workplace culture. To do so, she has to be heard. She has to be respected. She has to be able to connect her message to something that matters to the CEO, whether

that's increased profitability or reduced attrition, or retention of talent, or whatever he considers strategically important.

How is your client perceived by the senior leadership? How is she perceived by the rest of the company? Who would she like to be as a leader? Is there anything in the way of her being heard, respected, and able to influence the CEO and others on behalf of the unheard women in her company? Does she even want to do that?

The coaching that would best support her must be determined by her. I can't tell you since I don't know her or her objectives in hiring you in the first place, but you could ask her what would best support her in her development as a leader in this situation. As a few possibilities, you might help her:

- Align her internal branding with her intended role as a leader.
- Create strategic opportunities for women to be heard in the organization.
- Increase the awareness of the CEO and

other senior leaders about the experience of women in the company.

- Identify research and data that supports the bottom-line impact to any company for embracing diverse voices in decisions made.
- Manage up and navigate her relationship with the CEO to become a strategic advisor to him about culture improvements.
- Determine who she wants to be in the matter of women's leadership. Does she want to take up the mantle of women's issues, or would that brand her in a way that doesn't strategically serve her or the company? Does she want to be the voice of women on the leadership team as the token female?

Once your client is clear about who she wants to be as a leader, you can support her in aligning her brand, communication strategies and style with the impact she wants to make.

By Craig Carr, BCC, PCC, CPCC

For the first time in a decade of sticky situations, I felt compelled to consult another expert. I wanted to be sure I didn't inject my response with involuntary male bias, so I called on Gillian Windsor, a seasoned coach and facilitator – also my wife – who helps professional women claim authority and influence. What follows is fully vetted by a woman who knows this landscape very well!

First, taking action to shift the dominant paradigm is a call that women everywhere are stepping up to. On the other hand, executive men are burning out and struggling with their own unique, exhausting issues. It's not unusual to see them confusing the strident use of power with leadership, then turning around to find their relationships at work and at home are in turmoil. This is a juicy niche if you're looking.

Gillian and I concur that a first task is determining whether the CEO is an old school bullyboy narcissist that your client will have to navigate around, and wait to be gone,

or if he's an out-of-touch, unconscious gaslighter who is fearful and innocently unaware of the world around him. There's a spectrum here, so making that determination can be tricky. Work with her to tread carefully, assess the territory, be brave, and learn both situational and systemic awareness.

We also noted the irony that the mess surfaced in a gender diversity workshop. Your client needs to know who her allies are. Find out how the incident was handled during the workshop and if anything got addressed after the training. As the only female on the exec team, identify the scope of the cause she wants to lead forward. Become explicit around who will follow, who has influence, what's at stake personally and professionally, and is it worth it?

In terms of immediate action, your client's place on the executive team should ground her authority to speak privately with any idea-pilfering guy. If that's an awkward conversation, you can work on that with her. If she doesn't trust her authority to be direct and fierce, there's work to do on strengthening her position, which may take time, and you should point the coaching in that direction.

Finally, remember that incidents like this are often symptoms of culture issues rather than the result of one person being a jerk, a bully, or an anomaly. Furthermore, it may not be the gender dynamic everyone thinks it is. It takes skill and digging to find real causes involving hidden loyalties, company pain anchored in the past (trauma), and invisible rules about who gets to lead. •

Are you grappling with a sticky situation?

You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you some different perspectives to consider. Email your situation to: submissions@choice-online.com and put "sticky situations" in the subject line.

'Being With'

**Beyond coaching for performance,
for all genders**

By Janet M. Harvey, MCC, CMC, ACS



The proverbial glass ceiling is constructed by everyone, by some overtly and by others unconsciously through habit. Both conditions and anything in between are well served through professional coaching.

Individually we experience or witness the impact of a ceiling, yet most people don't know what to ask for as an alternative. As a result, the mastery required in a coach practitioner focuses on revealing bias, assumption and preference. Gosh, that's true all the time in coaching, so what's different in the vulnerable territory of gender identity?

Professors Robin J. Ely and Irene Padavic studied the question of why women struggle to attain positions of power and authority in the workplace. The classic story is based in gender bias and is called the work/family narrative. Women biologically place family as a higher priority than work. For men, it is the opposite.

The research reveals a different narrative that provides a fresh opening for coaches who wish to support the removal of ceilings for any gender in the workplace. This underlying narrative punishes both men and woman. For men the primary identity as the ideal worker

“The emphasis on one gender versus another perpetuates stereotypes that sustain the ceiling.”

generates guilt for missing out on family connection. For women the primary identity with family as all-important, results in accommodation – for example, working part-time for a while – and then resentment for professional ambitions being placed in a secondary position.

The emphasis on one gender versus another perpetuates stereotypes that sustain the ceiling. As the professors' analysis shows, the work/family narrative blocks breakthrough thinking, emotional sensitivity and generative relating. Organizational cultures must attend to producing results, true. However, companies also want to create a climate for original thinking, creativity and learning.

All genders require time to restore energy, time to daydream and imagine, and time for connection that strengthens collaboration. Long hours and unrealistic timelines conflict with these important healthy climate factors and are masked underneath the work/family narrative that appears to create a premium on men as the ideal workers and reduces both inclusion and diversity that best matches the customer population.

Whether we are coaching men or women, exploring the underlying issue – the general culture of overwork –

yields far greater value. Leading self is challenging enough and people who chose then to also lead others accept responsibility for an extraordinary level of clear-eyed perceiving. The paradox is that activity and effort ultimately produce diminishing returns.

Early symptoms are frayed emotions that show up as personal judgments in the form of anger, dismissiveness and/or disproportionate critique. Left unnoticed, these symptoms evolve into more destructive behaviors that further drives a wedge between managers and the team members who deliver business outcomes. Disrespect and incivility are rampant in engagement survey results for organizations that suffer under the culture of overwork.

When we look in the rear view mirror, it's easy to see that optimizing stability and becoming knowledge experts are two high value leadership outcomes. Today's business environment produces continuous disruption that makes knowledge extinct at a pace and scale never before experienced. Instead of optimizing stability, today's workplace requires four alternative abilities.

All of these abilities rely upon the action to be with what is occurring and to see it clearly. More often than not, this requires the discipline to pause, be still, notice beyond habit, assumption and preference, and speak up with genuine curiosity. All of these abilities are well supported through a coach-like mindset and skill set.

The action for 'being with' produces respect for what is emerging. This is the first step in being able to anticipate. Team members at each customer touchpoint are the first to perceive customer signals for change, early, yet rarely speak up. Leaders who are being with each person continuously and deeply listening, fully present and asking questions he or she does not know the answer to, invite team members to trust their perceiving.

The action of being with invites team members to aspire toward new thought and creativity, to be what motivation research identifies as purpose-driven.

STRENGTHENING 'BEING WITH' PRESENCE

Coaching questions for leaders

Experiment and tailor the following questions to each leader's way of thinking, learning and creating:

Anticipate:

See around the corner before needing to turn.

- What surprising insights are customer-facing team members expressing?
- What preference or habit in your team meetings stops team members from speaking up?
- What are the outlier data points catching your attention?

Aspire:

Connect to purpose for self-trust of perceiving.

- What do you want to know about from team members that demonstrates you trust and care about their contribution?
- What perspective from your front windshield view do you want to share with team members?
- What assumptions do you hold about the accuracy of customer-facing team member perspectives?

Adapt:

Liberate new thoughts for solution-oriented action.

- What authority do team members require to implement solutions autonomously?
- What tools and resources do you have to contribute for others to act more quickly?
- What evidence strengthens your confidence in team member decisions and actions?

Align:

Amplify and accelerate what's working.

- What is changing for the better that you want to acknowledge and encourage?
- What visibility is possible for successful team members to be role models for others?
- What are you saying "no" to and actually meaning "not yet" on the path to "yes"?

Leaders who sustain genuine care and curiosity produce reciprocal dialogue and discover ways to adapt processes and execution more quickly and with fuller ownership at the point of customer interaction. Nothing builds alignment more quickly across an organization than successful change results that are demonstrated by the frontline workforce.

Organizations are moving toward building coaching into managerial capability. As a result, the role of the professional coach is evolving as well. Practitioners who move beyond coaching for performance toward

tapping latent potential to anticipate, aspire, adapt and align will amplify and accelerate a leader's contribution to the organization.

How leaders allocate time is gender neutral. Revealing the clear linkage between time to 'be with' and accelerating successful change is the driver to transform the culture of overwork into a culture of effective work, for all genders. •

NOTES:

Harvard Business Review, March-April 2020; "What's Really Holding Women Back?" pages 58-67.



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A low-angle shot of a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. She is looking upwards with a slight smile. In the background, a modern building with a glass ceiling and dark structural elements is visible. The overall tone is bright and aspirational.

features

BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

Coaching women in leadership

What barriers do professional women face? How can women break their own glass ceiling? What are the advantages of having more women in leadership positions in an organization? What does the future hold for women in the workplace? How to coach those women who are aiming for the C-Suite? What resources or coaching needs do women leaders require that are different from men's?

Join us as we explore how to coach women to success.

THE BURDEN OF GREATNESS

Unique challenges of high-achieving women

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC



One night 20 years into my career, I was sitting in the dark in my living room. I didn't have enough energy to turn on a light. I was 40 years old. I owned a beautiful home plus two cars in the garage. I had plaques and pictures demonstrating my global achievements. In the dark, none of that was visible. There was something missing that kept me from enjoying my life. I was tired, emotionally numb and had no idea who I was.

