

Women *as* Transformational Leaders

BY DEBBIE MASON, PRESIDENT, STRATEGISTS, INC.



THE FIERCE LIST: Read more about these remarkable women on page 47.

*While women in leadership of all sectors — private, government and independent — are a much smaller subset than male leaders, there has been a swelling tide of data to support the fact that **women leaders are perceived as equally effective as men.** Newer data shows that many workers perceive women to be **even more effective than men in most of the key attributes of leadership.***



Female leaders are rated much higher than males by bosses, peers and subordinates in the actual competency areas of management and leadership in several significantly large studies.

Despite the positive reviews of women as leaders, finding women at the Fortune 500 CEO level is nearly impossible, with only 26 of the 500 seats, or roughly 5 percent, occupied by women. It should be noted that this is an improvement from 1995, when there were no women at the helm of Fortune 500 companies. Although the data is not clearly tracked by our chamber of commerce or our local governments, the same dismal picture seems true in our community. As one scans the top leadership posts of our county, cities, and our largest employers — both private and nonprofit — one finds very few women occupying the top posts.

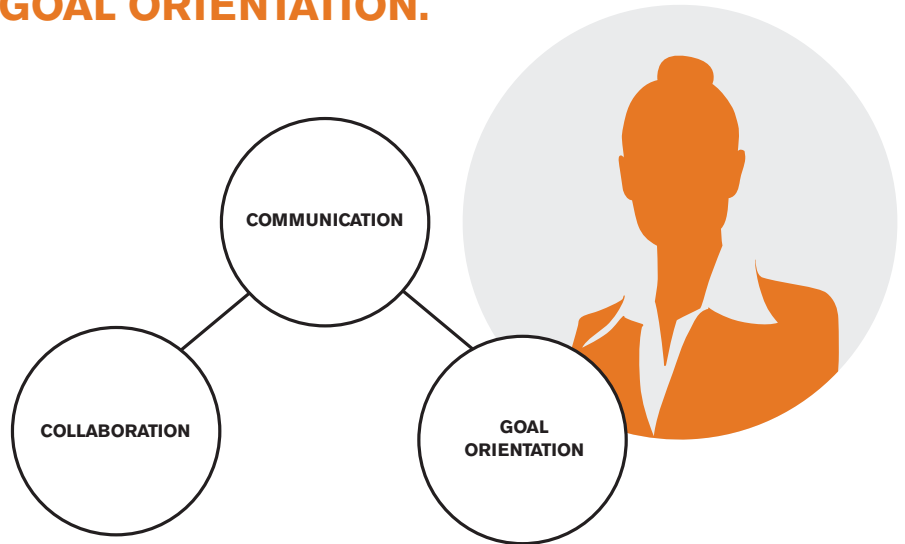
What are the barriers that keep more women from occupying CEO seats? For several decades, the primary drumbeat has been one that implied that women don't ascend or get hired to CEO positions because of a conflict in balancing family commitments. While it is true that women are more likely than men to take on these family responsibilities, only 20 percent of Americans participating in a 2014 Pew Research Center national research project said family was the real barrier to women reaching leadership positions.

Instead, the number-one barrier cited by more than 43 percent of respondents was that a double standard exists where women have to work twice as hard as men in business and politics just to prove their worth.

WHY WOMEN ARE PERCEIVED AS MORE EFFECTIVE

Ironically, the double standard that demands women work harder than men is exactly why women are perceived to be better leaders.

THE COMMON WEALTH INSTITUTE OF SOUTH FLORIDA STUDY OF WOMEN CEOs ASKED PARTICIPANTS WHAT SET WOMEN APART AS STRONG LEADERS, THEY IDENTIFIED THREE TOP AREAS: COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION AND GOAL ORIENTATION.



Performing twice as well in order to be thought of as half as good as male counterparts is the most prevalent reason why women are perceived to be better leaders, reported a Zenger Folkman Consulting study. The study participants noted quite simply that women work harder, get more things done, deliver the results, and are seen as better role models to peers and subordinates.

Sue Washer, president and CEO of AGTC, a publicly-traded company located in Progress Park, said of the study results, "I'm not surprised. Many of us in leadership have long recognized that women have to be at the top of their game to succeed." She added, "By definition, women have to be exceptional at all aspects of leadership because it is so difficult to rise or to be hired in as CEO."

Alachua County Sheriff Sadie Darnell said of the perception, "Think about that quote about Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. It really is true that she had to learn everything he did, but backwards and in high heels. The

workplace is often the same for women, although improving somewhat."

Of 16 competency areas measured and reported in the Zenger Folkman study, women scored higher than men in 12. The biggest statistical variance was in women's abilities to take initiative, to display integrity and honesty and to drive for results. While these have traditionally been the areas described as masculine personality traits, women are increasingly outperforming men in these areas.

Not to mention that women also score higher in the nurturing areas most already assume are women's traditional roles, such as developing others, inspiring and motivating others, relationship building, collaboration and teamwork.

