

## **Women in Leadership: Maximizing Your Team**

### **Keynote address for the Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce and Industry Women's Leadership Connection Luncheon**

June 17, 2009

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Good afternoon.

It is indeed a pleasure today to take part in the Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce and Industry's second Women's Leadership Connection this year. I'd like to share with you my thoughts today on the role that we, as successful women, can—and will—have on the future of this region, this country and our world by embracing what we do best.

Let me begin, however, by sharing with you a few thoughts on women and leadership in general. In a recent Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends survey on the subject, 2,000 Americans, equally divided between men and women, identified the following as the eight essential traits of an effective political leader:

- Honesty
- Intelligence
- Hard work
- Ambition
- Decisiveness
- Compassion
- Extroversion, and
- Creativity

Respondents then rated both men and women on each characteristic. What a disappointment to learn that although we females are seen as possessing seven of the eight traits indicative of strong leaders, those surveyed still believe that men are better leaders.

Half of those surveyed say women are more honest than men, while only 25 percent think men are more honest. Intelligence is deemed to be the second most important leadership trait. Here, women outperformed men again: 38 percent feel women are smarter than men, with men receiving just 14 percent of the vote. And on it goes. Compassion: women 80 percent, men five; extroversion: women 47, men 28; creativity: women 62, men 11.

In terms of job performance skills, it is women who receive the higher marks in every measure tested, including “standing up for one’s principles in the face of political pressure, being able to work out compromises and keeping government honest.”

That’s right, it was women by a landslide in all but one category, decisiveness—and I’m certain we’ll get better at **that** once more of us have the opportunity to make some real decisions! The Pew report’s summary is telling. “Women,” it says, “emerge from this survey a bit like a sports team that racks up better statistics, but still loses the game.”

This is not to say that the leadership club is entirely devoid of women. Israel’s Golda Meir, whom David Ben-Gurion once famously called “the best man in the government,” apparently never received the message that women can’t lead, nor did Britain’s Margaret Thatcher or Norway’s Gro Harlem Brundtland.

Last year’s U.S. presidential election brought two strong women—Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin—to the national stage. Clinton was elevated to near icon status by women all across America; so much so that when she failed to clinch the nomination her supporters, in turn, threatened to abandon the party—a heretofore unthinkable act.

Smart, strong women on the national stage are nothing new. What has changed, however, is our perception of them. Eleanor Roosevelt’s enormous talent and intellectual strength only emerged upon the death of her husband, when she was able to emerge from his shadow. In the early ’70s, the country found it shocking that Rosalynn Carter occasionally sat in on Cabinet meetings and that—how amazing!—she found them interesting.

By 1993, however, presidential wives began to gain credibility as equal partners. Within five days of becoming First Lady, Hillary Clinton was named by her husband to head his Task Force on Health Care Reform, and became the only First Lady to keep an office in the West Wing among the president’s senior staff. Her successor, Laura Bush, took on issues for which she had a passion in a quiet, self-effacing way, but her message was just as powerful. All have laid the groundwork for Michelle Obama, presidential spouse and mother, yes, but an Ivy-educated lawyer and public servant whose voice carries great weight across the nation and around the world.

Each of these women, and others like them, has paved the way for those that followed, in much the same way that I ask each of you today to mentor someone for their—and our—future.

It may surprise you to know that nationally women now outnumber men in our colleges and universities. At Salem State, they currently represent over 60 percent of our student population. This is a good sign, for it clearly shows that women value education and what it means to their future success. The numbers are clearly in our favor. The question now becomes “How can we turn our educational achievements and our

acknowledged skills in the leadership traits at which we excel into actual leadership positions?"

As educators, mentors, role models, and influential women in business, I believe it is incumbent upon all of us to seek new ways to balance the female advantage in enrollment and graduation rates against the female *disadvantage* in this country's post-college labor force. You and I and women just like us must be the catalysts that make it happen. We must be both poised and prepared for the change we seek. We must be fully ready to take the reins, and to do that we must, first and foremost, bring our extraordinary team building skills to the table. Unlike men, who see other males as competition, women try to make things work and this, I believe, is our greatest strength.

I first learned the value of teamwork as a nurse, working with other women in teams. Later, I served as director of a community consortium comprised of nine Boston University, Northeastern University and other neighborhood health organizations, each led by a woman. Need I tell you how much we accomplished???

Make no mistake about it: as women, our time to lead has come. The leadership void in business, in the political arena, in education, commerce, and, indeed, in so many aspects of the American fiber **requires** us to step up. The Pew study acknowledges that we have the right stuff; it's time we use it. "The vision," someone once said, "must be followed by the venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps—we must step up the stairs."