The night I sat in my living room in the dark, I thought I was alone. I didn't know there were a growing number of women just like me – confident, passionate and successful, yet disillusioned, exhausted and confused. With the best of intentions, our parents raised us to excel and society persuaded us to achieve. Being ordinary was not an option.

That's when I decided to do my doctoral dissertation on goal-driven women in the workplace, specifically looking at

what personal factors serve or frustrate the aspirations of women who desire to achieve big things at work.

I was right. Many of today's women represent the growing number of us who were told they could accomplish anything they put their mind to. They could experience greatness. Though they were warned the roads would not be easy, they were told the possibilities were limitless.

The problem with having the goal of being 'great' is that it's a constantly moving target. As a result, many women feel restless, sensing there is something more for them to do in this life. They get excited by new goals and projects, but at some point feel disappointed or just sense that it's time to move on. I call this phenomenon "the burden of greatness."

For smart, goal-driven women, a mid-life crisis isn't about recovering lost youth. It's about discovering the application of their greatness.

Women working their way up the ladder in the workplace today are likely to have multiple college degrees and feel more confident in their abilities than their mother's generation. They love being busy and hate feeling bored. They don't worry about being found out that they are not competent enough for the job. They are irritated by not being challenged enough, recognized enough and included in making important decisions. They were told they should accomplish amazing things. They detest that there are still so many roadblocks to doing great work.

As a result, they wander from job to job, career to career and sometimes even relationship to relationship. If they don't physically wander, they seek to renew their work and their lives as often as they can in their current situation. If they can't do this, their frustration and anger hurts both themselves and those around them.

I also found these women feel like they are the only ones who work so

hard and care so much at work. Since I released the book with my research, *Wander Woman: How High-Achieving Women Find Contentment and Direction*, I received emails from women around the world thanking me for articulating what they have been struggling with mentally. Again, they had no idea so many women deal with the same angst they feel.

FEMALE MID-LIFE CRISIS

By the age of 40, many smart, goal-driven women sit in the dark like I did, wondering who they are. They focused so much on external achievement at work and home, they begin to have what I call a *Mid-Life Crisis of Identity*.¹

Women now enter the workplace with high expectations of career

advancement. Many in their 20s say, "I want to be CEO" and then face the reality of having to live in the trenches for a while before they can rise up.

As they enter their 30s with more clarity about their careers, they seek meaningful and challenging work, saying, "I want to prove my value and make a significant difference." As they cope with the ongoing inequality in the workplace, their disappointments of dreams unmet and continually feeling misunderstood and mismanaged, they begin to drop off the corporate ladder. The conflict of their personal values and corporate values may become irreconcilable.²

By the time they enter their 40s, many lose their taste for proving themselves in the workplace. I have met many top performers who feel they can accomplish more working on their own. Others take lateral moves to keep their minds challenged and their lives in balance. Some drop off the grid to discover themselves.

STRESSORS OF SMART, GOAL-DRIVEN WOMEN

In my research, I found some common stress-related behaviors of smart, goal-driven women that are provoked by their strengths. The following assumptions exacerbate their stress:

ASSUMPTION #1

There is a right answer and it is mine

You are often the best and the one who knows. Can you let other people be right sometimes too?

ASSUMPTION #2

No one can do the work as well as I do

You take on too many projects and overwork the ones you have. Can you develop someone to share the load and allow others to learn from their mistakes?

ASSUMPTION #3

I am disappointed, again

You start out excited about the possibilities, then you focus on what's wrong. Can you focus instead on what is right and possible?

ASSUMPTION #4

I don't need help

You can figure it out on your own. Can you let others help you? Asking for help is more efficient, builds relationships, and you look stronger as a leader.

ASSUMPTION #5

I have to be great at everything I do

When one project is complete, you quickly search for the next great thing to conquer. Can you stop and enjoy your achievements before moving on to accomplish something else?

Smart, strong women can be ambitious. They can accomplish amazing things and have what they desire. And, they can enjoy the journey. Coach them to face their assumptions so they can choose to chill out, ask for help, and let life get messy. There is so much to enjoy in the moments they are missing.

A woman from my research went from being a celebrated marine biologist to an international sales executive to a global consultant, and then quit to raise her daughter while contemplating her next career move. She told me she was taught to always raise her hand. Now in her 40s, she is questioning what she is raising her hand for.

These women are facing a mid-life quest for identity.

This quest might even endure into their 50s and 60s as circumstances change and desires surface. They continue to feel a restless craving to realize their potential.

For smart, goal-driven women, a mid-life crisis isn't about recovering lost youth. It's about discovering the application of their greatness. The problem is they still can't define what 'greatness' looks like, so the quest has no specific destination.

I often get female executive coaching clients who want to explore what is next for their career, and possibly, their life. They can't talk to family and friends who tell them they should appreciate the great position they have right now. A coach might be the only place they can safely show up as themselves.

Many times, my female clients already have one foot out the door. I advise them to choose what is next, not just leave because they don't like what they have. I always ask them if they would stay a little longer in their position so we can figure out how their next chapter should read.

Here are some questions you might explore with your clients:

- What do you feel you should have done by this time in your life?
- Is there something more important and fulfilling you want to focus on now?
- What do you want more of?

- What have you imprisoned that is crying to be free?
- What *shoulds* are getting in the way of what you really want to do?

Let them know it is okay to lose their equilibrium when others think their life should be smooth sailing. It is okay to say, "I don't know who I am," even when they have a successful career.

Sometimes you have to lose yourself to find yourself. Some call this a mid-life crisis; I call it the Heroine's Journey. •

NOTES:

¹Gersick, C. and Kram, K. *High-Achieving Women at Midlife: An Exploratory Study*. Journal of Management Inquiry, Vol. 11 No. 2. June, 2002 104-127.

²Reynolds, M. *Wander Woman: How High-Achieving Women Find Contentment and Direction*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010.



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A PATH TOWARD EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES

How professional coaching can benefit all women in the workplace

By Chariti Gent, MA, PCC, CPCC

A few years ago, a mid-career surgeon at a world-renowned hospital called me in tears. “I’m just so burned out,” she said. Her goal was to feel more comfortable as the only female surgeon at the clinic. Instead, after 16 months of

coaching, she quit the job. And it was the best decision she ever made.

At the start of our conversations, she blamed herself. Not her former colleagues who had sexually harassed her earlier in her career. Not her current colleagues who were subtly dismissive and, at times,

overtly hostile. Not the toxic, hyper-competitive environment. She internalized everything as a personal failure.

But coaching empowered her to believe in herself and to take a risk. She left her prestigious position without another job offer. To make ends meet, she became a traveling surgeon for rural areas. It was in the quiet halls of these remote hospitals where she learned her value. Staff and patients showered her with appreciation, noting her rare combination of technical prowess and compassionate bedside manner.

“

While only one in five C-suite executives is a woman, only one in twenty-five is a woman of color.

The internal and external challenges she faced as a woman in a male-dominated field are not unique. All of the professional women I’ve coached over the past 15 years, from lawyers to company presidents, have shared one trait: a lack of confidence, despite their many achievements.

It’s why, as research increasingly validates, professional coaching is so effective for women in the workplace. A 2018 International Coaching Federation (ICF) study found that companies that report a strong coaching culture have a significantly higher percentage of diverse hires (58 percent), including gender, compared to their peers (42 percent).

And it’s why our industry has the potential to effect wider change.

As we know, coaching is expensive. Those who can afford professional coaching on their own dime are, by and large, already financially secure. And usually, only employees who are viewed as high potential – a classification susceptible to bias – gain access to coaching in the workplace.

What if we can open the same pathways for those facing economic barriers

and systemic oppression? What could it mean for the workplace – and the world?

GLASS CEILING OR CEMENT FLOOR?

The reasons may be complicated, but the reality is clear: women remain behind in the workplace. They earn less money, receive fewer promotions and are less likely to stay in the workforce.

Coaching can't directly address these disparities. There's no quick fix. But for employers and employees, coaching can lay the groundwork and establish a culture where the seeds of progress are more likely to grow. It can empower women to ask for raises or, like the female surgeon, explore employment elsewhere. It can encourage workplaces to focus on their employees' strengths, confront biases and provide flexible working arrangements for those with family obligations.

The ICF study found that companies with a strong coaching culture are more likely to internally promote employees. Their employees also report being more engaged with work than their peers.

ladder. Women are less likely to earn an initial promotion to manager, cutting off the pipeline to subsequent promotions. Women fill half of entry-level positions, yet only hold 38 percent of manager-level positions. The disparity is more extreme as you go up the ranks.

For every 100 men, only 72 women are promoted or hired to manager, according to McKinsey. Not surprisingly, even though 87 percent of companies say they're highly committed to gender diversity, only half of employees believe that to be true.

That cynicism will continue to be justified until companies show their commitment. Gallup's 2016 report "Women in America" highlighted 10 priority areas for employers that wish to attract, engage and retain a female workforce. One of the recommendations was to develop a culture of coaching.

The report read: "Coaches bring out the best in employees by reinforcing their individual strengths, helping them achieve self-efficacy and self-awareness and guiding them toward their ideal future. The more you support coaching,

Coaches can help employees navigate biases and help employers address them, but we must first understand our own. This point was underscored by Dr. Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard to Talk to White People About Racism*, at last year's Association of Coach Training Organizations (ACTO) Conference.