The two areas in the Zenger Folkman report in which men did have higher scores were developing strategic perspective and technical or professional expertise.

The 2014 Pew Research study of randomly polled Americans validated the Zenger Folkman findings and reported that Americans recognize women's strengths as leaders to include both compassion and being more organized. Respondents also said women are equally as effective as men when it comes to intelligence and capacity for innovation.

Dr. Alice Eagly of Northwestern University has executed several landmark research projects that evaluate leadership behaviors. Her work reports that women exhibit more transformational leadership, serving as effective role models to develop the skills of others and motivate followers to go above and beyond the call of their individual positions.

Dr. Eagly has also demonstrated that female managers are better transactional motivators, preferring to motivate with positive, reward-based incentives as opposed to men who more often offer negative, threat-based incentives.

The Common Wealth Institute of South Florida study of women CEOs asked participants what set women apart as strong leaders, they identified three top areas: communication, collaboration and goal orientation.

Locally, female CEOs interviewed for this article validated those same top skill sets as vital to be an effective leader, regardless of gender. Kathy Viehe, interim general manager of Gainesville Regional Utilities, said the biggest asset in her role is communication.

"Because I don't have a technical background, I can ask questions, which isn't necessarily a bad thing," Viehe explained. "I see the world differently."

Maggie Labarta Ph.D., president and CEO of Meridian Behavioral Healthcare Inc., said "It is important to know who you are, your style of communications and your strengths and hire people who are able to help you see your communications challenges and address those with you."

GETTING TO THE TOP

Life sciences, and in particular biotechnology, is a sector where women have rarely served as CEOs, yet Washer says she's been fortunate to develop a peer group with other women leaders since AGTC went public.

"My focus has shifted to the national sphere since we took our company public, and I've been fortunate to develop peer relationships with a number of women CEOs around the country," said Washer.

In the social services sector, women can often rise and prove their effectiveness a bit easier than men. According to Labarta, "In Florida right now, there are more women CEOs in the mental health sector than men. Women are strong and effective leaders, and some lead very large organizations."

Sheriff Darnell works in a sector typically dominated by males. As one of only two female sheriffs in the 67 counties in Florida, Darnell reflected that when she began her career in the mid '70s, law enforcement was not a particularly welcoming sector.

"There was a constant struggle to be recognized as [being as] valuable as the males for your work," she said. "But, over the decades, women have proven to be very capable and have been steadily advancing because of the effectiveness of the work."

Once elected, Darnell noted that her fellow sheriffs have been a welcoming group.

"As an elected official, the sheriffs' perspective is that you were validated as a local sheriff and leader by the people who voted for you. So, I, and others that come as newly elected sheriffs, are 100 percent welcomed, enjoy a great sense of camaraderie and a level playing field, even though it is nearly a completely male group."

The Facts...

▶ Female entrepreneurs are a significant economic engine for America. According to the American Express 2014 State of Women-Owned Businesses Report, in the United States, there are nearly 9.1 million women-owned enterprises that employ nearly 7.9 million workers and generate over \$1.4 trillion in revenues.

▶ The Commonwealth Institute of South Florida in 2015 reports that as of 2014 Florida has 564,400 businesses owned by women, which makes the state #4 in the nation.

▶ 2014 was a growth year for Florida's women-owned businesses as reported by the women CEOs participating in the study and a stunning 85 percent of those expect this year to also be strong for growth of their organizations.

▶ Since 1997, the number of women-owned firms in the U.S. has increased from 5.4 million to 9.1 million - an average of 591 new women-owned firms started per day since 2007.

▶ Nationally, women-owned firms now account for 30 percent of all enterprises and are growing faster in number and employment than most other firms. Women-owned firms comprise 31 percent of all privately held firms and contribute 14 percent of all employment and 11 percent of all revenues.

▶ Locally, the story is about the same, as women-owned firms accounted for 31.6 percent of businesses in Alachua County, as reported in the 2007 census. Eight percent of Alachua's workforce was employed by a woman-owned firm at that time.

ADVICE FROM *Local Women Leaders on Effective Leadership*

Sue Washer advocates that women must be transparent leaders. She believes employees make the best decisions when they understand the full situation, the goals and why the decisions need to be made.

Kathy Viehe suggests that women who lack a full understanding of finance should take the time to get the education and understanding. Viehe recommends they strengthen their ability to understand their own industry and business finances.

“As women seek to advance, running something with some profit and loss responsibility is important.” Maggie Labarta said. “Gaining

access to finance and accounting is important, as is making yourself valuable to the company in ways that align with the company’s goals.”

“We need to step away from labeling skill sets in a gender-based way,” Darnell said. “Think about some of the most effective women you know – who are career women, who are single mothers or are women who now care for their own parents – these are women with superior time management, planning and budgeting skills. For many decades, women have done these things, but the workplace has not really seen these skills through the lens of objectivity to give credit in the appropriate skill-based, work-place terms.”

Darnell’s closing advice: “Focus on doing your job in the very best way you can – and let that speak for itself. Get involved at work and in the community, and do your very best.”



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