WOMEN LEADERS WORKSHOP SERIES

Women are catching up to men by leaps and bounds, but the unique challenges they face as leaders persist. Women who attend an O.E. Strategies workshop will leave with a broader understanding of how to tackle the issues they encounter every day and learn to leverage their strengths.

Leaning In and Leaning Back: How Women Can Optimize Their Careers

Gain a broader understanding of the issues encountered every day as women and how to tackle them.

Strategic Charisma – Practical Tips to Impress and Influence (Two-Part Series)

By incorporating Social Styles and Versatility assessments, learn to go beyond knowing charisma when you see it to fully leveraging charisma to achieve your goals.

Emotional Intelligence for Women (Two-Part Series)

Using the Emotional Intelligence (EQi) assessment as a foundation, participants will walk away from this series with a plan for applying EQ to work and personal lives.

Standing in Your Strengths: Strengths-Based Coaching Clinic

Attendees will have a deeper appreciation for the power of strengths, greater insight into their own strengths, and ideas for reinvigorating their goals.
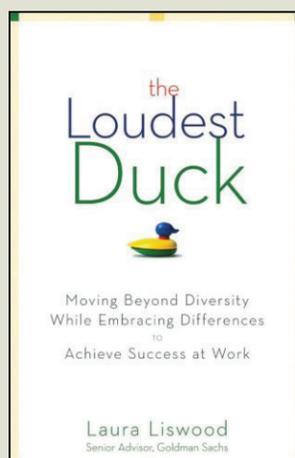
For more information or to schedule a workshop, please call 440-546-0008

BOOK REVIEW

the Loudest Duck
Moving Beyond Diversity While Embracing Differences to Achieve Success at Work
Laura Liswood, 2010

The Loudest Duck, by Laura Liswood, is a business fable that gets its name from a Chinese children's parable. It explains why organizations need to move beyond the old-style diversity effort to actually benefit from difference. Every culture has unique values which are embedded within everyday life. While organizations are increasingly attentive to issues of diversity and inclusion, those who have encountered diversity and inclusion issues at work know it is all too common for them to be overlooked, misunderstood or oversimplified. The author examines critical topics including common objections to diversity, explicit and implicit, as well as subtle forms of bias and discrimination that can surface in the workplace. She also provides a set of practical tools for those striving to bridge the gap within their own organizations. An easy and fun read, it puts a positive, practical lens on diversity and inclusion at work. With engaging and accessible anecdotes and analogies, The Loudest Duck provides great prompts and reference points for candid and stimulating discussion. It is essential reading for those who want to maximize the effectiveness of organizations.

LEVERAGING DIVERSITY

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK
FOCUSING ON AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Having the opportunity to work in a variety of organizational cultures provides a fascinating perspective of how cultures are built. As we focus this issue on how inclusive cultures support innovation, I reflect on two client organizations that value innovation but only one achieves it in spades. The culture that is spurring innovation, which I will refer to as Company A, focuses on treating every associate as a worthwhile human being and team member. That does not mean that expectations are low or that objectives are unclear. In fact, both organizations have clear expectations and objective metrics that stretch people. There is a difference in the symbolic ways in which employees are included and respected. Company A is an inclusive culture and Company B is not.

Two specific examples include development planning and upward feedback. Company A ensures that leaders up to the executive suite are held accountable for meaningful development plans. This organization lets employees know their value by investing time in development conversations, planning and assignments. While many development tools are self-service, the key to it being a cultural norm is that managers follow through and make it important. Upward feedback is conducted regularly to give employees the opportunity to have input into their managers' leadership effectiveness. This metric is just as important as achieving business results. Bright problem solvers who are ineffective leaders do not get rewarded with advancement. They receive coaching and development to improve their skills and scores. Company B only focuses on financial results. There are examples of intimidating leadership that have not been addressed over a period of years.

Another key positive difference is communication. All organizations continually work to improve communication. However, the flow of information upwards and the consistency and transparency of information downwards are two tell tale signs of an open culture. Company A has robust conversations between senior executives to ensure they are in consensus on key strategies and priorities. This creates alignment which means there is one message and shared priorities. It is clear how departments need to support each other and resolve resource constraints because the goals and supporting "why" is clearly communicated. In Company B, business leaders disagree in quiet and passive ways. Staffs have conflicting priorities competing for finite resources. They are in survival mode. The lack of alignment at the top disrupts middle managers.