In her book, DiAngelo discusses the discrimination people of color face in the hiring and promoting processes, and how workplaces are failing to address it meaningfully. She writes: "For many white people, an isolated course taken in college or required 'cultural competency training' in their workplace is the only time they may encounter a direct and sustained challenge to their racial reality." And if bias is treated as a one-off lesson, it's tempting to dismiss it as such.

That's why at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where I direct the Certified Professional Coach program, we're working with diversity and human resources offices on campus to integrate bias-awareness training throughout the 10-month curriculum. We know that unconscious bias never goes away, and we want it to be a habit for future coaches to question their assumptions. Do you process the same answer by a man and a woman differently? Do your own experiences influence the follow-up questions you ask?

Our industry is starting to take promising steps. ACTO recently published its *Stand for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging*. It reads in part: "We acknowledge and are committed to eliminating the negative impact of personal and systemic bias, privilege and oppression, which may be conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional, overt or subtle. As coach trainers, we are tasked with creating the future of the coaching profession."

As professional coaches, we pose powerful, provocative questions to our clients so they can chart a new path. And if our industry is to create broad change, we must turn those questions on ourselves. •

Not surprisingly, even though 87 percent of companies say they're highly committed to gender diversity, only half of employees believe that to be true.

These findings are all the more important when you consider that women are falling behind at every step of the promotional ladder. We often talk of the glass ceiling for women in the workplace – the stunning lack of female representation in senior leadership positions. But what about the cement floor? While representation of women in the C-suite increased 24 percent between 2015 and 2019, representation at the manager level stagnated, according to the research firm McKinsey & Company.

McKinsey calls this phenomenon the "broken rung" of the promotional

the more you foster employee development and loyalty."

Employers invest in high-potential employees, putting them on a fast track to promotion. What if they were to cast a wider net and invest in hidden potential, too?

TURNING THE TABLES

Workplace disparities are even greater for women of color. While only one in five C-suite executives is a woman, only one in twenty-five is a woman of color, according to McKinsey. At every step of the promotional ladder, women of color are significantly underrepresented.

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10 WAYS WOMEN MIGHT BE SABOTAGING THEMSELVES AS LEADERS

And how you can help them as a coach

By Wendy Capland, MCC

Women often unknowingly sabotage or minimize themselves, their voices, and their power. Feminine leadership is on the rise, and I believe we are on the brink of a world-altering phenomenon so enormous that women must get better prepared to step into their A-game and stop the behaviors that minimize their contributions, play down their accomplishments, and sabotage their careers.

The war for talent has shifted and women are sick and tired of sitting at the director and vice-president levels in their organizations. Women are going to make an exponential leap in the next 5 to 10 years, and as a coach, you can have a tremendous impact in helping them become their fullest and best selves.

Here are the top 10 mistakes professional women make and my advice after 15 years of specifically helping women advance and 30 years of execu-

tive leadership development as to how to change these behaviors for NOT only us as women but also as coaches in order to help those women to claim the full measure of their power in the business world.

Whether you identify as male, female or non-binary, your voice as a coach is very important and can make a BIG difference in the advancement of women and their leadership.

1 Using Minimizing Language

Women use words that minimize their own impact. The words *'just,' 'sort of,' 'maybe,'* and *'kind of'* are some examples. How often do you say, "I *just* wanted to tell you something" or "I *just* wanted to stop you for a minute." The qualifier 'just' sends the subtle message that our statements and opinions aren't all that important.

There are other belittling words

women are prone to using. For example, how often do women say, "I'm feeling *a little bit* concerned about something." I doubt you're really feeling just *a little bit* concerned or you probably wouldn't have brought it up in the first place. Instead, say you are feeling concerned and don't couch your words with unnecessary extra minimizing words. Speaking powerfully is one of the best things you can do for yourself.

COACHING TIP: Develop the distinction with your client of the negative impact of using minimizing words and ask the client's permission to point out when they use these words, so they can self-correct.

2 Apologizing

Women are prone to apologizing when there's no reason to do so. Many women's voice-mail messages begin, "I'm sorry I'm

not able to take your call right now.” Even in our voicemail, we apologize! Of course, apologize if you have made a mistake; otherwise, cut ‘sorry’ out of your everyday vernacular.

To check whether this applies to you, start counting how many times in one day you say the word ‘sorry.’ The act of counting will help you become aware and reduce the occurrences.

COACHING TIP: Start by asking the client where they notice they are doing this currently and what impact they think it might be having. Then explore changes, if any, they would like to make.

3 Asking Permission

Women are prone to asking questions when they already know the answers. We don’t want to be too overpowering, and we want to get buy-in up front, so we often ask permission to say something when there’s absolutely no need to do so.

Coaching Tip: A good place to start with this one is to ask the client, “Do you think you do this and if so, in which areas are you prone to do this more often?” This conversation will raise awareness, which you can help coach them through.

4 Waiting Until We’re Experts Before Taking on a New Role

When offered an opportunity, women will often feel like they need to be fully skilled before taking it on, while a man given the same opportunity will say, “It’s about time they selected me!” Women say, “I’m not ready yet.” Men will say, “I’ll take the job and figure it out when I get there.”

Age doesn’t seem to make a difference. I just spoke to two 30-year-olds, one man, one woman, both unhappy in their jobs. The woman says she wants to get a new job but doesn’t know what else she can really do unless she looks for a similar job in the same type of industry. The man says, it’s no problem, he’ll have no trouble getting another job because he’s so marketable.

COACHING TIP: Ask the client to articulate where this may have happened to them in the past. Do they see it happening now? Do they see an opportunity where this pattern could repeat itself in upcoming assignments, projects or key stakeholder conversations?

5 Focusing on Cooperation Rather than Competition

Yes, there are a thousand business articles that tell us collaboration is the more effective approach. The problem with that? It’s not the structure of corporate America. This may not be PC to say, but corporate America has a hierarchical structure that is not set up for collaboration to work effectively in the long-term because the way to success is still to climb the ladder.

COACHING TIP: Help the client identify the corporate structure in their organization and whether they have found this has hindered their advancement and in what ways. Then have them brainstorm powerful conversations with key stakeholders to clearly articulate their powerful request. It’s also a good idea to have them write out a script and role play with you before they go live with their conversation.

6 Questioning Ourselves

A lot of women I’ve been exposed to spend too much time thinking about whether we’re doing it right. Will I be a threat to my husband if I surpass his income? Will

BUILDING A PERSONAL BRAND

A strong personal brand will help you get what you want whether you’re working in a company or running one of your own. The way to develop a personal brand is to deepen your own self-awareness. Ask yourself, “What makes me stand out positively from other people?”

A personal brand is an asset that defines the best things about you. It’s the impression people have of you, and the impression you want them to have. Spend the time defining what you want to be most known for and align all that you do around it.

COACHING TIP: Ask the client to interview 10 people who know them well and ask each for five things they think are strengths, gifts, or talents. Ask the client to make a chart of all the responses and look for themes. Determine if this is enough information to help the client to create a personal brand statement which will provide a ‘north star’ from which they can navigate and be guided.



people think I'm a bad mother because I'm working so hard or running my own business? Will I lose my friends if I upset the balance of power or popularity? And who am I, anyway, to try and move out of the box of what others expect of me?

COACHING TIP: Obviously, this topic of 'am I good enough?' is ripe for coaching and helping clients excavate their deepest fears. This exploration might help them move through to the other side towards feeling empowered.

7 Not Setting Clear Goals
You have to be really clear about what you want. Do you want a promotion or a job change? Funding for your new company? Do you want to write a book or be a keynote speaker? You have to be very clear about your desires and commitments so that you can set priorities and boundaries. You're going to have to make big asks. If you're wishy-washy about what you're going after, everyone

else will be too and they won't be able to help you most effectively.

COACHING TIP: Most coaches are already very good at helping clients get clear about what they want. I am referring to their goals, dreams, and aspirations. You can only do great coaching if you know what your client wants and is aiming for.

8 Only Setting Goals we Know How to Reach
Don't be stopped from setting a goal because you don't know how to get there. No one knows exactly how to get to any big goal in the beginning especially where they're stretching themselves. Dream big and figure it out as you go along taking one easy,

non-frightening step at a time.

Years ago, I found myself declaring during a workshop that I wanted to have my own television show. As soon as I said it, I thought, "I have no idea how to do that. That was a stupid goal." But a woman in the audience came up to me afterward, told me she was being interviewed by a cable show the following week, and invited me to come along and observe. I decided this was a good way to get my feet wet with very little to no risk. You can head toward a big goal one baby step at a time. In fact, it may be better that way – you'll avoid setting off your own fight-or-flight response.

Sure enough, I eventually wound up with my own cable program, which ran locally for three years and I had 2.5 million viewers. Not bad, considering

“Ask the client's permission to point out when they use minimizing words so they can self-correct.”



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that I had absolutely no idea how I was going to accomplish this goal when I first set it.

COACHING TIP: Great coaching encourages the client to stretch into the person they have the potential to become. In big generalities, men more often already think they're great and women often think they're not ready yet. If you're coaching someone who has big dreams, go for it through your coaching.

If you're coaching someone who could dream bigger, be provocative by asking, "If you dreamed as big as you dared to, with no limitations, what would you do or who would you be?"

reflects badly on them in some way. This is often less true for men.

10 Worrying Too Much about Relationships
That 'no' on the cable series was harder than it should have been. I was really clear that it was a 'no' for me, but I think the woman on the other end of the phone was surprised and a tad annoyed. I felt uncomfortable when she sounded annoyed because even though I didn't know her, I worried I was hurting her feelings and maybe ruining any chance at a further relationship together. Nevertheless, I stuck to my guns and declined her generous offer.

