

The Neuroscience of Female Leadership

The corporate and professional work world was designed by men—who got there first, of course—to reflect and optimize their pragmatic thinking, spatial awareness and expedient problem-solving style. Neuroscience shows that these are the characteristics of the structure and usage patterns of the typical male brain. But how do women fit into this?

Stats show that women are flooding into the corporate world and into the professions all over the world. They start at the bottom, reach middle management in ever increasing numbers, and then either stall in their career development or opt out of corporations or professional partnerships in order to consult or start businesses of their own. Too few make it to the C-suite where they could have greater power and influence.

I would be the last person to dictate to women, who are finally finding financial and social freedoms, how they should develop their careers. However, I do coach women to shield themselves against common career foibles and to optimize their natural gifts. But, to be honest, I would love to see more women pushing through to become executives and managing partners in order to influence the changes that will make a more female-friendly work world. After all, studies show significantly that when women are in the C-suite, companies make more money and tend to have greater influence on society.

An oft discussed pattern has emerged in much of the world. Female leaders have been obliged and have chosen to think and act like men, often appearing harsh and rigid. Conversely some women have opted to fit the gender stereotype to act 'girly' and likable, often losing impact and credibility. I think there is a third way to show up as women leaders.

In order to optimize the gifts of the typical female brain and at the same time fit into the male-designed work world, I coach women to develop the following leadership and communications strategies:

- Employ strategic and complex decision-making that utilizes the female whole-brained analytical/intuitive style
- Communicate one's suggestions in a forthright and disciplined manner, never skipping our valuable innate understanding of others, nor underestimating the male brain's resistance to talk about feelings!
- Collaborate with other leaders to create cross-departmental solutions, breaking down silos that ensure mediocrity
- Empower others to excel and feel enriched and fully-utilized
- Relish the increasing diversity in the workplace; find others fascinating
- Develop one's own innate strength and resilience by learning to handle internal and external fluctuations; don't take one's internal narrative too seriously until after processing it; get used to change and stress in the environment
- Feel confident—imagine it until you feel it--and dare to make a difference.

Women have the natural characteristics that have been missing in leadership. We're no longer 'optional extras' but are the hope for the business world of the 21st Century.

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