This, then, brings me to the core of my message to you today: how you can embrace our talents, embolden your colleagues and maximize teamwork to achieve the success you—and those who follow you—desire. To that end, I'd like to suggest that you undertake three important changes in the way you work: embrace your bee-hags, think like hedgehogs and use the differences between men and women to your advantage.

For those of you unfamiliar with a bee-hag, it's not too late to make its acquaintance. BHAG is actually an acronym for **Big Hairy Audacious Goal**, a term first proposed by James Collins and Jerry Porras in a 1996 article entitled *Building Your Company's Vision*. Essentially, it is a vision statement in the form a long-term goal that propels you and your team toward an envisioned future shared by all.

A true BHAG is clear and compelling. It serves as a unifying focal point of effort. It acts as a clear catalyst for team spirit. It has a clear finish line, so your organization knows when it has achieved its goal. People like to shoot for finish lines and you, as a leader of people, can best engender teamwork and empower your staff by encouraging them to work with you to develop your company or area's BHAGs—and meet them.

In creating a BHAG with your team, it's okay to dream big, but make your goal concise and easy to understand. Google's BHAG was to "organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful," while Ford's was to "democratize the automobile." Microsoft's BHAG? "A computer on every desk and in every home." For Meg Whitman, former CEO of eBay, it was to become "the world's online marketplace." In the '60s, our country had a BHAG as well: to land on the moon by the end of the decade, something we succeeded in doing. At Salem State, we have a big hairy audacious goal as well: "to be a premier teaching university dedicated to excellence in education, service and scholarship."

All BHAGS have three clear tenets:

1. A time frame long enough to achieve the goal. Remember, these are not modest goals you're setting, they're **BIG HAIRY AUDACIOUS GOALS**.
2. Expression in clear, concise, plain English
3. A goal consistent with and in alignment with your company's values

Creating a BHAG **in concert** with your employees empowers them, gives them ownership of the goal and a desire to reach it, and engenders teamwork of the highest order. The process itself gives all a voice, elicits participation from everyone and imparts to your team the value of collaborative pursuit. True leadership, remember, is about creating an environment where people are heard.

And now to hedgehogs.

In a 7<sup>th</sup>-century poem by Greek poet Archilochus (AR-KI-LOCK-US), he speaks of the fox as an animal that knows many things. The hedgehog, however, knows one big thing. Jim Collins, who coined BHAG, used the parable of the two animals in his book *Good to Great* to develop what he calls the Hedgehog Concept. As Collins describes it, the Hedgehog Concept "is a model that reflects understanding of three intersecting circles: **what you can be the best in the world at, what you are deeply passionate about, and what drives your economic engine.**" Greatness, he says, comes about by a series of good decisions consistent with a simple, coherent concept.

Across the country—and right here in our own backyard—women-led businesses are increasingly making those good decisions. It may surprise you to know, for instance, that women-owned enterprises account for nearly 40 percent of all privately held companies in America, and that right here in Massachusetts, they represent nearly 30 percent of the state's businesses, generating \$23.1 billion in annual revenues.

But back to hedgehogs. We've all experienced how difficult it is to get passionate about what we're doing when we've had no say in it. That kind of project management will never get us—and our teams—moving forward most productively. When we are

able to determine what we're passionate about and pursue **that**, however, results and morale change dramatically.

As leaders, we must also get the right people on the bus before we decide where to drive it.

By placing the right people on the bus, removing those not suited and placing the most effective people in the key seats, our corporate bus has a much better chance of reaching its destination.

Lastly, I would argue that we all should begin to use the differences between ourselves and our male counterparts to our advantage. A study at Cornell University's Johnson Graduate School of Management found that compassion and building teamwork will be two of the most important characteristics business leaders will need for success a decade from now. We know from the Pew survey that these are areas in which we excel, so let us embrace them, utilize them and encourage those on our teams to do so as well. The study has shown—in quite dramatic fashion—that in seven of eight key leadership traits women are perceived as better than or equal to men. I believe it is incumbent upon each and every one of us now to step up, step out, move forward, and demonstrate exactly why we, by rights, should be driving more buses.

It was no less an accomplished personage than Faith Whittlesey, who served two terms as ambassador to Switzerland, was a member of the senior White House staff directing the Office of Public Liaison in the Reagan Administration, acted as an official adviser to U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton during the 2006 UN Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons in New York City, and is currently president of her own consulting firm, Maybrook Associates, who famously said of women and their accomplishments: Remember, Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, but she did it backwards and in high heels.

We have what it takes. We know what must be done. It is incumbent upon us now to not simply press forward for ourselves, but to look to those younger professionals who will follow us. Let us be the mentors to them that many of us never had. Let us show them what is possible, and empower them to believe in themselves and use their natural leadership skills. The barriers to women achieving the same success as their male counterparts are falling and you and I can see that it continues. I believe strongly this is our greatest responsibility.

I thank you for inviting me to speak with you today and I look forward to any questions you may have.