Have the client define what boundaries mean to them and in what arenas they might have looser boundaries than they would like.

9 Not Setting Clear Boundaries
Once I had done the show for three years, I felt I was done with cable TV. My next stretch goal was a PBS special. So, when a woman got in touch and invited me to do a cable TV series, I said no because it wasn't in line with where I was headed. Create some non-negotiable boundaries for yourself so you can say yes to things that lead you toward your goals and no to things that would distract you.

COACHING TIP: Introduce the distinction of boundaries with your client. Have the client define what they think boundaries mean to them and in what arenas they might have looser boundaries than they would like.

Also ask, what requests would they need to make? Of whom? And how would this ultimately benefit them? In big generalities, women are more prone to say yes because they don't like hurting other's feelings or they think it

COACHING TIP: Ask the client if they say 'no' too often or not often enough. Then ask if there are currently things at work or at home that they could say no to if they had the courage.

If yes, help them wordsmith the 'no' and role play to practice saying it safely without repercussions.

WHAT NOW?

As a coach, you can use this information with both coaching men and women. For women, I use it to help them increase their power, their voice and their seat at the table, if these are aligned with their goals and desires. For those men who are leaders in their organizations, I use these 12 mistakes women make, to help them coach, mentor and develop their pipeline of female talent.

One simple way to use this list is to share it with your clients and ask them which ones they struggle with or would like to develop deeper awareness or more facility navigating. •



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AN UNEVEN PLAYING FIELD

How company culture creates a two-tiered system for women leaders

By Valerie Pelan, MBA, PCC

I had the opportunity to coach a woman leader, Hannah, who had fast tracked to director level. However, her situation changed dramatically after she returned from maternity leave. She found herself reassigned to a low visibility project. In addition, she was not invited to the more “important strategic” meetings, where project leaders were chosen; these projects were high visibility and spotlighted future executives.

As we coach more women leaders, it is important to understand the company culture they experience. Listening to how our clients describe their current situation gives us additional insight into how they view their future career prospects. When there is a two-tiered organizational culture with a thick glass ceiling biased against women, coaching is a powerful tool to help women leaders get promoted and move forward.

Hannah wasn't sure what caused the

change in her status and visibility. Was it because she now had a family and the company felt she should travel less? According to recent articles in Harvard Business Review and the Wall Street Journal, situations like these are common for women. The articles describe how women's careers can be decelerated after they return from maternity leave and/or hit the glass ceiling.

Hannah felt her career had ‘plateaued out.’ She was stressed and frustrated.

Hannah described her situation as she ‘no longer had a seat at the table.’ Women experience hurdles and are scrutinized more than their male peers.

CULTURE ADDS COMPLEXITY

Organizational culture by its definition is unwritten; it is a set of norms, values, ways of doing and thinking. It is important as coaches to get an understanding of your clients’ company culture.

By maintaining a two-tiered system, organizational culture directly impacts women’s opportunities to move up the career ladder. The path to executive level can be circuitous and bumpy for women depending on the company and its culture.

Companies may say they “support gender equality in leadership,” but the reality check is to count the number of senior leadership positions held by women and whether those are ‘revenue and operational’ positions or the ‘traditional women’s areas.’

COACHING FOCUSES ON THE ‘WHO’

Coaching is situational. Understanding the impact of the company culture enriches the coaching with contextual information. How is the company culture working for or against your women clients? How even or uneven is the playing field?

In Hannah’s situation, her ‘grounded confidence,’ which had motivated her to obtain those promotions to director, started to wane as she saw male peers getting promotions for which she was equally qualified.

This is when coaching is powerful: asking penetrating questions that uncover these complex organizational situations and any negative self-talk about being de-positioned. Through the coaching process, perspective giving, and reflection, we can help them see how “even” or “uneven” their playing field is.

Now, when I coach women leaders, I pay closer attention to the company culture. I also find out how much internal support women clients are receiving to move into the executive

ranks. Hannah’s frustration with her decelerated career opportunities, prompted her to ask for a leadership coach and an internal mentor.

She received both, but while those resources were forthcoming, she felt there were missing pieces of internal information and opportunities that she did not have access to.

that information is not readily available, it is difficult to get promoted into the executive ranks no matter how good you are. Her acceptance of the uneven playing field and the inherent bias of the company culture helped her perform to her strengths.

She leveraged her low visibility project by collaborating with several teams. She

The path to executive level can be circuitous and bumpy for women depending on the company and its culture.

COACHING CREATES A SAFE PLACE

Hannah needed a safe place to explore her emotions. Coaching can create a non-judgmental space for clients to examine their situation. We become “thinking partners” as clients rediscover their “grounded confidence” and consider their career options.

As Hannah’s coach, I asked questions to clarify the direction she wanted to move her career. Did she want to stay in her technical area or move to more of an operational or a line management position with bottom line revenue targets? Was she driven to lead and be a role model?

Questions like these are thought provoking and helped her formulate her future action steps. The clearer she became the more motivated and re-energized she became.

Coaching can inspire and reawaken women leaders to focus on their strengths and accomplishments. The move into the executive ranks for many is a jump and leap. Coaching helped Hannah leverage her strengths as she quickly learned how to maneuver through these corporate situations and assert her leadership skills.

The big “aha” moment for Hannah was when she realized people do not get promoted without organizational support, internal mentoring, and access to ‘vital and key information and projects.’ If

transformed that “low visibility” project into a success story. She created positive feedback and recognition for herself. She eventually received the opportunity to take that functional position and is doing well. She became “comfortable with being a leader” and continues to learn and move forward.

Coaching is key for women leaders. It helps them in many ways, including: creating a safe place; reframing complex situations; supporting clients moving forward; creating options for clients feeling stuck; addressing negative self-talk; opening possibilities for creative problems solving; and so much more.

As we coach more and more women leaders, it is important to understand the company culture in which they work. As coaches we need to listen to our clients use of metaphor and descriptors on how they experience their situation.

A two-tiered organizational culture that creates a glass ceiling and is biased toward women can be a career bump in the road. Coaching is a powerful tool to help aspiring women executive leaders move forward with their careers. •

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COACHING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP



What to look for to maximize impact

By Terrie Lupberger, MCC

Women's leadership has become a global conversation and movement. The data supporting the value of it points to organizations and teams that outperform competitors and deliver greater returns. Gender diversity leads to stronger recruiting and retention and to higher levels of engagement. The business case is there.

From a social and historical perspective, there has been no other time in history in which women have had such enormous power and opportunity to not only lead in organizations but to also be a force for change in the world. The largely masculine models that have dominated for thousands of years are proving to be insufficient in providing the solutions now needed to create a world that works for everyone.

While it's a ripe and exciting time in history for women to rise, many barriers exist that keep women from advancing. Women lead differently from men and face different hurdles, externally and internally. Of course, there are leadership qualities and skills that transcend gender, but nonetheless, women face

unique challenges and roadblocks on their leadership paths.

In leading women's programs and coaching women leaders globally for two decades, I've found that supporting women to unleash their greatest potential requires a multi-faceted approach and the ability to explore in at least three critical territories: Self, Systems, and Culture.

SELF: We are shaped by our beliefs

As human beings, we all have habits and blind spots in our thinking that limit what's possible. It's one of the things we are trained to listen for in our coaching. We help our clients consider which beliefs and stories they have taken on, consciously or unconsciously, that may not be serving them and then help them create next steps and practices to break through the belief.

In coaching women's leadership, while every woman is unique, I have also found some common threads in their beliefs. They include, to varying degrees, being overly self-critical, feeling not good enough, avoiding conflict, not saying no, taking care of

others before self, not easily delegating, not being able to receive praise or take credit, just to name a few.

I worked with a young woman who, in fundraising for a new start-up, went into paralysis, physically and emotionally, when she got rejected by potential investors. Her well-developed habits of pleasing and wanting to be liked had worked for her up to this point in her life and career, but were now keeping her from facing all the no's she inevitably would get in raising money.

Another senior leader, successful by all conventional standards (money, status, awards) was in constant anxiety that she wasn't good enough for the job and it was affecting her health. In both of these examples, by working with their individual limiting beliefs, emotional blockages and habitual thinking patterns, these women were able to start moving through their resistance.

SYSTEMS: How they impact our results

As human beings we are impacted by the systems we operate in. By taking a look at the parts that make up the whole – by examining the procedures,

Women are at the mercy of history whispering through the centuries what a woman's role and place in society is, what women are capable of and not capable of, how women should and shouldn't behave.

rules, processes, the way things are done and organized, etc. — coaches can help illuminate the external factors impeding women's progress and advancement.

As an example, it's important to understand that women still carry the majority of responsibility for family caregiving and for taking care of the home. Thus, women work significantly more unpaid hours than men. One client I worked with looked at the antiquated work policies when she took over from a previous executive director and ended up introducing flex-time schedules so the staff had more flexibility in addressing family matters and emergencies. Sixty-five percent of her workforce was women and, within nine months of implementing the change, productivity went up by 20 percent and morale increased by 40 percent.

Given that women are generally more inclined to collaborate, to share the credit, and to see the interconnectedness

of ideas, does the current appraisal system in most organizations measure and acknowledge this? Most performance evaluation systems measure the end results and don't consider the process by which those results are achieved. How can those valuable skills also be formally acknowledged and praised?