A final positive difference is a clear invitation to speak up. In environments where people feel safe to make a suggestion, call out a safety or quality issue or ask why we do it this way, new ideas can emerge. Company A rewards and recognizes ideas that come from the bottom up and even assigns cross-functional, multi-level teams to develop alternatives to current business approaches. This is a development opportunity that has yielded innovation of processes and services.

All of these tactics rest on the deeply ingrained belief that great ideas can come from anywhere in the organization, that everyone has something to teach and something to learn, and that hierarchy is a management system and not a statement about people's inherent worth.

Many managers dream of leading a high functioning and diverse team that can build on one another's strengths to create top-notch products and solutions. Yet, achieving the right team composition and dynamic can be challenging. Diversity is a two-edged sword that can spur creativity or polarize opinions. When you are cognizant of the benefits and pitfalls of diversity, you can take practical steps to cultivate an inclusive team environment where diversity brings out the best in everyone. These steps include:

Clarifying team goals

It might seem overly simple, but the first question to ask is: What is the team trying to accomplish? What skills, backgrounds or perspectives are needed to achieve the end goal? By clarifying team goals, you can highlight the types of diversity that are likely to have the greatest impact on a successful outcome and minimize differences that might cause unnecessary conflict or disrupt workflow. This strategy allows you to develop a unified team that can function cohesively, while embracing the contributions of diverse team members.

Identifying relevant differences

Once you have clear goals, it is important to map those goals to the types of diversity that will help the team achieve its work objectives. While the term diversity is often used to refer to race or gender, there are many types of diversity that impact the way a team functions such as age, culture, education level and tenure (Cannon-Bowers & Bowers, 2011). For example, on an interdisciplinary team that combines designers, marketers and managers, the diverse backgrounds and organizational roles come to the forefront, while demographic diversity may be less salient to the team's success. However, if the team is tasked with creating a new product line that appeals to a wide audience of users, then including people from different races, age groups and gender categories is critical.

Identifying complementary team members or strengths

Each team member brings a unique perspective to the team based on their race, age, gender, experience, personality and other facets of diversity. When forming a new team or working with an existing team, you must identify each team member's strengths and perspective to ensure the project benefits from varied points of view. Each team member should be carefully selected for the expertise and diverse perspective he or she brings to the team. Of course, striking the right combination of perspectives should facilitate positive engagement rather than conflict (Morgeson, DeRue & Karam, 2010).

Cultivating inclusive communication

Since the team's ability to constructively manage conflict is tied to team performance, fostering a team culture that prizes open communication and inclusive attitudes is imperative (Behfar, Peterson, Mannix & Trochim, 2008). You can do this by affirming diverse perspectives when they are shared, inviting feedback from team members and modeling constructive disagreement. When you openly value the contributions of diverse team members, you shape team norms toward inclusivity (Mitchell, Boyle, Parker, Giles, Chiang & Joyce, 2015). As the team engages in fruitful discussion, the entire team experiences the synergy and success that occurs when multiple perspectives fuse together in a winning idea.

Removing roadblocks to participation

Finally, creating an inclusive team hinges on your commitment to remove policies, practices and attitudes that prevent diverse individuals from participating. Can you change the meeting time or location to accommodate time constraints or geographic distance? Are there policies or practices governing team member eligibility and selection that create barriers for particular groups? Do team attitudes perpetuate bias against diverse individuals, such as beliefs about competence and job or task fit, or does the team invite difference? Answering these questions honestly can help you identify the barriers and work to resolve them. You can initiate a long-term shift toward inclusiveness by consistently investigating and removing potential impediments to team diversity.

You have the opportunity and responsibility to foster open and inclusive teams by valuing input from diverse perspectives and encouraging active engagement. As you model inclusiveness and reinforce the merit of diverse backgrounds, skills and perspectives, your team will learn to navigate differences in constructive ways and leverage diversity in ways that ultimately improve performance.

