

PowerTalk has been especially designed for women leaders who want to leverage Return on Investment (ROI) in their careers and life experiences and take the next leap. Each issue of PowerTalk focuses on key strategies that will increase your leadership effectiveness. Answer questions posed, review the suggestions and write down ways you can implement. Use these suggested strategies today to enhance your tool kit or even rewrite the script for your future.

The Dark Side of A+ Behavior

Now that 2007 is well under way, consider how you could maximize your value this year to make the most difference to your institution and your own professional development. Are you driven to earn an A+ on every task no matter how tactical or insignificant? If so, you're in good company. Most women leaders have built their reputations on delivering high-quality work on time. They have become adept at taking charge of a project personally and managing all of its components at a task level to make sure it is done right. Perfection—but at what price?

The A+ Syndrome - Strength or Weakness?

The *A+ Syndrome* expresses itself in a number of symptoms. First, needing to earn an A+ of course means that you have to do everything yourself. Your standards are so high that you cannot bear the thought of someone else doing a less than perfect job. And since you don't often delegate tactical assignments to those who should be performing them, you miss opportunities to empower them and enable their professional development. For example, I discovered that one client was coaching and training clerical staff rather than delegating the task to her chief of staff.

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Doing everything yourself in turn leads to excessive multitasking. Do you cherish your ability to multitask as a strength? It can be, but only when used appropriately. As you advanced in your career, your ability to multitask may have been among your greatest strengths, but in a leadership position, it is no longer the path to sustained success. In fact, it can be a serious weakness because it prevents you from being present in the moment and focusing on issues that really matter. It keeps you managing rather than leading.

Multitasking is particularly dangerous when it turns into an addiction. It then becomes a coping mechanism—a way to deal with increased volume and complexity - that keeps you trapped on the treadmill rather than taking a "time out" to examine the root cause of a crisis or to consider more efficient ways to handle all the activities. Eventually, as tasks and crises accumulate, you reach the end of your rope. You can no longer multitask your way out, fatigue overwhelms you, and eventually you burn out.

Once you are hooked on multitasking, it can make you susceptible to an even graver danger - adrenalin addiction. Do you procrastinate until a problem becomes a crisis or a deadline looms large, and then let your adrenalin kick in to carry you over the finish line? If so, you're addicted. You may no longer be able to distinguish between projects that are your personal responsibility and tasks that should be handled by others. For example, one client was writing a long response to faculty answering questions related to fundraising. Although this was clearly a job for the Advancement vice president, she felt that she could do a better job explaining it in language that would resonate with faculty. The cognitive blinders imposed by her adrenalin addiction kept her from realizing that she could have asked the Advancement professional to draft a letter for her to edit.

Do The Right Thing

Leadership is about accomplishing things through others. It is about strategy, not tactics. And, as Frances Hesselbein, Peter Drucker and Warren Bennis have all urged, leadership is about *doing the right thing*, while management is about *doing things right*. The A+ Syndrome and its addictive symptoms are destructive to a woman's ability to make a difference in a leadership position. Although they are strengths in management roles, in leadership they encroach on strategic thinking and creative problem-solving. Additionally, these destructive A+ behaviors will eventually erode your leadership image and influence with peers and superiors.

Time for Rehab

If you are partaking of the deadly combination of perfectionism, multitasking and adrenalin addiction, don't persist until you crash and burn. The following steps may be challenging at first, but once you master them, they are guaranteed to rehabilitate the leader in you.

- Realize that your standards are much higher than the institution's. Not every project demands perfection. Learn to recognize the tasks that only require a B or C and delegate them. As you do, you are providing empowerment and professional development opportunities to others so they can learn to support you better.
- Understand that just because you have the background, experience or skill sets to excel at something, that does not mean it is your job. Before you take on any task, always ask yourself if it is really part of your role. Don't enable someone else's poor performance by jumping in and saving them. Remember, as a leader, it is your job to do the right thing. Leave it up to the managers to do things right.
- Learn to be politically savvy about saying no and renegotiating. Before you say yes to any additional demand, always perform a realistic assessment of what you already have on your plate. Engage in only those activities that will make the most difference.
- Don't confuse offering professional advice about unrealistic deliverables with whining. If you lack the infrastructure and resources to execute a project within the expected time frame, tell your superior up front. It is your job to give your professional opinion. If, on the other hand, you wait until your time is up and you cannot deliver, citing lack of resources and infrastructure might be construed as whining.
- If you have an open-door policy, don't allow distractions to interfere with your focus on strategic thinking and creative problem-solving. Being open and flexible is a good thing, but don't forget to set boundaries.
- Continue to assess what really matters. Ask yourself, if I get nothing else done, what are the three most important things I need to accomplish today, this week, this month or this year.

The A+ Syndrome, over-committing, excessive multitasking, adrenalin addiction and unwillingness to say no, can affect your career by preventing you from doing what you should be doing as a leader - think strategically and deliver through others.

Learn to overcome these self-destructive indulgences and take the first steps toward a more resilient you. Start now by freeing up some "white space" on your calendar for strategic activities that create value for you and the organization.

Your Thoughts Are Invited

What do you think differentiates women leaders who maintain their resilience? What are the characteristics that let them deal with stress and adversity? How do they maintain a healthy but pragmatic optimism and continue moving toward their goal rather than getting stuck or thrown off course? Please email me with your insights at drbarbkaufman@earthlink.net.

Additional Resources:

- [Click here to review more articles by Dr. Barbara Kaufman](#)
 - [Beware the Busy Manager](#), by Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghoshal; Harvard Business Review, February 2002, Reprint # R0202D.
 - [What Leaders Really Do](#), by John P. Kotter; Harvard Business Review, December 2001, Reprint #R0111F.
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Your comments and questions are invited: info@roiconsultinggroup.com

For more information on coaching and other leadership effectiveness services or Powertalk Seminars:

ROI Consulting Group, Inc.

35 Oakmont Drive

Rancho Mirage, CA 92270

TEL: 760.324-3271 - FAX: 760.324.5612

drbarbkaufman@earthlink.net

www.roiconsultinggroup.com