In the hiring or promotion practices of an organization or team, are there inherent biases impacting the advancement of women? I worked with the VP of HR at a software development company who was trying to eliminate biases in the hiring system. She instituted a policy that the company wouldn't interview for a job opening until they had as many women candidates as men in the final round.

These are just a few examples of where the systems themselves can be

roadblocks for women. Being aware of potential systemic traps is another critical territory to explore in our coaching women leaders.

CULTURE: How it shapes us

Yes, we are individuals, responsible for our actions and our choices. At the same time, we are products of cultural narratives that influence and shape our thinking and actions. Our family of origin, our lived experiences, where and how we were educated, where we grew up, the communities we've been a part of, etc. all come with collective stories that we assimilated to varying degrees.

Regardless of a woman's individual skills or talents, there is a particular historical narrative at play that also



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shapes what's possible. In her book, *Women & Power*, author and scholar Mary Beard lays out a thoughtful and well-researched case for how western culture, in particular, has had thousands of years of practice at silencing women. It isn't surprising that women, on a collective level, have had trouble finding and speaking their voice.

In our current cultural narrative are other expectations (and biases) projected onto women that impact their success. Examples of these biases: women shouldn't be seen as aggressive or they won't be likeable; they should be likeable but also assertive (try to walk that fine line without going crazy); women should be competent but also attractive, be sexy but not too sexy, be caring but speak up ... just not too forcefully.

Cultural narratives are hard to change but that's really not the point of understanding them. Nor is the aim to blame or become a victim of the narrative. The power is in understanding that there are stories embedded in our collective psyche that create biases that women leaders are, without question, impacted by. With awareness comes the possibility to make a different choice, to make a change, to try and create a different game. The women I've worked with actually feel some relief in acknowledging, out loud, that the struggle they thought was their own is actually, in small and large ways, part of every woman's story and struggle.

Maybe it's about something beyond women's leadership? I've been talking

The largely masculine models that have dominated for thousands of years are proving to be insufficient in providing the solutions now needed to create a world that works for everyone. Most performance evaluation systems measure the end results and don't consider the process by which those results are achieved.

The double standards and double binds women face are mind-blowing. Women are at the mercy of history whispering through the centuries what a woman's role and place in society is, what women are capable of and not capable of, how women should and shouldn't behave.

Let's face it, women lead differently and yet the models we have for leadership are predominantly masculine. It's no wonder women report feeling like they don't quite fit in. The hyper masculine game of business as it is currently designed values competition, power, endless growth, and profitability as the ultimate measure of success. The game is ultimately not sustainable and most women I've worked with know that and struggle to play that version of it.

about how coaches can better support women leaders to become the most powerful version of themselves. That's useful but insufficient.

Actually, consider that it's not about women and men but about helping the feminine values emerge and grow in both men and women. While women are the stewards of the feminine, what we're aiming for is to grow the healthiest aspects of the feminine and integrate them with the healthiest aspects of the masculine, in all leaders, regardless of gender.

Many leading thinkers and visionaries are saying that women, but more specifically the expressed feminine values in both men and women, will be key elements in the solutions that will lead the way forward for us all. •



IT STARTS WITH SELF-LEADERSHIP

Coaching women leaders to be assertive and resolve inner conflicts

By Doris Helge, PhD, MCC

Even though the playing field between male and female leaders and emerging leaders continues to be unequal, women who hire a leadership coach to help them develop a strategic action plan to navigate the rocky road forward can eventually break through

a thick glass ceiling. Their coach must help these clients develop assertiveness skills and resolve internal conflicts because there are direct relationships between healthy assertiveness, inner alignment and business success.

Leadership mentors and even some

leadership coaches fail to recognize that leaders with hidden inner conflicts unintentionally sabotage their success. Parts Work, based on the research of Virginia Satir and Richard Schwartz, prevents unconscious self-sabotage by helping the leader discover and realign

the parts of her that are holding her back, such as a harsh inner critic.

Why is Assertiveness Critical to Success of Female Leaders?

Women leaders who stand their ground have greater influence. They advocate for their teams with upper management and build other strategic alliances that help them gain the professional resources their team members need. No matter how competent a women leader is, team members won't trust her if she lacks the ability to persuade upper management to approve their raises, promotions and perks. Quite simply and understandably, team members want to work for a leader that employees perceive to be strong, well-respected

confident leader who fully supports and promotes them. Losing qualified team members will significantly increase the burden of recruiting and training new people on a timid female leader whose plate of duties is already overflowing.

She can also sabotage her success if she avoids direct communication with employees about her expectations for them. Employees who want to be successful, efficient, make money and gain promotions depend on their leader to deliver objective, clear communication. These are exactly the kinds of employees a woman leader requires in order to thrive in a leadership position.

As a leadership coach, it's essential that you challenge your female leadership coaching clients to develop the mindset of

success-oriented, most threes can benefit from assertiveness training.

In the DISC system, the High-D is usually perceived as the most assertive leader. In the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory, ENTJ is often perceived as the most direct leader, with several extraverted runners-up, depending on the specific industry and leadership position.

Sometimes women leaders who practice assertiveness are unfairly labeled aggressive by people who either misunderstand healthy assertiveness or are not being honest in their assessment of the situation. As a coach, help your female clients take steps to avoid this minefield and meet unhealthy challenges that emerge.

First steps include reminding your client that by definition, assertive behavior is not pushy, bossy, controlling or manipulative. Because assertive people are confident in their abilities to handle changing or unexpected situations, their leadership is generally fair and even-tempered. Because their confidence can insulate them from unnecessary stress, their teams tend to be less stressed than teams led by people who are less self-assured.

Make sure your client understands that overcoming fear of speaking her mind and advocating for her team is essential so she can gain the influence and professional resources she must have if she is to successfully lead her team and empower her team members to reach their highest potential.

Help your client comprehend that assertive behavior could be mislabeled aggressive, particularly by men who perceive women as competitors for a position they want, instead of valuable colleagues. Some men simply have limited assumptions regarding what women can achieve.

One of the duties of a women's leadership coach is to help your female client understand how to be assertive without losing the support she needs from both men and women so she can do her best work. Coach her to understand what she can and cannot control regarding comments about her leadership behavior.



One of the duties of a women's leadership coach is to help your female client understand how to be assertive without losing the support she needs from both men and women so she can do her best work.

and connected to sources of power.

Sometimes, a female leader who is unsure of how supported she will be by upper management or team members may be tempted to try to people-please. As a coach, it's critical that you explain to your women leadership clients that there are significant disadvantages when a leader fails to be assertive in healthy ways.

Upper management may overload her with inappropriate responsibilities that detract from her ability to lead her team effectively. Even if she doesn't immediately receive a poor performance review, her confidence will deteriorate over time. Her health will decline as she becomes more exhausted. As team performance degenerates, some of her best team members may seek positions elsewhere because most capable employees know it's critical to work for a

an assertive leader. This includes leading by example by embracing, instead of avoiding, team members' differences of opinion and healthy conflicts that can help team members grow.

Assertiveness is Sometimes Perceived as a Disadvantage

Some women leaders are inherently direct and comfortable being assertive, particularly those who resonate with numbers one and eight in the Enneagram personality typing system. (In the Enneagram system, these numbers are known as reformers, perfectionists, leaders and self-reliant asserters). Women described by the other seven numbers are often less confident asserting themselves, especially number nine (peacemakers). Even though threes (achievers) are

Help your client comprehend that assertive behavior could be mislabeled aggressive, particularly by men who perceive women as competitors for a position they want.

Encourage her to focus on obtaining objective evaluations of her leadership so she can learn and grow. Help her discover how to raise awareness of her accomplishments, especially if self-advocacy is difficult for her.

Parts Work Can Create Superior Self-Leadership

As Virginia Satir discovered in the 1970s, all of us have subpersonalities. I'll share one example that illustrates two common parts (subpersonalities) of most leaders. For example, even leaders that are most often confident have an Inner Critic part and a Taskmaster part. When a leader knows how to guide their Inner Critic part and effectively channel the energy of their Taskmaster part, the leader can navigate her professional life without unnecessary stress. The leader can do this once she has used Parts Work to discover the positive intentions of the two parts.

Problems arise when the leader is either unaware of her Inner Critic and Taskmaster parts or tries to deny or suppress them. As Carl Jung wisely said, "What we resist, persists". It is quite common for an Inner Critic part to nag, "You're not good enough" or "You'll never succeed" while a harsh Taskmaster part harasses the leader with another negative message, "If you don't do more, better or faster, you'll fail." This internal battle requires so much energy to struggle with that the skirmish will exhaust a leader who doesn't know how to stop and effectively connect with these parts.

Once leaders and emerging leaders understand and accept all of their parts and explore their positive intentions (even when a part appears to be misguided), all parts can work in harmony to achieve both professional

and personal goals. To emphasize, leaders who consciously lead their parts instead of feeling manipulated by them are superior leaders. Self-leadership is the coat of arms worn by a true leader.

Here is another example. My clients often tell me that taking the time to discover the hidden reasons they sometimes feel self-assured and assertive but at other times their confidence vanishes is like exploring a hidden underground gold mine.

This is evidence of conflicting intentions. In fact, clients often say, "Part of me wants to stand my ground but another part of me is afraid to do so because that part of me fears the risk is too high."

