

A CONVERSATION WITH YOUNG WOMEN IN BUSINESS

I had the privilege two weeks ago of conversing with Georgetown Women in Business, a club formed by women in the MBA programs at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business. They all had worked at least four years in the corporate world before coming back to complete their graduate studies. They are a highly global group, which is true of the university itself, as students are from countries around the world

Among the topics we discussed was **leadership without authority**.

As one works her way up, she will frequently be in a position to lead without authority. It is important to recognize that leadership is helping others do the right things well. We may influence 1,000 people, or 100, or even one other person, that team member or colleague who needs inspiration or direction.

Be helpful. Be encouraging, Be a friend and a coach. Help others. It's good for everyone, and for your career!

A woman can do this so effectively by using her natural leadership skills, as the best leadership comes from the heart. These skills include:

- asking purposeful questions
- listening to understand, and with care
- having meaningful conversations
- developing important relationships
- caring about the village – the team – not being self consumed.

Working with a difficult boss

We discussed the inevitable, working with a difficult boss, one who is not helpful, not accessible, maybe has a command and control management style. My advice is to try to work it out with that boss.

Start a conversation such as, "I want to do great work, and I would like to know what you expect, need and want from me, and I would like to share what I need from you, as my boss, which will help me. My doing great work benefits all of us and our company."

As communication is a solution to most problems in today's world, I'd ask, "May we discuss what great communication looks like between us?"

In fact, the above conversation is a great idea with any boss, whether she/he is difficult or a helpful leader.

Negotiating skills

We discussed the fact that women are paid just 78% of what men receive. It is amazing that we still must wrestle with equal pay today. Negotiation skills are essential for women, and it is crucial to prepare yourself, to be able to articulate your achievements and contributions.

While it is often difficult for women to be self-promoting, at times it is very definitely in your best interest to do so. This may be precisely how you will receive the salary and the promotion or important assignment you want and deserve.

Remember that Ilene Lang, the President of Catalyst, a long-standing organization that helps women in business, points out that men are promoted based on their potential, while a women must earn that promotion over and over again.

We must be ready to stand up for ourselves, ideally setting a “win-win” situation, that just as your contributions benefit your company, your company should also compensate you well.

Work life balance

We talked about work life balance, especially, but not limited to, those who have childcare or elderly care responsibilities. I referred to Christine Brown-Quinn’s wonderful book *Step Aside, Super Woman*, in which she shares her strategy of laser and unwavering focus, which enabled her to meet her goals of success as a mom, a wife and as managing director of an investment banking firm (just 7% of the managing directors were women).

There is no question that the demands of family and business are complicated, especially for women. There is no single strategy for success, as so much depends on individual circumstances. Surely, as stated above, laser focus is key. And with today’s technology, if one has an attitude of answering phone calls and emails immediately or as soon as possible, it is possible to be current and on point no matter where you are working. And if the team thinks together and shares work, there can be flexibility, to take full advantage of everyone’s knowledge, skills and drive to do great work.

A mentor - and a sponsor!

These women asked about seeking a mentor, which can be very important. There is no single strategy except to do a great job and seek trusting relationships at all levels, and not to be hesitant to ask. Likely, the person you approach will be flattered. Certainly discuss expectations and how you will work together.

I also hope that there may be someone at a senior level who elects her/himself as a sponsor, and says to her/his senior leadership, “This person has it, we need to bring her up to an important leadership position.” It is often inappropriate to ask directly for that sponsorship, rather one must earn it in the eyes of the person. To do so, one has

to be visible as a significant contributor and great teammate, to thus earn that access to such a relationship.

Being a great teammate

We talked about becoming indispensable, the MVP, for all we do, not just our own great work, but also the positive energy we bring, and the help and encouragement we offer our team members. The best way to be promoted is by our peers!

Learn what success looks like for your position, and how you can help your boss and your colleagues. Don't seek personal credit, as people know who is doing great work. Remember you have external clients, and that your colleagues are your internal clients.

And remember the "little things", which are not little at all. Being early – always, remembering names, never talking behind people's backs, being a source of positive energy, offering positive and helpful feedback.... being a giver is so important!

Emotional Intelligence and relationships

It is important to understand *emotional intelligence*, which does not begin to get the attention and credit it deserves in business. It is the *key indicator of our success in business, in our leadership, and certainly our happiness. Business is about earning trusting relationships.*

The four essential emotional intelligence skills are self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and relationship management. These skills mean a great deal – our self-awareness, how we carry ourselves under stress, how we relate to others and develop and maintain important relationships, these are just some examples of the importance of emotional intelligence.

Thanks to a thoughtful question from Sonya Chawla, the President of Georgetown Women in Business, we discussed that our emotional intelligence skills may be easily assessed, actually online, which will give us a benchmark of where we stand now, and we may choose to select specific skills, which we would like to develop and improve. That will only help us in our leadership and our relationships.

Read a leadership book a month

I encouraged reading one leadership book a month. Today's books tend to be short, easy reads, usually with compelling stories. I always gain at least a few very useful ideas and a whole lot of inspiration.

I would be happy to share some of my favorite leadership books.

There are certainly other important topics that could have been discussed, but the hour flew by. I would like to continue the conversation. We need women like these in the Georgetown MBA programs to grow into leadership roles in business.

I was inspired by this impressive group of women, who have so much to offer in their business careers. They have humility and a strong desire to gain knowledge,

business know-how and wisdom so they may help their companies - and themselves - succeed.

About The Author



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