

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: LEADING YOURSELF & OTHERS

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Women fulfill so many roles in life.....daughter, sister, partner, wife, mother, employee, friend, etc, etc, and in the process we often forget about the most important person of all.....ourselves. In our drive to be all things to all people and to please others, for that is how we have been socialized, to be the “nurturers of the planet”, we nurture least the people who need it most....ourselves.

In her book, “Meditations for women who do too much”, Anne Wilson Schaef, paints the following picture, which I think most women today can relate to:

“Some of us have modeled our lives after the road runner cartoon character: jump out of bed in the morning – beep, beep. Throw in a load of laundry so it can wash while we do our exercises and shower – beep, beep. Nine minutes for make-up and hair – beep, beep. Seven minutes for toast. Five minutes for eating breakfast and making a list of things that must be done today – beep, beep. Throw laundry into the dryer, grab keys, handbag and briefcase, and burst through the front door – beep, beep.” aNow this is clearly a “single female road runner”.

This anecdote doesn't include those of us who have children to wake, feed, get dressed and march out the door with eyes still half shut with a piece of Vegemite toast in one hand, a juice popper in the other (so it won't spill in the back of the car) and hoping that they have two matching shoes on as you drive them off to day care of before choll car before the sun has risen. Note this part of the story doesn't even have “bbep, beep” as we don't even have time to make the noise. By the time we have finished our morning routine, most people would be exhausted, and we have just begun – beep.....beep.....Perhaps it is important for us to remember that while we have many characteristics in common with the roadrunner, we were not created to be roadrunners.

In her self-help book “be-good-to-yourself Therapy, Cherry Hartman puts forward the very valid proposition that you cannot be anything to anyone until you take care of yourself first !! And many women have yet to learn that. We are often brought up to believe that God, or which ever spiritual being we may (or may not) worship come first, then others, and right down the bottom ourselves. We have believed this and accepted it. As women we are even referred to as a minority group in terms of the work place and political and economic power. Extraordinary when you consider that in Australia alone we make up 52% of the population, occupy 43% of full time jobs and 75% of part time jobs. We also own 40% of the over 800,000 small business in Australia today, and have a higher success rate in small business than our male counterparts, and yet we continue to doubt ourselves.

In a study done in the SU by Carol Tomlinson Keasey, she said : “One startling finding, given that these women had an average IQ of 143, was their lack of confidence in their abilities and the belief that their intellectual selves were...not developed.” People have said that the women’s movement is the only revolution where the outpost of the enemy is in our minds (not that we need to think in terms of enemies). We should all feel a lingering sadness for a group of intelligent women who do not believe in themselves or their abilities, and then perhaps ask ourselves if perhaps that are not too dissimilar to ourselves. We amy put up a good front, but often there is that niggling doubt that perhaps we are not quite gooid enough, or as good as ithers tell us we are.

In order for us to be good leaders we need to change this by starting with some self-leadership. Self-leadership is the essence of all individual and team change management. N Self-leadership is based on knowing yourself and seeking reliable counsel. It is also the core of the future career covenant. It encompasses our personal goals, values, vision and requires us to be courageous.

Here are some tips for Self-leadership from a researcher in this field, Richard J.Leider:

- **Choices are the secret of our power.** We are not powerless in choosing our living and working conditions. We need to make choices that are right for us. So many Generation X women are choosing not to have children, 25% of them, because they believe that you cannot have a successful career and a family, and yet society does not ask men to make the same choice. That is not only sad, but is contributing to Australia’s declining birth rate, and therefore the “War for Talent” will no longer be about hiring the brightest graduates, it will simply be about getting enough people to do the work that needs to be done within the next 10 – 20 years.
- **Gain control where you can.** You need to make time not only for your family, but for exercise or some form of stress relief, and self development. The only person who can give you permission to do something for yourself, is YOU. Lock the door to your bedroom for 15 minutes when you get home from work before tackling domestics, children , dogs or whatever else requires your attention, and if you turn up the music high enough (even Enya) you can’t hear them beating on the door
- **Change your mental maps.** Real change comes from changing the way we think, and in order to do that, you need time to think. Even 10m minutes a day in a quiet spot, whether a park or coffee shop ON YOUR OWN will give you that time to think and ask yourself the question “What area of life would I like to develop besides work.....my mind, body or spirit?”
- **Do what you love.** If you don’t love what you do, get some career counseling and start changing things. Baby Boomers could learn from Generation X and Y, who quite openly will tell you that “We won’t do work we don’t like, that is boring and not challenging”. Therein lies another secret clue for leaders in relation to retention and motivation in the workplace.