Notice the polarization between what Virginia Satir called conflicting subpersonalities that have opposing opinions and needs. Satir knew that all of us contain many parts that compete for our attention. When we don't know how to accept and work with each part successfully, one or more parts will eventually develop an extreme opinion that dominates our consciousness and behavior in unhealthy ways. You've seen examples, such as a female leader who sabotages herself with analysis-paralysis instead of taking action, or the leader whose lack of assertiveness fuels internal angst that eventually erupts into aggressive behavior, to the astonishment of everyone involved.

During more than 20 years of coaching many types of clients, including women leaders, I've consistently discovered that parts work creates major client breakthroughs. Parts work fills my heart with joy because clients lead themselves to new levels of confidence and success. Even better, their growth is sustainable. •

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STAND YOUR GROUND

10 tools every woman needs

By Marva Sadler, MBA, TOC Jonah

Picture the following scene: A woman in her late 20s is standing in the entrance of an opulent office speaking with a 50ish white male sitting behind an imposing walnut desk. “I came to speak with you about my next project assignment,” she says quietly. “I understand you’ve decided I can’t be assigned to anything that requires overnight travel. Is that correct?” The man looks surprised, and a bit uncomfortable. “Of course,” he says. “I thought you’d appreciate it. That way you don’t have to be away from your baby.”

“With respect sir,” she replies, “That’s not your decision to make. I don’t want special accommodation. If I allow that decision to stand, it will ruin my career.”

That conversation took place many years ago. Yes. It really happened, and it dramatically changed my career trajectory. More important, such scenes still take place today. Even more concerning, many such scenes don’t occur. The woman doesn’t realize she’s being treated differently, or she doesn’t know how to address the issue. So, her opportunities diminish, and her frustrations increase. As a coach, you’ve heard similar stories dozens of times, often without the happy ending.

As a woman with more than 20 years’ experience in senior executive positions, I put significant energy into helping other women. I’m frequently asked for women’s leadership tips. Recently, I was invited to present to a group on “10 Tools Every Woman Needs.” I offer these tips to you now. They’re based on hundreds of leadership books read, many years of experience, and personal opinion. These are my top 10.

1 Anticipate

Wayne Gretzky once said, “A good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be.” As with sports, so with business. Don’t wait to be told what needs to be done. Figure out where things need to go, what needs to change, and help your team get there.

2 Be Bold

Studies show that women typically take fewer risks than their male counterparts. For example, they only apply for positions they feel fully qualified for. They encourage each other to “play it safe.” Practice taking small risks. They will lead to greater comfort with bigger risks. Plan for bigger risks and lean into them. If you never experience a setback, you’re not being bold enough.

term with my teams. In our vernacular, it’s Who, instead of What, but I use it to mean; no pretense, no BS, no games.

Relationships (both personal and professional) based on authenticity reduce the distance between team members, ensure that we are interacting around what is real, and leave us with more mental and emotional energy for productive work.

I recently received a birthday gift from my team. It contained notes that each

Don’t wait to be told what needs to be done. Figure out where things need to go, what needs to change, and help your team get there.

3 Be Confident

Women are socialized from early childhood to focus on competence. Most of us continue to emphasize competence well into our careers. We tend to use diminishing language when presenting ideas.

“This probably isn’t very good, but...” Yet studies show that confidence is at least as important as competence in determining success. Practice expressing confidence in yourself, and in others. Your expressions of confidence in your team will strengthen your relationships, increase trust in your leadership, and foster success.

4 Be Positive

Psychologists tell us that positivity fuels success. When we are positive, our brains are more engaged. We are more creative, more energetic, more motivated, more resilient, and more productive. Best of all, positivity can be learned. We can tap into all these benefits through practice.

5 Be Genuine

WYSIWYG was a popular term in the early days of software development. What You See (on the screen) Is What You Get. I use that

team member had written telling me what they appreciated most about my leadership. The majority mentioned how much they appreciated that I am genuine in my interactions. I was deeply honored.

6 Own Your Power

This is one of my favorite tips, to both women and men, young and not so young. There are many kinds of power. Positional Power is the most widely recognized, but not the only kind you have at your disposal. Expert Power (skills and expertise), Informational Power (what you know), and Referent Power (who you know) are all extremely valuable power sources.

My personal favorite is Relationship Power. Building strong relationships builds power. It increases your powerbase of Who you know, and What you know, and it increases the emotional ties that cause people to want to help you. One other tip: The best way to grow your power is to share it with others.

7 Prioritize

Somewhere in our history, women bought into the idea that we could and should “do it all”.

In their recent book, *How Women Rise*, Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith found that not prioritizing, or “trying to do it all” was one of the most common mistakes that hinders women’s careers.

This attitude that we should be able to do everything, and do it well, leads to stress, overwhelm, and burnout. The simple answer is **DON’T TRY**. Focus on what’s important. Stay away from low value-added tasks, extra assignments with little upside, and the constant quest for perfection.

8 Be Resilient

The ability to bounce back after a setback is one of the biggest determinants of long-term success. The bigger and bolder we play, the more likely we are to fail at some point. The key is not to avoid failure; it’s to recover quickly and learn a lesson that helps build our skill set. As Sheryl Sandberg advised in her book, *Option B*, remember the three

P’s of Setback: It’s not Personal; it’s not Pervasive; and it’s not Permanent. Get back up and get going.

9 Focus on Solutions

If you’re like me, you’ve recently been in a meeting where someone focuses on all the reasons something won’t work and can’t be fixed. And the meeting feels like it drags on forever. Frankly, it’s easy to focus on finding problems. Solutions take more thought. A solution orientation is one of the top five differentiators between those who succeed and everyone else. When you bring potential solutions to the discussion, everyone wins.

10 Throw Some Elbows

Several years ago, my daughter was invited to play soccer on a competitive boys’ team. She was 15. It may have been one of the greatest lessons of her (and my) life. She had

been playing competitively for six years by that time. But she had always been on girls’ teams. Believe it or not, girls’ soccer, even competitive girls’ soccer is very different than boys’ soccer.

At 15, boys are stronger, faster, and due to all that testosterone, much more aggressive. My daughter had to learn to play the game all over again. She had to be willing to charge the ball, stand her ground in a free kick, and play a different game. She had to earn her place on the field at every match, not only with her own team, but with the opponents. Players from other teams would try to break her, make her cry, or get her off the field. Sound familiar? Change a few words, and we could be talking about the experience many of us have experienced.

In her book *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman*, Gail Evans gave us some great wisdom. “There is a set of unwritten rules in business, and, while you may not choose to follow all of them, if you don’t know what they are, you might as well be playing the game with both hands tied behind your back.”

In my many years of business, I’ve discovered it’s imperative to know the rules, and to use them, and break them, intentionally. The further I’ve progressed in my career, the more I’ve chosen to break the rules I don’t like, especially those that relate to treating team members like interchangeable parts or abusing others’ goodwill to get ahead. As we rise, we will find ourselves with more opportunities to set the rules of play. In the meantime, it’s important to understand the game, and to stand our ground.

As I said when I began this article, these ten tools are my personal favorites. They come from leadership books and personal experience. Your toolkit may look very different. But I find it valuable to review difficult situations through the lens of which tools might be helpful. •

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THE LOW CROUCH

Leading while silenced

By Carrie A. L. Arnold, PhD, MCC

Last fall, my husband and I took a long weekend with two of our children in Estes Park. We live in south Denver, Colorado, and the drive takes less than two hours. My husband and his son went up earlier, and my daughter and I left for the mountains at 5:00 p.m. We were on the road for 30 minutes when the snow and rain began.

I spent that drive on high alert, and as it grew dark, I alternated between stan-

dard and bright headlights as I maneuvered tight turns, oncoming traffic, and windy roads. I did not want to alarm my daughter that I was nervous. I pretended I was completely comfortable and tried to act normal.

When we arrived at our rented cabin, my body was in a tight crouch. My hands were sore from gripping the steering wheel, and I felt like I had been swimming in a pool of adrenaline. The

drive took a toll on me, and once there, I could admit how scared I was and how easy it could have been to slide off the road, swerve, or cause an accident. My relief to be out of the car felt immediate.

Most of us have had a driving experience like this; the tension we feel is visceral. Now imagine holding that type of stress in your body all day, every day. Women who feel silenced while trying to lead can experience this exact type of grip.

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FEELING SILENCED

In 2011, I began to explore silencing. As an executive coach, I focused on the client group I work with most: female executives. The silenced female leader is a paradox, as leadership implies a sense of voice and efficacy. Leaders need to communicate their purpose and vision to enlist followers. This is hardly done without voice, yet my research suggests many women are sitting in executive and senior-leader roles feeling silenced.

The sensation is far more complicated than refusing to speak up or out; it is also not about tone, volume, preferences, or having a quiet personality. Voice is an intricate part of leading. We breathe in oxygen that allows our vocal cords to vibrate, and then sound is produced. There is the physical phenomenon of speaking but much more profound is the psychological aspect of having a voice.

Women are silenced by systems that favor a dominant male discourse, or they may experience systems that prefer a style or opinion they do not resemble or share. As a default, their authentic style may be silenced by ingroup normative behaviors. There are also relationships that silence. Peers and direct reports who hold power in an organization can be commanding silencers, not to mention those in leadership who yield authority over others.

It is a myth to assume that men always silence women. This is not true. My research suggests that women silence other women in equal – and at times, more painful – ways. Women often feel they have to adopt the male-dominant style of leadership and communication to be successful. When they do so, they can become silencers of their gender in unconscious ways.

When systems or relationships do not silence women, they can become self-silencing. Women can go to great lengths to preserve relationships, and their association with an organization can become the entity they will silence themselves to remain un-

beaten in their careers. The impact of feeling silenced requires a higher level of awareness. My original research indicates that silencing effects the brain, heart, soul, and body like a virus.

