

Women in Business Get the Job Done Their Way

By Elizabeth Polen

In the early days when women first entered the business world, they often had to conform to a male model of business in order to succeed. It was a struggle for them to be taken seriously, let alone thrive on their own terms. How times have changed.

"I'd like to think I don't face special challenges as a woman," said Christine Kirby, director of resources and statewide support at the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, and president-elect of the Executive Women's Council of Pittsburgh (EWC). "I don't feel my gender is an issue, in terms of advantages or disadvantages."

Current research shows that other women are experiencing the same sense of equality. A recent study for the U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy found that men and women are on equal footing these days when it comes to education, effort and performance.

Still, this doesn't mean that women have achieved this success by continuing to approach business the same way men do.

"Women are famous for multitasking," pointed out Joanne Quinn-Smith, creative energy officer of Dreamweaver Marketing, and president of the Pittsburgh chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO). "While we're waiting in the car to pick up our kids from sports, we're making a deal on the phone."

That ability to wear many hats at once means that businesswomen often excel at prioritizing tasks and arranging schedules to accommodate not only their own hectic lives, but the lives of their employees as well. In addition, Quinn-Smith says, women tend

to be better at empathizing with their clients' individual situations and going the extra mile to ensure customer satisfaction.

The need to juggle the many different needs of family members and clients is what drives many women to start their own businesses in the first place. While male entrepreneurs tend to concentrate on the potential to make more money, female entrepreneurs cite family reasons, such as trying to achieve a work-family balance. Unfortunately, this focus can result in a lack of growth within women-owned businesses. Women's new businesses tend to be smaller and slower to get off the ground than those of their male counterparts. And women's businesses are less likely than men's to survive past the first four years (a difficult task for all new businesses).

While the slower growth of women-owned businesses may be concerning, it may also be self-imposed to a certain degree. Female entrepreneurs often don't allow their businesses to grow beyond what they feel they can handle while still balancing work and family responsibilities. They may be more content than men to accept the rewards of job satisfaction and self-fulfillment, whether or not their businesses grow as rapidly as they might like.

One of the biggest differences between male and female business styles may be the one that is the biggest detriment to women's success: women hate to negotiate, and they don't ask for what they want.

"Women will tell all about their qualifications, but then they leave before they ask for the business," said Quinn-Smith.



Kirby agrees. "We think that our accomplishments speak for themselves, but we still need to ask for the opportunities."

The 2003 book *Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide*, explored this topic in depth (see sidebar). Authors Linda Babcock, professor of economics at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz School of Public Policy and Management, and Sarah Laschever argued that because women are afraid of negotiation, they often lose out on the business opportunities men experience.

This lack of confidence, combined with subtle but persistent discrimination against women in the corporate world, may account for the dearth of women in executive positions. This year, only 13 CEOs of Fortune 500 companies—less than three percent—are women.

To overcome these challenges and make the most of their unique abilities, women striving to succeed in business can take advantage of the resources offered by a number of women's business organizations. In the Pittsburgh area, groups like the EWC (ewcpittsburgh.org) and NAWBO (nawbopittsburgh.org) are dedicated to providing support, networking and enrichment and educational opportunities to help women grow in their business fields. Other helpful organizations include the Women's Business Network, Inc., of Southern Pennsylvania (wbninc.com), Women's Business Enterprise National Council (wbenc.org) and Business and Professional Women/PA (bpwpa.org).

Talking to other businesswomen and entrepreneurs is sure to help, too. "Find a mentor—female or male—to help you negotiate the path to where you want to go," advised Kirby. "Establish a peer networking group so that you have a sounding board."

And most of all, says Quinn-Smith, women should "focus on [their] integrity, credibility and superior quality of service. And then just do it. Get out there and do it." □

Women don't ask— but they should

Men initiate negotiations about four times as often as women.

Women are more pessimistic about how much is available when they do negotiate, and so they typically ask for and get less when they do negotiate—on average 30 percent less than men.

By not negotiating a first salary, an individual stands to lose more than \$500,000 by age 60—and men are more than four times as likely as women to negotiate a first salary.

A study calculated that women who consistently negotiate their salary increases earn at least \$1 million more during their careers than women who don't.

Women own about 40 percent of all businesses in the U.S. but receive only 2.3 percent of the available equity capital needed for growth. Male-owned companies receive the other 97.7 percent.

Source: *Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide*, by Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, womendontask.com.