



VALUING WOMEN LEADERS

By RAINA RADZAIFF
editor@leaderonomics.com

AS of July 2013, there were only 19 female elected Presidents and Prime Ministers in leadership positions around the world. In the business domain, women currently hold only 4.6% of Fortune 500 CEO positions and the same percentage of Fortune 1000 CEO positions.

As women continue their upward trajectory in the business world, they have yet to be fully recognised for the distinctive qualities and abilities they bring to the workplace.

Like many children raised in a modern family upbringing, I was surrounded by hardworking, strong-willed and purpose-driven women.

My grandmother, mother and mother-in-law possess natural leadership skills and they are masters of "opportunity management" – seamlessly keeping us all in check while managing the household and supporting the family.

They seamlessly deal with crisis and change and are turnaround experts – sensing and neutralising any signs of danger well before it crosses our paths. Thanks to them, we are well-organised, loving and well-balanced.

We are by no means a perfect family, but we are a modern family who embraces traditions even as we adapt to changing times.

The best women leaders I know have circular vision that enables them to be well-rounded people. Often, they have their finger on the pulse of culture and can talk to you about the latest news on pop culture, and then effortlessly switch gears to give you their perspective on what is taking place in the global economy.

Women leaders seeking a chance to be significant see the world through a lens of opportunity; they tend to go for opportunities previously uncharted.

As women run the show for years both at home and at work, one may recognise that these women are master multitaskers and highly collaborative, although they are not afraid to get territorial to protect their domain.

They enjoy their own space to challenge

themselves and find their own rhythm. Many are like scientists: they want to make new discoveries or solve problems where others have failed. They do not stop pursuing until the job is done. This is why they make good collaborative leaders – not afraid of trial and error as long as that gets them closer towards accomplishing their goals.

As I have learned from my women bosses and mentors, they prefer things to be authentic and practical. These women leaders enjoy a good challenge – and seek to find meaning and purpose from each circumstance faced and opportunity given.

They like to observe and understand the connectivity of thoughts. They also want all the facts and figures before making critical decisions.

Successful women leaders do not rely on favours; they earn respect and strongly believe they can influence their own advancement by serving others. They also strive to prove their value and self-worth by surpassing performance expectations.

Respect means more than recognition and the most successful women leaders do not aim to become the star of the show – rather, they aid others to build a great show.

In other words, being in the spotlight is not what drives them, rather it is the ability to influence positive outcomes with maximum impact.

1 OPPORTUNITY-DRIVEN

When faced with a challenge, women leaders tend to see the glass as half-full rather than half-empty. They push the boundaries and, when faced with adverse circumstances, they learn all they can from it. Optimism is their mindset because they see opportunities in everything.

During the post-war consumer boom, women wanted to start sampling cosmetic products before buying them. Estee Lauder, the child of Hungarian immigrants, spotted and responded to that shifting dynamic by pioneering two marketing techniques that are widely used today: free gifts and gifts-with-purchase.

This is an example of innovation that other women use to seize opportunities in front of them.

2 STRATEGIC

Often, women see what others do not see. As one of my women mentors told me, "A woman's lens of scepticism oftentimes force them to see well beyond the most obvious details before them."

"They enjoy stretching their perspective to broaden their observations. Many women are not hesitant to peel the onion in order to get to the root of the matter."

At times they "play the part" to test the intentions of others and to assure that they are solidly grounded and reliable. Successful women leaders know how to play the game when they have to – and can anticipate the unexpected. They know what cards to play and keenly calculate the timing of each move they make.

This is not to say that women are uncomfortable with risk – in fact, they will often tackle risk head-on in order to get to the root cause of a problem and to solve it (they value time and money).

Women leaders who do not allow their egos to stand in the way of good business are in the mindset of getting things done for the betterment of those involved.

3 PASSIONATE

While women in general were historically viewed and stereotyped as emotional leaders by men, I believe they are just passionate explorers in pursuit of excellence. When women leaders are not satisfied with the status quo, they will want to make things better.

These women leaders get things done and avoid procrastination. When these women leaders are locked into what they are searching for – move out of the way, people! Their passionate pursuits allow them to become potent pioneers of new possibilities.

4 ENTREPRENEURIAL

Entrepreneurship is just a way of life for many women. They can be extremely resourceful, connect the dots of opportunity and become expert in developing the relationships they need to get the job done.

Many women leaders also see through an entrepreneurial lens to best enable the opportunities before them. They

know that in order to create and sustain momentum, it requires a 100% focus on the objective – and so they do not enjoy being disrupted by unnecessary noise and distractions.

5 PURPOSEFUL AND MEANINGFUL

Many women leaders enjoy inspiring others to achieve. Often seen as an underdog, they often had to work hard not to disappoint themselves and others.

Women leaders with a nurturing nature are also good listeners and excellent networkers. They enjoy creating ecosystems and support a collaborative leadership style that shapes the thinking and ideas of others.

This is what multiplies the size of an opportunity and/or its speed in execution in order to create a larger sphere of influence and impact. Women who do not have to be "right all the time" make good consensus builders and will more likely enjoy participating in a team environment.

6 FAMILY FOUNDATION

Women are often the glue that keeps things together and that is why they represent great leadership for the future. When they detect growing tensions that can lead to potential problems, the most successful women leaders enjoy taking control before circumstances get out of hand.

Women are usually the ones to secure the foundations of the family and to protect family and cultural traditions. They nurture the leadership within the home and in the workplace to ensure that legacies remain strong by being fed with the right "nutrients" and "ingredients".

Hopefully this perspective helps awaken more of us to the opportunity of learning about leadership from the women in our lives, whether in the home or at work.

To the great women in my life, thank you for the opportunity to be inspired and mentored by your leadership.

■ Raina Radzaiff is a learning and development practitioner with a leading Malaysia-based multinational corporation.

WOMEN LEADERS SEEKING A CHANCE TO BE SIGNIFICANT SEE THE WORLD THROUGH A LENS OF OPPORTUNITY; THEY TEND TO GO FOR OPPORTUNITIES PREVIOUSLY UNCHARTED