Here are some key findings a silencing virus creates:

- **A mental spin** that causes someone to think, rethink, play and replay certain things. The brain is seeking a different outcome from something in the past that will never happen.
- **Deficit thinking** makes a woman reconsider if she deserves a seat at the table. She may see herself as less than or begin to question if she belongs.
- **Emotional trauma** with post-traumatic stress terms used by women; they also use war-like metaphors to describe their efforts to lead.
- **A sense of vulnerability** can cause women to play small. They often mute their leadership voice if they believe speaking out could jeopardize their relationship with an organization.
- **Feelings of isolation** to finally arrive at the hard-earned corner office and still feel silenced is often a difficult thing to admit.
- **A loss of self or a loss** of who they are in their leadership role can be a spiritual crisis. Disconnection from purpose, values, or identity is a painful place to lead.
- **Immunity issues** that impact the body. The respiratory system, digestive system, and overall body health can be damaged. Women in my study spoke about ulcers, constant colds, stomach tears, significant weight gain or loss, grinding teeth, blurred vision, and various other conditions that emerged during periods of silencing.
- **A possible opt-out** of leadership is likely. When women self-silence, there is a higher correlation of this phenomenon.

When women opt-out of leadership or make a leadership change, their transition does not automatically bring voice recovery. Findings suggest that

only half the women who opt-out or create a job change fully recover from their silencing experience. The overall leadership of a woman facing these silencing symptoms is bound to compromise how she interacts, leads, or propels a team forward.

I surmise that silencing is perhaps an unspoken phenomenon that is creating a barrier to women promoting into or sustaining leadership positions. Based on a study conducted with more than 60 women in executive roles, less than 25% of women leaders can stay in their leadership positions after a long silencing experience. Most transfer, leave, or opt out of leadership entirely.

regard. When we highly regard someone, they get our respect, our undivided attention, and our kind words of appreciation. Self-regard is taking that same conscious consideration women are eager to give others and directing it back on themselves.

Third, women need to form relationships with others and move out of isolation when they feel silenced, as this is a critical aspect of recovery. Often men are crucial in helping women feel heard again; they need the invitation to partner and be part of the process.

Also, women need to find their tribe of other women who are in similar

Women are silenced by systems that favor a dominant male discourse, or they may experience systems that prefer a style or opinion they do not resemble or share.

HAVING A VOICE

Not every woman in leadership will experience silencing. Those who do need to focus on voice recovery by relying on three essential strategies.

First, the ability to focus on the phenomenon and essence of feeling silenced and frame it as a virus is critical. This is not just about gaining more confidence, speaking up, breaking the silence, or being more assertive. When silencing is over-simplified, women can feel dismissed and further silenced.

By naming the phenomenon in new terms, it allows women to consider their leadership in new ways and it also helps normalize something that many are reluctant to name. Having a purposeful and effective voice does not happen by accident, and it requires intention.

Second, there are strategies to heal from the virus that requires a shift in focus. Many women talk about improving their self-care, and this is perhaps a mistake. Instead, women need to consider their level of self-

executive roles. Having a shared context is essential for women who are struggling with silencing, as not everyone can understand the complexity. Women need to make time for precious community and connection.

IN SUMMARY

Women leaders face a host of barricades. Pay, effort, access, airtime, promotions, forgiveness for errors, and overall grace are a long way from being equal. Some barriers women face are outside their control, while others – like maintaining a purposeful and effective voice – are within their scope of agency and influence. Women first need to recognize if they are in a silencing situation; second, they need to assess their self-regard; and last, they need to find a community of other executives who share a similar context. The low crouch is an impossible place from which to lead – but with voice recovery, there comes a new and needed posture. •



CONTROL THE CONTROLLABLES

How to S.H.E.D. limiting beliefs

By Jenn Chloupek, CSC, MEd

As coaches, we have a great opportunity for coaching women in the dynamic environments they work in. Coaches can coach around the controllables.

Helping our women clients evaluate where they spend their time, energy and effort in those areas which they can control can yield great results. When coaching women around legitimate obstacles they might encounter in the workplace, it is a good coaching practice to determine where they can spend their time, energy and effort.

While coaching your client there are three areas to examine: Control, Influence, and Concern.

When looking at glass ceiling barriers,

it is helpful to ask your client: What can you control in this situation? What can you influence? Are you wasting time being concerned over a situation that you have no control or influence over?

The U.S. department of Labor defines the glass ceiling as the “invisible – but impenetrable – barrier(s) between women and the executive suite, preventing them from reaching the highest levels of the business world regardless of their accomplishments and merits.”

The 2019 Executive Coaching Survey from Sherpa Coaching noted that less than half (47%) of respondents reported that women and men had an equal chance of holding positions of power in their organization.

To help break the glass ceiling, you

and your client need to identify if one exists in their organization. Is there a gap in diversity in the board room? Are people operating out of their own personal biases? Are inappropriate comments being made? Interestingly, the 2019 Executive Coaching Survey notes that more organizations than ever (90%) value women as leaders, while less than half are ‘always’ open and receptive to change.

I recently spoke at a Women’s Summit in Southern California and came across the most inclusive group of women professionals that I have ever met. They were operating out of what they could control and influence, and they were spending three days developing together professionally.

What tools and methods can coaches use to help women operate in this way?

They were able to S.H.E.D. limiting beliefs that were perpetuating the glass ceiling. They listened to each other, supported one another, and lifted each other up.

S.H.E.D. is a helpful acronym coaches can use to help their clients when looking at behaviors and what they can control when there are 'invisible barriers' and unconscious biases.

Let's explore each letter individually in S.H.E.D. and the questions coaches can ask their women clients.

S = SET GOALS

Do you have clarity of your goals? In order to move up, you need to know where you are going and set goals that might be outside of your comfort zone. As you are setting goals, make sure you are not listening to 'self-talk' that could be limiting. Put a stop to these internal voices by seeking outside support. Who can support you with this goal?

Who are the important people in your life? How do they influence and support you? Are they aware of their role? Remember, this is an opportunity (an area you can control) to reach out to them to let them know how they can support you and your goals. Enlist allies from day one.

Some organizations have sponsorship/mentoring programs that help with setting and reaching goals. Seek out opportunities that will support you reaching your goal. Showing up and blooming where you are planted as you seek to rise is something that you can control.

When setting goals, remember: what can you control and influence? Are you spending time in an area of concern?

H = HUMILITY

Humility includes 'confidence in one's ability to admit mistakes and seek help from others.' This does not mean setting aside self-confidence. Instead, humility involves willingness to admit mistakes, ask for advice, speak respectfully and listen to others.

When striving towards the top, a certain level of humility and vulnerability is needed in order to be

authentic, self-aware, and transparent.

Humility involves a tremendous amount of listening and seeking to understand. It seems counter-intuitive to be other-centered when trying to break through the glass ceiling, however clawing your way to the top as you are being self-centered leaves behind a lot of 'could-be followers.'

Look for help. Build your network. Take initiatives to increase your visibility while working to overcome your limitations. The 2019 Executive Coaching Survey Report noted that only half of women are aware of team coaching programs available to them. Are you in that half?

and positive consequences of going for your goal.

- **Coaching** – How will you monitor your progress? Is the needle moving with regards to reaching your personal summit? What is working? What might need to be done differently?

When setting expectations for yourself, don't forget: what can you control and influence? Are you spending time in an area of concern?

D = DEVELOPMENT

When tackling the glass ceiling, you can learn more about it (control). Raise your concerns (control/influence). Take responsibility for your own development.

To help break the glass ceiling, you and your client need to identify if one exists in their organization.

When seeking humility, remember: what can you control and influence? Are you spending time in an area of concern?

E = EXPECTATIONS

Setting realistic expectations for yourself will help you break through any perceived barriers.

Some simple questions to ask yourself before committing to a self-imposed expectation would be: Is this expectation realistic? Fair? Consistent? Finally, can I do it?

If you can confidently answer 'yes' to these questions, then you are ready for the next four steps.

- **Communication** – What do I need to know about my goal (remember S in S.H.E.D.: Set Goals). What is my plan, using the 5 Ws – who, what, where, when, why, and how? Make sure you can communicate this articulately to yourself first and then to others.

- **Commitment** – Are you committed to achieving this goal/expectation? How can you demonstrate that commitment through your actions?

- **Consequences** – What are all the consequences? Examine both negative

While taking personal responsibility for your own development, consider this equation. On one side, you have positive skills and on the other side you have positive behavior. What is the result of positive skills and behavior? Positive Skills + Positive Behavior = Positive Impact on Business.¹ And that's the bottom line.

What areas do you need to develop regarding your skills and behaviors? What will help you shatter the glass ceiling between you and your goals? Remember to approach these questions through the S.H.E.D acronym, and ask yourself: What can I control in this situation? What can I influence? Am I wasting time being concerned over a situation that I have no control or influence over?

Our research shows that globally, corporate cultures are becoming increasingly gender-neutral, and that trend will continue. •

NOTE:

¹ *What's Your Impact On Business: The Sherpa Guide to Business, Behavior and You*, by Brenda Corbett (2012).

FEMALE POWER!

9 skills to create a supportive community

By Maria Connolly, LPC & Louise Santiago, PhD



Leadership is intentional work. If we, as coaches, are to help our clients achieve excellence, we cannot expect our own personal and professional support to come from our clients.

