



CAREER MINUTE



Scrappy Street Fighter or Gracious Queen: Women Need a Balance of Power

[By Dr. Karen Otazo]

At a recent Washington fund-raiser, a former female CEO arrived in a dazzling designer suit while a female senator who dressed in the business attire stated on the invitation. Why is it that many women have to be the “smartest” in the room whether in clothes or comments? Very smart women abound. They achieve so much and often get recognized for their achievement. Many of us have asked why there aren’t more women in leadership positions in organizations of all kinds.

Women are often walking a tightrope in how they are perceived in leadership positions. Learning balance is a key for us as well as men, but women really need to be aware of everything they say and do. We are more noticeable and often fewer in number. Our secret weapon is preparation and forethought. The art of preparing for everything that is public in any way, a meeting, report or conference is what we need. We need to be thinking about the balance of power in asking, telling, giving and taking everything we do or have done.

A core issue for why there aren’t more women CEO’s or top political leaders is striking the right balance among the power, achievement and relationships. Women and men can push any one of these out of proportion. We’ve all seen out-of-control power. The excesses of corporate and

political life litter our newspapers and talk shows. As for achievement, even Margaret Thatcher said that if you want a job done ask a woman. The “iron maiden” may have not brought many women into her inner circle but she appreciated their ability to achieve results. Although women through the middle management ranks are often known for relationship building, at the top they are typically known as “cold, ice princess, angry, pushy” etc. We are damned if we’re warm (not tough enough) too. Men and women who make it up the ranks are often high on achievement which may get out of hand. They may want to do it on their own or their way is the only way since it’s usually better. Take the case of the star ballerina and Ivy League graduate who was always the top of her class. Because she always had to be the “best” she had trouble being part of a team when she went into the work world.

As girls growing up we didn’t have the team experience that boys often did. We don’t know how to stop being the competitive girl so we could mature.

We learn the wise use of power with lots of give and take all the way up the line. Women may not learn the give and take early enough. Or we fight so hard as the underdog that we don’t know when to stop and be the gracious Queen when we get the majority vote.

If you want to see raw power at work watch the 3rd season of the West Wing which is all about the use and misuse of power. See the 1970 classic The Psychology of Leadership by Harry Levinson.

For more information about Dr. Karen Otazo, check out www.global-leadership-network.com.

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