



WOMEN SHORTCHANGING THEMSELVES

At a seminar addressing gender issues in the workplace, a male panelist expressed admiration for the difficulties around getting a family prepared to go out the door in the morning. He said how much he admires his wife for her ability to keep everyone on task and on time, and that he knows this scenario is played out in homes daily.

“YES! And not only do we do all that, but then we get ourselves to work on time, too!” exclaimed a female attendee. There was applause from the predominately female audience.

Many years ago my grandmother told me a story that has relevance to that seminar.

She related how she was on her hands and knees, scrubbing the floor. One of her two strong sons came into the room, saw what she was doing, picked her up and set her on a chair. “No mom of mine should be on the floor scrubbing!” Her eyes twinkled when she told me the next line, “Yeah, but do you think it occurred to him to scrub it himself?”

We can’t assume that the male panelist was trying to avoid sharing the load of getting the family out the door. Nor should we assume that the audience member’s comment indicated anything more than pride in handling her responsibilities well, or even that my grandmother really wanted someone else to scrub the floor.

But these comments point to three issues that seem common to women. They are that women often apologize too much, take on more than they can comfortably do, and use help less often than they could.

These habits come from women’s generally socially-oriented nature and from a genuine desire to help others.

Apologies are often automatically spoken to communicate that a woman wishes the situation were different and that others would have a more pleasant experience.

For example, a female author apologizes for the bad news in a report that points out deficiencies in a situation. What she doesn’t realize is that her apology is often misconstrued by others that she is somehow responsible for the negative information.

Similarly, a restaurant meal is lower quality than expected and the woman that organized the gathering apologizes. Subconsciously, the listeners inaccurately infer the apology to mean that the blame lies beyond the kitchen staff’s bad day and belongs to her as the event coordinator.

Women’s wish to help others often means they take on more than they realistically should, given all their other commitments. The working mother who gets the entire family fed, organized and out the door on time before rushing to work herself and fielding comments about her chronic lateness ironically bears the responsibility for setting herself up for failure.

It’s not a badge of honor to do it all, and if we have choices it’s shortsighted to try.

Consider how it plays out in the workplace and what associates feel about the coworker that

'hogs' work in order to prove their competency. Stepping up to the plate more than necessary not only undermines everyone involved by allowing a skewed perception of the work involved, but creates martyrs and guilt in the process.

Women are often reluctant to arrange for help, somehow feeling as though it diminishes another's perception of their capabilities or intelligence. This relates to the previous two habits of taking on more than is necessary and apologizing for outcomes that are less than perfect - the odds of which increase in tandem with a heavy workload.

When a female guest at a party learned that the event host arranged for help with things she had the skills to do alone, the guest's wistful comment was, "I admire her for asking for help with that. I never could allow myself to do that." Why not? In return for arranging for help, she might have been able to enjoy the party more, been responsible for less, been less tempted to apologize for anything and even allowed others to spotlight their talents.

These three habits are not solely the province of women, nor do they relate to all women. However, everyone benefits, when we know and practice the difference between managing and leading by sharing the workload.

Mastery Consulting focuses on helping people excel and companies succeed through coaching, consulting and presentations. Areas addressed include effective productivity and information management skills, improved leadership and communication abilities, all of which help clients to get more out of life personally and professionally.

Published, quoted or featured in many local and national publications, principal Leslie Robison has presented organizational and personal achievement topics to businesses, chambers of commerce and community groups.

A member of a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers since 1999, she has served on NAPO's Philadelphia chapter board as Professional Development Director. She also served on the board of the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization (NSGCD).

Recognized through the NSGCD as a Certified Professional Organizer in Chronic Disorganization, Leslie has authored resource materials and presents teleclasses to both her peers, clients and the public. She is a member of Vistage, CHADD, ADDA, the Indian Valley Chamber of Commerce and Rotary.

With Leslie's help I've been able to really make some genuine changes in my life and career, things I've been thinking about, hoping to do something about and yet every year I was no closer to realizing. ~R. G.

Your presentation was interesting, helpful and fun and thanks to you I've found myself trying different methods to get organized. ~B. W.

Clients include individuals, small businesses, and corporate personnel.

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