References

Behfar, K. J., Peterson, R. S., Mannix, E.A. & Trochim, W. M. K. (2008). The critical role of conflict resolution in teams: A close look at the links between conflict type, conflict management strategies, and team outcomes. Journal of Applied Psychology, 93(1), 170-188. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.93.1.170

Cannon-Bowers, J. A. & Bowers, C. (2011). Team development and functioning. In S. Zedeck's (Ed.), APA Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Vol 1: Building and Developing the Organization (pp. 597-650). doi: 10.1037/12169-019

Mitchell, R., Boyle, B., Parker, V., Giles, M., Chiang, V. & Joyce, P. (2015). Managing inclusiveness and diversity in teams: How leader inclusiveness affects performance through status and team identity. Human Resource Management, 54(2), 217-239. doi: 10.1002/hrm.21658

Morgeson, F. P., DeRue, D. S. & Karam, E. P. (2010). Leadership in teams: A functional approach to understanding leadership structures and processes. Journal of Management, 36(1), 5-39. doi: 10.1177/0149206309347376

Among the many reasons women are underrepresented in reaching executive leadership roles, myths about women leaders continue to impede progress toward closing the gender gap. Dispelling these common misconceptions is vital to maximize the benefits of gender diversity in top leadership roles. As women leaders, we hold ourselves back when we buy into any of these three common myths:

Women must act like men to succeed

One myth that holds women back is the idea that they must behave in masculine ways to be seen as a leader (Vanderbroeck, 2010). Sometimes women leaders may feel pressured to adopt the style of a male predecessor or conform to male-dominated organizational norms to establish legitimacy. Research suggests that overcoming obstacles to leadership depends on women embracing a leadership style that reflects their individual strengths (Vanderbroeck, 2010). Rather than behaving like men, emerging female leaders should strive to develop a clear and authentic leader identity. The best leaders possess a range of task-oriented and interpersonal skills that allow them to tailor their behavior to what is needed in a specific leadership context.

Having children and a career are incompatible

Women at all career stages are likely to feel the tension that this myth perpetuates, setting up a false dichotomy that poses work and family as opponents. Rising women leaders may wrestle with the choice to have children because they fear it will mean giving up a rewarding career. However, Greenhaus and Powell (2006) argued that work roles and parenthood can enrich one another by developing a range of skills, perspectives and resources that transfer between work and life spheres. For example, women's engagement in family life was related to higher engagement at work (Rothbard, 2001). Further, Bartsch (2012) demonstrated that management skills developed during volunteer activities translate to the workplace as well.

Women are too emotional to lead

The belief that women are more emotional than men permeates Western culture with significant implications for perceptions of women leaders (Brescoll, 2016). This belief leads to bias against women as irrational and out of control. As a result, promoting a woman may be considered a bigger risk than promoting a man, since gender stereotypes portray the female emotional state as volatile and unreliable. This becomes especially problematic when a woman shows emotion and her display is interpreted as confirmation of a fragile emotional state. Yet, one study of male and female executives found that men reported being more emotionally expressive than women (Callahan, Hasler & Tolson, 2005). Overall, research suggests that men and women are more similar than different in their emotional experiences, and when men or women tend to experience more of a particular emotion, the differences are still fairly small (Schmitt, 2015).

Myths about women leaders impact women at the individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, misconceptions about what it takes to succeed may inaccurately inform women's career choices. At the organizational level, stereotypes and false perceptions can create biases that lead to fewer promotions. Increased knowledge, awareness and education on gender myths will help aspiring women rise to senior leadership and executive roles.

References

Bartsch, G. (2012). Emotional learning: Managerial development by corporate volunteering. Journal of Management Development, 31(3), 253-262. doi: 10.1108/02621711211208880

Brescoll, V. L. (2016). Leading with their hearts? How gender stereotypes of emotion lead to biased evaluations of female leaders. The Leadership Quarterly, 27, 415-428. doi: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.02.005

Callahan, J. L., Hasler, M. G. & Tolson, H. (2005). Perceptions of emotion expressiveness: Gender differences among senior executives. Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 26(7), 512-528.

Greenhaus, J. H. & Powell, G. N. (2006). When work and family are allies: A theory of work-family enrichment. Academy of Management Review, 31(1), 72-92.

Rothbard, N. P. 2001. Enriching or depleting? The dynamics of engagement in work and family roles. Administrative Science Quarterly, 46, 655–684.

Schmitt, D. P. (2015). Are women more emotional than men?: Women's negative emotionality as experienced around the world. Retrieved from https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sexual-personalities/201504/are-women-more-emotional-men

Vanderbroeck, P. (2010). The traps that keep women from reaching the top and how to avoid them. Journal of Management Development, 29(9), 764-770. doi: 10.1108/02621711011072478