Just as we ask our clients to work on emotional intelligence, authenticity, well-defined boundaries of accountability, clear and direct communication, problem-solving, decision-making, self-awareness, and self-management, so we, as coaches must do the same. We must reach out to leaders we admire, as we create our own community of advisors, mentors and colleagues to support, inspire and encourage us.

As women, it can be challenging to identify our unique, personal style of leadership. You may feel that the old, hierarchical style of leadership doesn't fit

you, but you're not sure how to balance emotion with strong leadership. To answer that need, there's a new feminine style of leadership emerging – one that is based on building a supportive community as your foundation.

When we build our own supportive community, we can reach our potential to maximize our own performance. Building community is a powerful, yet subtle, influence that brings out the best in each member of a team or group to create a synergy of the whole accomplishing much more than any individual could. We say it's a feminine style of leadership because it pays attention to the human element, taking advantage of the behaviors, characteristics, and skills that women have quietly used for centuries to successfully guide their families.

Hopefully, you already have a supportive community in place with women who you admire and respect as part of your inner circle. However, in order to nourish your community of feminine leaders and keep it from stagnating, you must continue to master the following skills. These skills will magnetically attract the kind of like-minded women you want to both learn from and support.

1 Practice Mindfulness and Self-Awareness

Only you can control your reactions to others. Learn to identify how your body sensations reveal the way your emotions affect you. This requires you to slow down and curiously observe how your body is shaped by your thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. For

example, when threatened, you might cross your arms. When stressed, you may tighten your neck, shoulders, stomach, and hunch over.

Learning to recognize, name and experience each emotion, without judgment, gives you the power to reject unhelpful emotional reactions and adopt a more positive state, or way of being. Feminine leaders don't let everyday stressors make them rigid in their thinking and physiology. They've learned to soften the body and figuratively roll with the punches.

2 Know and Accept Yourself

An effective coach or leader models the behavior desired for their client or team. It's not a skill set you put on and take off. It's who you are intrinsically. The old "do as I say, not as I do" simply doesn't work. When you hide behind a persona and show the world a censored version of self, you're giving away your power.

It's important to regularly reconnect with your purpose and values. Embrace who you are now AND actively unlock the full potential of who you can dynamically become through mindful, personal growth.

3 Develop Healthy Interdependence

We begin life totally dependent. In our teen years, we strive for independence. The next stage in the natural progression of human growth is interdependence – learning that there is a social responsibility for playing and working together nicely. It's not all about "me"; more is accomplished by the synergy of "we."

Feminine leaders hone their sensitivity to the mood in a room, working toward understanding each person. You motivate by making an honest assessment and respectfully communicating the strengths you appreciate and where there are areas for improvement. Feminine leaders aren't afraid to show emotions when appropriate.

4 Fearlessly Shine the Spotlight on Other Women

Feminine leaders look for ways to connect, to hear and see others. We seek to inspire and build, thereby multiplying our impact, rather than separate and diminish our efforts. People respond to this caring energy. It fosters creativity and excellence, as others feel accepted and valued.

Don't be too busy to shine a spotlight on others. Make a daily practice of verbalizing or writing your gratitude for the way others participate in the world.

5 Model Healthful Living

A healthy body is the powerhouse behind attaining meaningful aspirations and dreams. Without clean water, nutritious food, and energizing exercise, the human body can't function properly. When you practice and model wellness you empower yourself, and by example, others to be the best version possible. Also, it's essential to nurture a powerful spirit that lets dreams soar, never giving up.

6 Invest in Yourself

Before you can give to others in your community, it's vital to have a continual commitment to developing self. This can be challenging because as women, we're often juggling multiple responsibilities and end up lacking the time, energy, or focus to do deep personal work.

Make a commitment to yourself to get away and seriously explore and clarify what you want. Visit lovely surroundings where you can de-stress and think deeply without distraction.

7 Strengthen Your Convictions

When you're strongly convinced that what you do and say matters and that what you offer is of great value to others, your energy shifts and you become more attractive and persuasive. The people you work with feel more at ease. It engenders a feeling of security.

This is essential as a leader, as it helps everyone concentrate on doing their best work because they see that everything is under control.

8 Be an Intentional Communicator

Take ownership of your career. You determine your vision, goals, and path. When you set intentions, you're sending a message to the universe and yourself about who you want to be, what you wish to contribute and how you choose to touch the lives of others. No one can do it for you. Don't let people underestimate you, because of the way you present yourself.

We recommend learning Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques to help you earn respect and inspire trust, so people want to work with you, recommend you and promote you.

9 Be a Lifelong Learner

As a leader, complacency is dangerous since too many people rely on you. Leaders never stop learning. When lifelong learning is your way of life, you'll have a competitive edge in today's job market. You won't feel stuck in your profession, because you know you can learn new skills that will advance your career and make you highly sought after as an expert in your field. You never need to feel stuck when you can draw from talent within your community.

Even if you don't yet have an empowering support system, you can build your own, by being open to making new connections, reaching out, conversing, and sharing your hopes, dreams, and ambitions. For example, the authors of this article met and connected at a coach development program. Since then we have been working to build a business to empower women to be fierce leaders.

We, as women, have the privilege – indeed, the responsibility – to use our community to empower each new generation to come. Are you up for the challenge? •

Global Coaching Supervision Survey

In 2018, four researchers conducted a survey which captured perceptions and practices of coaching supervision from around the world.¹

This study used the European Mentoring and Coaching Council's (EMCC) definition of coaching supervision: "Supervision is the interaction that occurs when a mentor or coach brings their coaching or mentoring work experiences to a supervisor in order to be supported and to engage in reflective dialogue and collaborative learning for the development and benefit of the mentor or coach, their clients and their organizations."

This is the largest known global dataset collected on coaching supervision to date. Data was obtained from coaches, coach supervisors and coach/clinicians in some regions that had not been well-represented previously, since many prior studies had originated in areas such as the U.K. and Europe where coaching supervision is a more common practice. The analysis utilized responses from 1,280 participants in 72 countries, of which the largest number came from North America and the United Kingdom.

The study asked for responses from those who receive or are currently receiving individual and group supervision, or both.

A few select findings from the study:

- The highest adoption rates for coaching supervision were reported in Europe.



- The majority of participants (88 percent) reported experiencing individual coaching supervision, with 65 percent having experienced group supervision. Of the 1,280 participants, 29 percent (352) had experienced both individual and group supervision outside of a training or certification program. About 11 percent (137) reported working with both an individual and group coach supervisor simultaneously.

- The topics most frequently explored by coaches in both individual and group supervision were client-related issues/challenges/situations.

- Helpful supervisor behaviors concerned the content, rather than the process, of coaching supervision. The most helpful behavior reported was supervisors offering their own perspective, ideas, advice and/or experience.

- There is occasionally a lack of clarity between coaching supervision and mentor coaching (e.g. for ICF certification), especially beyond Europe. While the survey provided an upfront definition of each and used screening questions to filter out mentor coaching, it appeared that some participants still did not differentiate between coaching supervision and mentor coaching.

- Mixed perceptions were reported about the cost of supervision. Coaches who had never experienced coaching supervision reported viewing it as expensive. However, coaches who had experienced supervision reported that the fee/cost was not a barrier for them. There was a broad range of perceptions about what appropriate fees should be.

The study can be read and downloaded in its entirety at: coachingsupervisionresearch.org

NOTES:

¹Kimcee McAnally, PhD, PCC; Lilian Abrams, MBA, PhD, MCC; Mary Jo Asmus, PCC; Terry Hildebrandt, PhD, MCC, MCEC.

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Change

Is it your enemy or friend?

By Deborah Johnson, CPCC, MCC

Change. It's a word that can cause several thoughts, feelings and emotions to bubble up for us. Change is one of those things that we are constantly faced with in life, both personally and professionally. As coaches, we have the opportunity every day to work with our clients as they face change in many forms.

So, my question is, what makes change so incredibly interesting in terms of our reaction as human beings? Perhaps it is the idea that we are wading into the unknown, outside of our current world into a world that we do not know.

There are so many questions that arise, such as: How will I fit in? What will it be like? Will it be ok? Do I have what I need? How will it feel?

Although change can be tough, if we take time to reflect back on all of the changes we have 'mastered,' I wonder what treasures we would find. As I reflect on the changes I have gone through, which have been many, what I have found is that with every change come lessons and growth if we choose to embrace the opportunity. If we choose to walk into the 'wilderness' with an understanding that we need to go through it versus around, over or under it, we can and will become stronger, wiser and empowered.



Have you ever tried to ignore a push to change? I have found that what exists will persist until we listen to the messages and see the signs that change is something we need to do. It's like getting a wakeup call where the pain of staying where we are is so great that we are finally forced

“What exists will persist until we listen to the messages and see the signs that change is something we need to do.”

to move. I am always interested and amazed at people's stories about how change has shaped their lives and made them who they are today. Understanding what others have been through

often provides insight into how they react to things in current situations.

My belief is that each lesson we learn creates an opportunity to share it with someone else to help them on their journey. The lessons can also create empathy, which is a key ingredient needed to become a great leader, coach and person. The more we have the ability to understand, the more we can connect with others. This more than anything else helps us on the journey called life.

I have often heard the adage, "there is a reason a windshield is bigger than a rearview mirror." If we embrace change and focus on moving forward while using the lessons that have threaded through our life, we have an opportunity to become a powerful asset to the coaching profession and the world.

My question to you is this: "What lessons have created your life tapestry, and how are you sharing those lessons with others?" •

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