- **Renew a relationship with a mentor or coach.** As yourself “Who is the first person I’d call for leadership advice?”
- **Step out of your comfort zone EVERY DAY.** Risk and challenge can recharge your batteries. All successful people are risk takers, often they take calculated risks but nevertheless they take risks. The worst thing that can happen when you take a risk is that you fail, and failure is not something many successful people are afraid of. It should be seen as a learning opportunity.
- **Quit doing something !!** Busy people and leaders tend to over commit themselves. The end result again is that you will have no time for yourself.
- **Self-leadership is self-care.** Be honest with yourself, and have fun.....it’s contagious !!

Now that we have some tips around leading ourselves, we are ready to lead others. The trick for women is to get into those positions of senior leadership. In the most recent statistics released by EOWA, we find :

- Men outnumber women in managerial roles by more than three to one
- Only 1 in every 8 members on private sector boards is a woman
- Of the top 100 companies in Australia, only 2 CEO’s are female
- Women comprise just 13% of general managers and 27% of specialist managers
- Women still only earn 84% of men’s full-time weekly earnings for doing the same work.

When you look at these and other recent statistical information, which suggests it will take only 177 years before we have an equal number of men and women in leadership positions, then you realise that while we may have come along way in the last 30 years, we have an incredibly long way to go.

However, when you look at what employees of the Employer of Choice winners in the Hewitt surveys of the last 3 years have identified as what make these companies good places to work, you receive women are well skilled to play a key leadership role now and in the future. The best companies to work for identify the following key motivating factors:

- Strong leadership, and a genuine interest in people
- Performance management systems and processes
- Regular, constructive feedback
- Challenging work
- Opportunities to learn new skills
- Teamwork
- Open and honest communication
- Work/life balance.

If you then compare this to what motivates Generation X and Y in the workplace, it has many similarities to the list of the characteristics of an EOC. Gen X and Y seek:

- Inclusive work environments
- Regular, honest communication
- Strong team environments
- Opportunity to make a contribution
- Opportunities to learn new skills
- Work/life balance
- Being heard
- Being valued and accepted as a “whole” human being

Both these lists demonstrate that the old style of “command and control” and “Do as you are told” leadership will not work with Generation X and Y, and Employers of Choice are already shifting their cultures to being more open, more inclusive and recognising that loyalty and respect works both ways. While Veterans and Baby Boomers were loyal to organisations, Gen X and Gen Y are loyal to good leaders and managers and the team they “belong” to. Women have always understood the value of helping others, they are natural mentors and coaches, they simply don’t recognize it in themselves in many cases. Women have learnt how to be team players in sport, social environments and understood how to use teams and teamwork to achieve seemingly impossible challenges, e.g. school fetes and sporting carnivals on shoe string budgets with no technology, etc. Women are good at sharing information, and teaching others, another thing that Gen X and Gen Y are looking for in the workplace. Women are good at giving feedback and encouraging people, again an important skill for the leader of the future. And of course, women understand how challenging it is to balance work, home and other personal priorities. We are the “master jugglers” and can therefore empathise.

It would be naïve to suggest that all women would lead in this way. Many lead like the Veteran and Baby Boomer male role models that they have had, and continue to have, in the workplace, but Gen X and Gen Y will take their intellectual property, which sits between their ears, and they will not hesitate to go somewhere else if they are not happy with the leadership, the environment and the team to which they have been assigned, and remember the “War for Talent” is changing!! Women are now well placed in terms of physical numbers, education, skill and experience to take an equal place at the leadership table of the power bases of society.....government, private sector and churches, and to truly make a difference by leading differently, because that is what the future requires !!!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Meditations for Women who do too much”, Anne Wilson Schaefer

“The Leader of the Future”, The Drucker Foundation

“The Future of Work & Leadership”, Avril Henry, July 2001

Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency

“Leadership & Generational Diversity”, Avril Henry, 2002, 2003